

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON NATURAL
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

At Sydney on Wednesday, 23 March 2005

The Committee met at 11.00 a.m.

PRESENT

The Hon. Pam Allan (Chair)

The Hon. R. S. Amery
Mr G. J. Aplin
The Hon. I. M. Armstrong
Mr P. R. Draper
Mr G. F. Martin

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LEONARD WILLIAM BANKS, Director (Regional Relations and Education), NSW Department of Primary Industries, Locked Bag 21, Orange, New South Wales, sworn and examined,

RICHARD FREDERICK SHELDRAKE, Deputy Director-General, NSW Department of Primary Industries, 161 Kite Street, Orange, and

JOHN ANDREW FISHER, Manager (Natural Resource Advisory Services), NSW Department of Primary Industries, 161 Kite Street, Orange, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: I have been advised that you have been issued with a copy of the Committee's terms of reference and also a copy of the Standing Orders 332, 333 and 334 of the Legislative Assembly that relate to the examination of witnesses. Is that correct?

Dr SHELDRAKE: Yes.

Mr FISHER: Yes.

Mr BANKS: Yes.

CHAIR: The Committee has received a submission from the Department of Primary Industries. Is it your wish that that submission be incorporated into your sworn evidence?

Dr SHELDRAKE: Yes, it is.

CHAIR: Would you like to briefly elaborate on or add to it?

Dr SHELDRAKE: What I would like to do is make a short opening statement and as well table the material that we brought to the previous hearing. Thank you for giving the Department of Primary Industries the opportunity to present the material before you. You raised a number of topics which I will cover in dot point form.

The first was promotion of sustainable agriculture through catchment management planning and native vegetation management. Catchment planning is the responsibility of the catchment management authorities, while land use planning on the other hand is done by the Department of Infrastructure Planning and Natural Resources and Local Government. The purpose of the Department of Primary Industries is to promote profitable, sustainable primary industries based on sustainable use of natural resources. DPI provides technical advice to CMAs, DIPNR and local councils. Regarding native vegetation, DPI's main area of expertise is in the management of native pastures and rangelands. About 50 percent of production from extensive grazing industries is due to pastures based on native grasses and shrubs. Native trees are important in maintaining catchment processes and providing wind breaks for agriculture and alternative income for sustainable forestry.

The second item raised was property management planning. Property management planning is a process that integrates economic, social and environmental farm management issues to suit the goals of the individual farm. New South Wales Agriculture co-ordinated delivery of property management planning courses under the former Farming for the Future program. An accredited course based on this experience is available through Tocal Agricultural College. Property management plans are much more than just plans for the utilisation of the farm's physical resources; they consider all of the farm family's needs, including succession planning. New South Wales DPI has been assisting CMAs to tailor a property management planning program to meet their catchment planning goals.

The third issue raised was Environmental Management Systems. An EMS provides a structured approach to managing the potential environmental impacts of a business based on the continuous improvement cycle. There are internationally accepted processes for developing an EMS, such as ISO 14,000. Interest in EMS has been stimulated by the potential for market premiums. EMSs are still uncommon in agricultural industries because of their perceived complexity and current lack of market advantages. However, in Europe, compliance with the EUREP GAP protocol that includes an EMS is now required by the major supermarket chains for all fresh and frozen

horticultural products. NSW DPI assists agricultural industries to evaluate the relevance of the EMS approach to their businesses. An EMS can be integrated with a property management plan. The property management plan provides the context for the EMS, the big decisions about the farm family's goals and aspirations.

The next area that was raised was conservation farming. Conservation farming is a term that is applied to a suite of management practices that reduce soil disturbance, increase soil organic matter and retain vegetation, including stubble. The objective is to improve soil health, conserve water and reduce soil erosion. Native pasture species are often favoured by conservation farming approaches. Traditional soil cultivation and burning of stubble assists in control of weeds and plant diseases. In conservation farming other approaches are required. Conservation farming has enabled the development of specialised planning equipment, more disease resistant crop varieties and herbicides for wheat control. The Department of Agriculture has been involved in researching all of these areas since the late 1960s.

Extension services - New South Wales Department of Primary Industries has approximately 300 extension officers. Extensions taken include all the ways by which information relevant to agricultural industries is provided to farmers. This ranges from formal education activities with farmers to the indirect provision of information to them by providing training and technical support to the private sector, other agencies and CMA staff. Farm management is complex and the optimum approach needs to be determined for the local environment, business capability and market goals. Rather than presenting a one size fits all recipe, New South Wales DPI aims to promote a deep understanding so that farmers can determine the best option in their own situation. Examples of this approach are courses such as Prograze and Landscan. New South Wales DPI is also a member of the Council for Environmental Education and contributes to the delivery of the New South Wales environmental education plan Living for Sustainability.

The final area that was raised was research and development. New South Wales Department of Primary Industries has a research budget of approximately \$126 million, of which 30 percent is provided by industry and other external stakeholders. The department has approximately 900 research staff, including scientists and technical support staff. Research in Australia and internationally is characterised by increasing collaboration between research providers, both to obtain the range of expertise required and to defray the overhead expenses of research facilities. New South Wales DPI is a participant in 18 co-operative research centres. These include the CRC for Plant Based Management of Dryland Salinity, the CRC for Cotton and the CRC for Irrigation Futures. Formal alliances have been developed with other research providers, such as Charles Sturt University, University of Sydney, Southern Cross University and University of New England.

Mr DRAPER: The Minister stated that governments "need to better understand that the landholders' capacity to change to sustainable practices" is somewhat dependent upon a number of issues related to economic and social viability. Has there been any research to evaluate whether the approaches being promoted are economically attractive, and how does the interaction between land holding patterns and the capacity of landholders to adopt more sustainable practices impact upon practical natural resources management?

Dr SHELDRAKE: With a question like that we would be happy to provide a formal written response, if that was more appropriate or would assist.

CHAIR: Yes.

Dr SHELDRAKE: I will respond initially and then I might ask one of my colleagues to respond as well. I think one of the strengths of the Department of Primary Industries is that it does take into account all of the issues relating to the farm in terms of assisting natural resource management and profitable farming. We are in an organisation that has expertise in business, technical, agriculture and resource management, and in that way we believe we are able and capable of addressing the social, economic and resource management issues in any area. I have just come from a meeting with the chairs of the Catchment Management Authorities and, from those discussions it was clear that the issues that they are trying to grapple with and the skill sets that they want from us are incredibly varied, and it covers all of those issues, economic, technical and resource management. I believe as a department we are conducting all of those areas in different ways and with different groups of people.

Mr FISHER: Just a couple of points: The old New South Wales Agriculture had some farm management economists whose role was to help farmers evaluate the economic impacts of various options. With the recent reforms, such as for salinity and water, there were extra economists appointed with those programs whose role was to evaluate specific proposals and projects. Where this Standing Committee is looking at salinity, there is a group of salinity economists who have been evaluating the different techniques and technologies proposed and making that information available to farmers.

Mr DRAPER: Could I ask, having been on a recent field visit, do you think the relationships between CMAs, DIPNR and DPI are working effectively to get the best expertise from all three different areas?

Dr SHELDRAKE: It is early days for the CMAs, but I have just had discussions with the CMAs and it was an incredibly positive meeting. That was a meeting with the chairs of the CMAs, the Director General and myself. They are very positive about cooperation that is coming and the interactions that they are having with our staff and we are now looking at negotiating how we can provide expertise. In some cases we are providing them with a staff member to join their CMA. In others it will be identifying people who will remain within the Department of Primary Industries, but they will be working on projects jointly with the CMAs and what we talked about at the meeting was that this is the start and what we are looking at is a long-term permanent relationship and a partnership interacting for a long period. That is already happening with some of the CMAs. With some CMAs it has not advanced as much, so it has gone further forward with some than it has with others, but I think the signs are incredibly positive.

The Hon. IAN ARMSTRONG: Could I ask a supplementary question which will somewhat depend upon a number of issues relating to economic and social viability: Have you had a look at the changing ownership of land and social areas being diminished because of professional corporate farming? The question of intergenerational transfer and what families are requiring out of a farm does not apply with corporate ownership. Have you looked at the difference between the family farm, which has social responsibilities and demands, as opposed to the same area in terms of corporate ownership, particularly now that corporate ownership is starting to lease land as we see with the country at the top of the Hunter? Have you looked at the differentiation between corporate ownership where there are no social demands as opposed to the family?

Dr SHELDRAKE: In terms of the corporate farms they still employ a large number of families in their businesses.

The Hon. IAN ARMSTRONG: But on salary?

Dr SHELDRAKE: That is right, on salary. There is still an issue in terms of the social aspect of those large corporate farms and you only have to look at, say, the developments around Bourke with the horticulture, the impact - that is a number of families and corporate farms in that they are run in a large business sense but they are still owned by a small number of families.

The Hon. IAN ARMSTRONG: I am thinking more of Twinehams, which is at arm's length to family commitment.

Dr SHELDRAKE: I think those businesses are going to continue to be there in rural New South Wales. They are very positive contributors and I suppose the social impact - they do not have the same issue in terms of handing over the farm. The farm is part of a corporate decision.

Mr BANKS: I do not know that we have particularly studied that, but we recognise it in the delivery of our services in that there are our extension staff out there. People giving advice to people on the land are tailoring their messages to the sort of clients who are out there, so we recognise there are differences. We probably have not studied the differences, as your original question is, but I believe that we are tailoring our service delivery to meet the range of clients and that goes, as you say, from corporate to family to part-time to whatever and we need to accommodate that so that we can have the whole landscape being managed well for good profits, good industry development as well as good resource management. Horses for courses.

Mr MARTIN: In 1992 all States and Territories agreed to Australia's National Drought Policy, which was based on the principle that farmers should manage the risk of drought because it is part of the natural environment in which they operate. The principle which underpins this is for farmers to adapt their management practices in response to climate conditions they face and New South Wales farmers I know have recently taken a clear policy stance on the importance of building farm sector capacity to prevent and manage the risk of drought. Can you envisage a time when a model of farm management is developed where drought is simply another business risk and there may be no need for drought declarations at all?

Dr SHELDRAKE: I think we certainly, and as part of our property management planning, would like to think that drought is managed as part of the risk of the farming business. If that can occur then the need for Government to assist in drought becomes less of a need. I think that is what we are trying to strive for and I think, to be fair, the way farmers have responded in this last drought would indicate that that has happened to a large degree. In this drought very few farmers had animals that suffered in terms of animal welfare. Very few farmers had to destroy animals. That was assisted by world prices, the export markets were good, but I think farmers went into this drought much better prepared. Members of this Committee would have first-hand experience of previous droughts and I think, by any assessment, farmers have gone into this drought much better prepared. So I think what you are seeing is a trend in the direction that your question is aimed at and when this drought finishes and the next drought occurs I think you will see farmers continuing to move in that direction and continue to be better prepared.

Mr MARTIN: We have heard from the Rural Lands Protection Boards that their drought declarations have been more frequent than the one in ten year events adopted by New South Wales Agriculture. Does this mean that there is a discrepancy in the definition of what a drought is between the various agencies?

Dr SHELDRAKE: The way the drought is described, and this is currently an issue that is being discussed at the Primary Industries Standing Committee and Primary Industries Ministerial Council, that is a way of more objectively assessing when a region is in drought, so drought on the north coast is going to be the result of a different rainfall pattern than a drought at Bourke or Brewarrina, so the task has been set to try to identify some objective criteria that can assist in that and that will then overcome the discrepancy of the EC descriptor for drought and the criteria as opposed to Rural Lands Protection Boards, and that is the boards themselves advising State Council and then determining when an area is in drought. There are always going to be those discrepancies until you come up with something that is a bit more standardised.

The Hon. RICHARD AMERY: Isn't the issue about drought declarations a product of the unique New South Wales situation that we have Rural Lands Protection Boards? Is it right that some other States do not declare droughts, for example, or they work off exceptional circumstances classifications? I mean there is a difference in it.

Dr SHELDRAKE: Yes.

The Hon. RICHARD AMERY: At some stage they say "I declare it is a drought".

Dr SHELDRAKE: That is correct.

The Hon. RICHARD AMERY: Some States do not do that.

Dr SHELDRAKE: That is correct. All the States are participating in the Primary Industries Ministerial Council process in looking for a mechanism which will enable a drought to be better described, and that is for exceptional circumstances purposes, but in New South Wales and in Queensland, those States - and in New South Wales the Rural Lands Protection Boards - will then be able to use that same objective mechanism if it gets adopted.

Mr APLIN: What role, if any, do you see the CMAs having in drought management in the future?

Dr SHELDRAKE: I might ask Mr Banks to input as he has been heavily involved in working with the CMAs, but I would have thought one of the key roles where the CMAs would be able to assist in drought management will be in training and in the risk management issue raised already, so that CMAs will be able to help farmers be prepared in terms of a drought.

Mr BANKS: That is basically the answer. The CMAs are interested in the catchment landscape, improving the quality and the longevity of those sorts of resources, so they are sponsoring, in some cases through the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality and the Natural Heritage Trust funding that they have for project work, works that improve generally the groundcover, sustainability of industries and capacity of landscape to be more resilient, so that is the angle they are taking. It is not a specific focus on drought, it is a focus on improved landscape management and improved landscape outcomes and quality, but in doing so they are considering what happens when we get unusual events. There could well be floods, for instance, or fires or droughts, so those come into the equation in terms of the types of projects that they are interested in supporting.

Mr APLIN: We have touched on the subject of Rural Lands Protection Boards a couple of times today and their role. Do you see that there is a conflict with the CMAs and do you see any problems long-term in the continuation or viability of Rural Lands Protection Boards given that they could be deemed to be exercising excise on farmers to participate to keep them running?

Mr BANKS: I do not see the conflict.

Dr SHELDRAKE: No, I do not see the conflict. I think there are two separate roles. The Rural Lands Protection Boards provide a suite of services to their constituents. The catchment management authorities provide a different suite of services and I think with time, and as I answered the very first question, as the CMAs and the Department of Primary Industries are starting to work closely together you will see that same sort of development occur at the local level with CMAs working with the Rural Lands Protection Boards within their catchment area.

Mr BANKS: Yes, and just as the Department of Primary Industries has a lot of areas of common interest with CMAs, so do the Rural Lands Protection Boards. They are interested in land management and their reserves. CMAs are interested in how the land is managed, they are interested in a whole range of similar outcomes. It does not mean that they are duplicating work, it just means that they have common interests and they will find ways of collaborating on those areas of common interest as we are with CMAs as well.

CHAIR: When we were in Albury, the Department of Primary Industries Salt Action Team person had recently joined the CMA. That position had not been replaced at the DPI. Is that a conscious decision that has been made by the department? You earlier referred to the fact that you are working out whose responsibility is what. Is it likely that you will not have a Salt Action Team as a result of the CMA's existence now?

Dr SHELDRAKE: I will answer in general.

CHAIR: Yes, it is meant as a general question.

Dr SHELDRAKE: Yes, and I might ask Mr Banks to comment specifically. We are trying to work in a way with the CMAs that ensures that we are using people that obviously overlap and people have the skills to assist the CMAs. In some cases we may not refill a position and in some cases we probably will, so it is going to be a little bit dependent upon the task. In a lot of cases I envisage that the tasks our staff are currently working on and where we identify them to work with a catchment management authority the work might be totally consistent with what would be seen as a DPI project anyway. A good example might be an economist working in the north-west, say at our Tamworth institute. That person might start working on CMA related areas, but they are exactly the same roles that they would have been doing with the Department of Primary Industries, and so you are getting that interaction. In terms of Albury?

Mr BANKS: In terms of specifically the salinity, the salt action teams were formed out of the State salinity strategy and there was specific funding available for that strategy for a period of time. That funding has now finished for those particular salt action teams. We have retained some people that we employed under that process, particularly team leader and people who are delivering salinity training to other providers out there or the farmers or the CMA. So we are retaining that end of it and some of the more on ground stuff is being picked up by the CMAs. So there is a bit of rationalisation there as funding sources change as well.

The Hon. IAN ARMSTRONG: Would it not seem to be more practical with the evolution of the CMAs to have the irrigation officers, the salinity officers, the remaining ones in the department, who are associated basically with water, because the Department of Infrastructure and Natural Resources is responsible, would it not make more sense for them to move over with the CMAs to come under DIPNR, because there is only a skeleton left of both of them and basically both those groups are water based?

Dr SHELDRAKE: I think the strength of DPI staff is their rapport and their street credibility with the farming community, and the CMAs will get value out of working with the Department of Primary Industries staff because of that. That was part of the discussions that we had this morning, that the CMAs are very keen to work hand in hand with the Department of Primary Industries to assist them, and part of that assistance is the relationship with the farming community in terms of getting the natural resource management issues addressed by farmers. DPI staff are able to go to farmers and discuss agronomic issues, animal, livestock, veterinary, water, irrigation issues. So they have credibility with farmers from a technical perspective and at the same time then they can address and discuss the resource management issues. The CMAs recognise that that is a very powerful link and combination, and that is I think the thrust in terms of retaining a whole lot of skill sets within DPI, as long as there is that two-way relationship with the catchment management authorities.

The Hon. RICHARD AMERY: Question 7 is: How is the department working with the other agencies, such as DIPNR, DEC, the CMAs and the boards, to co-ordinate a large amount of information about managing salinity and drought, and, secondly, build the capacity of landholders to adopt more sustainable practices? That question comes back to an age old problem of confusing messages from the farmers' point of view, the environmental portfolio sending one message, agriculture or DPI talking about production and so on. Have there been improvements in the way those agencies are working?

The other supplementary on that question is: How does DPI ensure enough professional support for people at the local level? I think you have been talking about that, the stage funding for some programs, for example the salinity strategy and so on. Is the department happy with the number of professionals they have to support them? Are the different agencies sending out a conflicting message and are the mechanisms now getting better so that farmers are not confused by them?

Dr SHELDRAKE: I think the answer is that if the CMAs are given enough time, then they will address the concern that you are raising, and it is a genuine concern, but because of the CMAs' local ownership, they are setting their own goals and direction at a local level, I think they will start to draw on the departmental skills, so that is all the Government departmental skills that they need to assist them do their job, and I think with time you will see the CMAs starting to come back to departments like DEC, like DPI, like DIPNR and say, "Our community is wanting increased skills in this area. You should be providing us with more in that direction", and I think then you will start to see the local community drive the services that are provided by the Government agencies.

CHAIR: You sound very unthreatened by that. Do you think the other agencies have the same feeling of warmth and harmony?

Dr SHELDRAKE: I would not like to speak for the other agencies, Madam Chair. We are unthreatened in DPI. That is a good observation. We see this as a way of trying to help farmers address some of these really big sustainability issues, like water, like native vegetation, salinity, acid soils. We see the CMAs as another vehicle for us to get the technical message that we have got in a number of these publications that we are going to table shortly. We have got a lot of technical expertise. We are always looking for ways through an extension service and we see the CMAs as

being a vehicle for bringing the farming community on board and for them to direct us a little bit in terms of the material that we produce, making sure it is focussed to what they need to get that change.

CHAIR: You said you had already had a meeting with the CMA chairs this morning with your Director General. Is that becoming standard now for other departments, or is that an initiative that you took or they took, who took that initiative, the Minister?

Dr SHELDRAKE: No, I think the chairs of the CMAs are meeting with the other agencies and in our case I think this is the third or fourth meeting we have had. At that meeting we have recognised that at the next meeting we are going to invite Mr Banks along, our Deputy Director General (Science and Research), because both of those issues were raised today as issues that the chairs of CMAs want to discuss. So we are getting very interactive with the process, and I assume that it is occurring with the other agencies.

Mr DRAPER: I was going to raise the issue of salt bush. In the submission it discusses the potential use of salt bush to make use of salt affected landscapes. Could we just get a bit more information about the potential and how it is working?

Mr FISHER: We see two roles for salt bush. One is for salinity there is a real problem at the moment where salt bush can help to pull down the water table because it is tolerant to those conditions and, as it uses up the water, pull the water table down and let other pastures re-establish there. The other role for it though is the more pro-active one of integrating salt bush into a farming system. There is an interesting trial going on out at Condoblin with alley farming of salt bush and using the salt bush to fill in the gap in the feed year in Autumn. It improves farm productivity but because it has got a deep root system it is keeping the water tables down low. So that is a win/win for sustainability and profitability.

Mr DRAPER: There is a commercial organisation at the moment growing it near Quirindi.

Mr FISHER: Yes, but just how you manage it in the farming system is fairly critical. A lot of people are letting it get up too high. If it is used as part of the annual feed year, it should have more positive outcomes.

CHAIR: Can we take up your previous offer to get your response to each of the questions?

Dr SHELDRAKE: Absolutely.

CHAIR: One of the questions that we are particularly interested in is 17. We have heard your other submissions that there is inadequate provision for the cost of environmental externalities and that there appears to be a lack of information and knowledge regarding the economic capacity of dryland salinity. Has your agency conducted any research to assist with understanding how dryland salinity costs?

Mr FISHER: To take the two components, firstly, there are no strong market mechanisms yet to make the market pick up some of those externalities, and that is irrespective of whether you are talking about agriculture or secondary industries. There are some sort of cap and trade processes for some secondary industries but in general there is not.

The second part of that is looking at the technologies we are proposing for managing salinity and what are their economic impacts. I referred earlier to the economist we have employed under the salinity strategy. We are progressively evaluating those and working with our research people with the goal of finding the technology that simultaneously improves salinity management but has a farm productivity outcome, because that is what really drives adoption.

The Hon. IAN ARMSTRONG: The Minister also stated that there is a need to match farm management decisions to climate outlook, for example, "response cropping" assisted by the "Crop Choice" decision tool and to have a structured approach to farm management, via property management planning (PMP) and environmental management systems (EMS). Can you tell the Committee more about property planning management and environmental management systems in simple to understand terms?

Mr FISHER: Richard in his introductory talk ran quickly through PMP and EMS. Basically, we see PMP as that bigger framework on the property where we assist the farmer to locate their enterprises or make decisions about which enterprises they have got in a way that addresses their family goals but also ensures sustainability. So it is where you locate things on a property.

The Hon. IAN ARMSTRONG: Such as?

Mr FISHER: You might decide, "Do I want to have an agro-forestry enterprise on my property? What would be the returns to me? Do I have the family skills? What training do I need? What is the cash flow from it? Does that fit in with how old I am, my children", all those sort of big questions, but also "Where specifically do I locate it? Do I put the trees on this ridge or in this valley", those sorts of things. The PMP course is about a seven day course. It is a fairly intensive process because there are a lot of big decisions there, and it extends to other things: "Do I really want to be in farming? Would I prefer to cash up and go and buy a hotel on the Gold Coast?" They are the sort of fundamental questions that a business and a family has got to sort out.

Environmental management systems are more of a process thing. It is: "I have got this goal. What steps do I go through to assure myself and the community that I am actually going to deliver on those goals?" It is based on that continuous improvement business model of planning: Do, check, act. So you do it within that monitoring and evaluation continuous improvement but documenting the process. So it gives you assurance in meeting goals. We have here some brochures on the EMS process, because to really make it work we have got to have a simple national acceptance of what an EMS is, and so DPI has been working at the national level with other States.

Mr MARTIN: An old hobby horse that I know Ian shares is cell grazing. In terms of your research organisation, is there any work going on there? There seems to be some prima facie evidence out there that as a tool for managing a drought it has been very effective for the few people using it. I notice that a CSU student at the Orange campus has done some research along those lines which had some positive outcomes. Has it been taken up seriously at all?

Mr FISHER: The product we have, Prograze, tries to give farmers a broad understanding of how the pasture and the livestock enterprises work and pull together. The key element in cell grazing that has helped farmers through the drought is matching their stock-carrying capacity to the existing pasture and its likely outlook, so within Prograze and our other products we have that element, it is just that our model is a bit broader whereas cell grazing is a bit more recipe directed: You do this, this and this. I do not see any incompatibility; rather cell grazing could be a subset of Prograze.

Dr SHELDRAKE: And I think in cell grazing, as it is defined, it is quite concise in terms of how farmers are expected to lay-out the property. With Prograze we tend to let farmers use their existing property and layout and they manage the match of feed with livestock, so the principles are similar but the way the two are conducted might be slightly different.

Mr BANKS: I think also, if I may, when any of these grazing management systems are examined you need to look at what they are comparing them against. If you are comparing any of these systems that we have just been talking about with set stocking, continuous grazing, no fences, no gates, that sort of thing, any of these systems that manage livestock in relation to pasture growth are going to be superior whereas there is probably less distinction between the other levels of management.

The Hon. IAN ARMSTRONG: In your opening address you mentioned that 50 percent of agriculture is native grasses. Does that include 50 percent of production or just that in the State's overall land mass there is 50 percent native, 50 percent introduced? What is the ratio?

Mr FISHER: The comment was related to extensive grazing industries, so obviously we have feed lots that are not based on native grasses. Just thinking about across New South Wales, in the tablelands native grasses are a critical part of pastures. Similarly, in the western range land areas, native grasses and shrubs are critical and it is really only down through the middle where we have substantially altered our pastures, so the comment was really related to 50 percent of production of extensive grazing industries have pastures with a significant native component.

The Hon. IAN ARMSTRONG: Fifty percent of production comes from native pastures?

The Hon. RICHARD AMERY: It involves native pastures.

Mr FISHER: Yes.

Dr SHELDRAKE: To quote exactly, about 50 percent of the production from extensive grazing industries is due to pastures based on native grasses and shrubs.

CHAIR: Do you wish to table any documents?

Dr SHELDRAKE: I will table my introductory comments, our notes from the last meeting with the Committee, and there is a series of documents here.

[Documents tabled]

(The witnesses withdrew)

(Short adjournment)

RORY HAMLYN TREWEEKE, Chair, Western Catchment Management Authority, Angledool Station, Lightning Ridge;

DARYL RICHARD GREEN, General Manager, Western Catchment Management Authority, 4 Grevillea Place, Dubbo, and

GEORGE FREDERICK TRUMAN, Salinity Officer, Namoi Catchment Management Authority, 32 Abbott Street, Gunnedah, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Thank you for your submission. We appreciate you taking the opportunity to come and speak to us today. Would you like to make any introductory remarks?

Mr TRUMAN: I would like to address the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Namoi Catchment Management Authority. I would like to highlight to the Committee that the nature of salinity in the north of the State is quite different from the south since we have a summer dominant rainfall which usually occurs as short events and is extremely variable, resulting in drought through to floods. As rainfall never exceeds evaporation for any given month of the year, plants have the ability to use most of the rainfall. This rainfall pattern is more favourable for the development of agronomic systems, so we actually have the capacity to implement appropriate solutions through our farming systems. Largely we have the ability to maximise our water use through opportunity or response cropping thus reducing the potential for mobilisation of salts. We do have productive agronomic-based solutions to the management of salinity and trees are not always appropriate. This means that the retention and enhancement of native vegetation is generally not the most appropriate environmental or economic response for the management of dryland salinity in the Namoi catchment. In addition, the impact of increased tree cover on water yields from the upper catchment could lead to further losses in economic returns and regional viability. The Namoi CMA has identified this and, although a large percentage of our funds needs to be allocated towards the management of native vegetation, it is recognised that the management of salinity can be achieved through our farming systems. It is envisaged that funding will be allocated to assist in the increased adoption and uptake of opportunity cropping systems and alternatives to native vegetation where appropriate.

CHAIR: We have a series of questions, which I do not think we are going to get right through. We have provided them to you, but we also want to ask additional questions. There is obviously a lot of interest in the area. Questions that we do not get to would you be prepared to take on board and supply us with an answer subsequently?

Mr TREWEEKE: Yes.

Mr TRUMAN: Certainly.

CHAIR: Can you tell the Committee about the progress being made since the Catchment Management Act of 2003 and how well the information gathered in developing the catchment blueprints is informing the new catchment action plans, and are you satisfied with the progress being made so far in developing the catchment action plans?

Mr TREWEEKE: We were probably fortunate in the Western CMA in that our catchment blueprint we were able to take on board in its entirety. It was the first one approved at both State and Federal level. It provided a particularly sound base for the work that we are going to take on into the catchment action plan. The actual preliminary work on that has just started and we will be doing a public round of consultations on the development of that CAP over the next few months. The timeframe for the development has been extended until December, so we will be going out and consulting with all our stakeholders on that over the next few months. We have looked at the blueprint in terms of putting together our investment strategy. Because of changes in demands from both State and Federal funding bodies, we have had to collapse some of the headings into broader categories, but fundamentally we are following the same strands that were highlighted in the blueprint.

Mr GREEN: Our investment strategy for 2003-04, which is basically what we are implementing at the moment even though it is effectively 12 months' out of date, was based on the blueprint and our current one, which is in negotiation, from 2004 to 2007, the three year rolling investment strategy, as Rory said, is directly in line with what the blueprint said, even though there are some things that have dropped off, for example, the end of broad scale clearing. We had some actions in the blueprint that are probably not relevant any more because of that change in the Act, so they have been taken out, but the rest of it is pretty much in line even though it may look a little bit different.

I guess one of the real problems that we have run across is the development of investment strategies without actually completing our catchment action plan because of the timing. The funding to get on the ground has to come through the investment strategy, but the catchment action plan will not be finished, as Rory said, until December because of some - and I guess the process side of things with setting Statewide standards and targets. They have not been finalised yet, so we cannot finalise our catchment action plan until they are completed. So there is a little bit of out-of-phasing in what we are doing at the moment and hopefully in a couple of years' time - after December I guess - we will be able to catch those up and re-phase them. That is a little bit of a problem at the moment.

I think the other problem that we have run across is that, being first starting with the standards and targets, there is a bit of a danger that we are going to be second-guessed all the way along and the CMAs in developing their investment strategies and their catchment action plan could potentially become tied up in bureaucracy and red tape in the process side of things rather than the implementation side of things. That is certainly one thing that I am concerned about as general manager because we have been demanded by the New South Wales Government and Australian Government to get works on the ground and get things going whereas we are being asked to do all this process stuff as well with what are fairly limited resources in the CMAs.

Mr TRUMAN: I would like to add that the Namoi investment plan I think has been signed off recently and, just to lead on from that, although we are still waiting for these targets to come from the Natural Resources Commission we have actually reviewed the targets which were written in our original blueprint because they were very subjective and we need to try to make them a little bit more objective so that we can actually measure them, so at the moment we are just rewriting those targets to make them a little bit more accountable and measurable.

Mr DRAPER: According to the combined New South Wales Catchment Management Authorities annual report 2003-04, Namoi received funds for facilitation and coordination with regard to salinity and soils and I was wondering whether you could detail to the Committee a little bit more about the project and how it actually assists with the on ground approaches to management of salinity?

Mr TRUMAN: Yes, we have employed six and a half community support officers to deliver these four programs across the Namoi catchment. I guess the role of these CSOs is to engage the community and help them focus on what on ground works can be achieved. Within the priority catchments which have been identified through our investment strategy landholders have been informed that they lie within these priority areas and the CSOs will help to develop projects which will help to meet the targets. The CSOs are at that farm level. I guess they are able to work closely with the landholders and build up a good relationship and they can then seek the input from specialists like myself from salinity to assist where salinity is an issue, or if it is biodiversity, they can approach the key people. They are a familiar face that the landholders can build a relationship with and they also can identify some of the social, economic and environmental impacts that some of the technical sides may not pick up, they are aware of some of those issues as well, so they are out there in the catchment and already engaging the community, which will be a great step for when we start to get the catchment action plan happening.

Mr DRAPER: Where are they based?

Mr TRUMAN: We have got one at Walgett, Narrabri, Gunnedah, Quirindi, and two at Tamworth.

Mr APLIN: Will there be a role for catchment management authorities to assist with the delivery of the special conservation scheme intended to assist farmers with drought preparedness?

Mr GREEN: At this stage I do not believe there is. We have not talked to the Rural Assistance Authority with regard to it and they have not approached us as far as I know. One of the things that does concern me as general manager, again, is what seems to be a bit of a potential for CMAs to be given things that they are not resourced for. It could end up dragging us down and becoming ineffective.

CHAIR: Are these responsibilities as opposed to pots of money?

Mr GREEN: Yes, responsibilities, that is right, and the special conservation scheme - I was involved in that in my previous career - I think it is a great thing. We used it effectively in a lot of ways, particularly the soil conservation work, and I think there is an option for it to be administered by or partially administered by the CMAs. I cannot see it being transferred wholus bolus from the RAA because it needs a central co-ordinating body for the State, whereas the CMAs are 13 separate entities. I think there could be possibilities with that but it would have to be a negotiated responsibility, rather than saying, "You take this over".

The Hon. IAN ARMSTRONG: The Committee has recently heard from the Department of Primary Industries that it foresees working with CMAs in delivering on-ground action related to drought and salinity in the agricultural sector. How do you envisage that relationship evolving so as to make the best use of Government resources?

Mr TRUMAN: Could I just comment from the Namoi. We are actually in the process of setting up teams, for example sustainable farming, perennial pastures, native vegetation. These teams incorporate people from DPI, the CMAs, DIPNR, private agronomist advisers, so that they have got the involvement of all those agencies, and right from the word go we are involving them at this moment, so they will also be involved in the development of the catchment action plan, because if they are involved from the word go there is greater ownership and greater involvement. This is more of a formal arrangement, because we have been operating with these different agencies in the past but this is more formalised into certain people from all the agencies in set teams within the catchment.

CHAIR: A related question: How are your relationships going with the other departments, the other agencies? This seems a very formal approach that you are taking. Is that to maximise the communication? Is there evidence of lack of co-operation?

Mr TRUMAN: No. I guess it is just to formalise it. We have worked in this way in the past. It is a proposal at the moment that has been put forward. It has not actually been committed to, but it is a way of just trying to involve the different people in a bit more of a formal way, rather than just in general ways, but we have been working that way. We are certainly aware of limited resources right across all the agencies and it is just to avoid duplication there as a way of targeting the funds and resources in the most efficient way we can.

CHAIR: What about the western experience?

Mr GREEN: Just to answer part of Ian's question, dryland salinity in our catchment is really not an issue. From our blueprint it is not a big factor. In-stream salinity in the Barwon Darling system is a big issue, but it is mostly dependent on outside suppliers, whether it is Namoi or whether it is Queensland, and that is another debate, but in effect salinity is not a high focus within our blueprint and it will not be within our catchment management plan, but certainly the drought is. Drought is a factor in the whole management of the pastoral industry or pastoral areas. Basically, in our current process, our connectiveness to the other departments, whether it is Infrastructure Planning and Natural Resources or DPI or DEC, is quite high but it is not to the formal level of having teams. Effectively, we have got limited resource and those departments have very limited resources in the areas that we work, so if we do not work together we are really shooting ourselves because there is no value in trying to work against each other.

I guess the formal side of it has not been developed yet. I have talked to Geoff Woods, the Regional Director of Far West DPI, and we are planning on having a get together, probably with Len Banks who just left here, some time during April to work out some details. Similarly with DEC, I have talked to Josh Gilroy, and we have got a lot of advice. We are currently working on invasive

scrub issues under the PVP or Native Vegetation Act, so there is a fair bit of cross-over in that. As far as actual drought management, we probably have not got onto that as far as a concerted approach or a combined approach.

CHAIR: Rory, you were at the meeting this morning with the DPI?

Mr TREWEEKE: Yes.

CHAIR: Was it as harmonious and helpful as the DPI thought it was?

Mr TREWEEKE: It was a very good meeting. We went right around the table, all 13 CMA chairs enunciated how they had done their deal, if you like, with DPI, and it varied from, in one instance, a particular officer being designated to do a particular job that was of high importance to the CMA, another one where two were half-time, each officer putting half their time into CMA work, and other CMAs have literally chosen to look at a suite of skills, particularly socio-economic work, that they want DPI to contribute. So every CMA fundamentally is tailoring their requirements as to what DPI can deliver.

CHAIR: And you are having similar meetings with other agencies here?

Mr TREWEEKE: Yes.

Mr MARTIN: In relation to property vegetation plans, which you will be signing off on, how do you see them integrating with other property management approaches, and as a follow-up, do you see them as a tool to better facilitate outcomes from salinity and drought with PVPs particularly?

Mr TREWEEKE: I will start with that if you like. While the PVP is still in a development phase, you can start at a paddock level or you can go to a property level or you can go to a multi-property level. If you are looking at the paddock scale or the individual property level, I believe it has a disadvantage in that it does not take into account adequately regional considerations in terms of overall vegetation communities within a larger region, whereas I believe, in the western division anyway, the process that had been arrived at over many painful years in the western division did do that, so that when applications for clearing went in, that was put in the context of an overall regional impact on vegetation and land systems, and I think that is something that needs to be addressed in the PVP.

The trials that have been had to date have pointed out the extreme difficulty of getting a very complex system up. It is supposed to be simple in its outcomes but it is complex in the material that is needed to feed it into the computer program, and we are certainly not satisfied at this stage that it is something that can go out for use at this stage, it needs a lot more work to be done on it, because I think we are aware, and I believe the Minister is aware, that the reputation of CMAs will largely stand and fall on how successful they are in managing the issues of native vegetation.

The invasive native scrub module, which Daryl can certainly talk on in much more detail, I understand is looking quite good because a lot of the work that was previously done in the western division under the woody weeds task force has been able to be incorporated into that and it is looking quite promising.

The link between PVPs and property management plans, some trial work has been done in the Border Rivers, Gwydir and the Central West CMA, and we had a presentation on that yesterday, and yes, I think some of the basic property and vegetation and other information, threatened species, all of that sort of stuff, can form a basis for property management planning. There is no doubt about that. It does not matter whether you use the particular property management plan that those two CMAs have worked on together or whether you bring in some of the commercially available ones like RCS or Ballistic Resource Management, there can be very good linkages into those.

Mr TRUMAN: It really does dovetail particularly into the BMPs, because the cotton industry have just released their BMP which contains a vegetation management agreement, so it will just fit in nicely with that. Also the grains have got a BMP out. So it will dovetail in nicely with some of those existing to help in the delivery of those BMPs.

The Hon. IAN ARMSTRONG: Gentlemen, the lines of responsibility and demarcation between the CMAs and DIPNR, particularly when it comes to river management committees and the management of water, do you think those lines are clearly defined and are you satisfied that you have got your arm around your responsibilities and DIPNR have got their arm around theirs and you know where the lines are?

Mr TREWEEKE: I believe we do. Speaking for the western CMA, we are still waiting for the Minister to announce the Murray Darling Basin CAP strategy for the Murray Darling, which I believe he is about to do fairly soon. When that is in place then we will start to assist in preparing a water sharing plan for the Barwon Darling. All other rivers in our catchment basically come across the border from Queensland, so they are going to be subject to negotiation with Queensland, but the water resource plan for the Condamine and Bilong system will possibly include New South Wales representatives on their ministerial advisory council, depending on whether Queensland are prepared to accept an independent chair of that council. So whatever flows by way of water sharing plans in those schemes will be the subject of interstate consultation.

Mr GREEN: I think the separation is relatively clear in our minds but there have been a few documents come out that seem to blur that clarity at times, and what we really need is I guess a signed agreement of where things are. That has not eventuated yet, because a document came out indicating that the CMAs would be involved in the doing of macro water sharing plans. That has been withdrawn or changed slightly, and we will be involved in the community consultation side of it, rather than the making of the plan, but when that came out that caused a little bit of angst around the CMAs, saying, "Are we going to be out there implementing some of these plans", and that was blurred. That has actually been divided again and I think we are clearer, but until we get to the operational stage, there is probably still that possibility that it might become a bit blurry. At the moment we are doing okay.

Mr MARTIN: Did you see that as a conflict of interest?

Mr TREWEEKE: Absolutely.

Mr GREEN: Yes.

Mr TRUMAN: Yes.

The Hon. RICHARD AMERY: Could I just follow up on George Truman's comments earlier on. In your opening comments you said that trees are not always appropriate or native vegetation retention is not always the best option in every circumstance and you went on to talk about standards and targets. Have I misheard that? Are you signalling that when the State standards and targets do come down, particularly targets in relation to native vegetation retention and so on, that some of your catchments would have difficulty, or not difficulty, but disagree with maybe some of these targets? Are you aware of what these are going to be set at, what figures you are going to be looking at? Are you flagging to us that there is a rising storm coming in that area?

Mr TRUMAN: I really cannot comment on that. I could certainly seek advice from my GM on that and I can certainly follow up with some--

The Hon. RICHARD AMERY: Yes, it just seemed you were very fair and precise in your comments. It is a challenging one.

Mr TRUMAN: Yes.

The Hon. RICHARD AMERY: You talk about standards and targets which you understand a few catchments are a bit concerned about. I think your appropriate comment was that salinity in one part of the State is a different management issue than in other parts of the State. I am just asking the question: Is there a looming dispute or conflict between what might be State-wide standards and targets with the way your catchments, or anybody's catchments, may be managing those issues?

Mr TRUMAN: Yes, I see that. I guess it is really to highlight that, although the CMAs on-ground works are really associated with native vegetation, in our northern region, which has very high

economic outputs from productivity, and because of that climatic condition we have the ability to quite effectively manage salinity through our cropping practices and I guess it is really to highlight that, and they will try to identify those.

The Hon. RICHARD AMERY: You want more a recognition of agricultural practices than management?

Mr TRUMAN: That is right, and I think our general manager and policy adviser is trying to have that recognised.

The Hon. RICHARD AMERY: Question 17 is - and this is a question we asked the DPI - how is your CMA working with other agencies such as DIPNR, DEC, DPI and Rural Lands Protection Boards to coordinate the large amount of information about managing salinity and drought and, secondly, build the capacity of landholders to adopt more sustainable practices? I remember with the water committees and the native vegetation committees there always appeared to be a conflict perhaps with landholder members who saw the advice coming out of the environmental based portfolios to be different from that coming from the primary industry based portfolio. Is that situation getting better? As an addition to this particular question, I am just interested because I remember there were quite a number of conflicts and conflicting advice coming from the agencies as to how to best manage some of these natural resource issues.

Mr GREEN: I do not know that it is actually getting better at this stage. Our CMA has a program that we are just commencing for basically an expert information system as well as an anecdotal information system, which incorporates landholder experience, so you end up with a more collective view rather than an expert's view. We are not quite sure how it is going to go together yet, that is why we are putting it out to tender, but that is probably part of the way and it is still up to someone to make a decision on the collection of all information at that stage and that still comes to somebody making a decision, but if you have a combined set of information from different sources hopefully you will make a better or more balanced decision, so that is one way that we are looking at addressing that.

On the other hand, I have been involved fairly directly - I guess I have been leading the group - on the invasive scrub issues. The Science and Information Board is actually leading it and doing the responses on it, but I have been coordinating and helping to put together some of the responses. In that I must say the collective approach from DIPNR, DEC, the CMAs and the Science and Information Board has been very good and people have been looking at utilising whatever knowledge was around and not sticking I guess to the perfect scientific knowledge at some stages. That in itself under the Native Vegetation Act may be a little bit of a problem because it does say "maintain or improve" and we are trying to meet the maintain or improve test by using all the knowledge rather than pure science knowledge. It is obviously based on science, it has to be, there is no way you can get away from that - and not that we want to - but there has been a very cooperative approach in that and I think we will end up, as Rory said, everything being equal from here on, with a fairly good outcome.

Mr TRUMAN: I would like to add that the Namoi CMA has just signed a partnership with the cotton CRC because they have just released their BMP manual, so the CMAs are going to be assisting with the delivery and provision of resources of the cotton BMP. We have identified the information and it will certainly help to build that - yes, I suppose the acceptance of the information and standardisation of the information, and also working with Land and Water Australia in a knowledge brokering project to try to standardise and get together different research, planning implementation that is available across Australia to help that.

CHAIR: Is the cotton industry represented on your board?

Mr TRUMAN: One of our CSOs is employed through the cotton CRC, but no, they are not actually represented on the board.

CHAIR: Could I get back to a comment you made earlier, Rory, about Queensland. Do they have catchment management organisations on the other side of the border?

Mr TREWEEKE: They have.

CHAIR: Do you have dialogue with those?

Mr TREWEEKE: We do, yes.

CHAIR: Civil?

Mr TREWEEKE: They are very good, very friendly. I have been involved in some of the interstate committees - largely Queensland committees - set up to try to look at the water issues and they have been some of the most fearsome committees I have ever been involved in, they have been absolutely shocking. Our relationship with our CMA counterparts is excellent. We had a very good meeting in Moree a bit over a month ago and we are basically planning to meet about twice a year at this stage, and that includes people from the Darling Downs out to the Warrego area, and it includes the Border Rivers, Gwydir and ourselves, because natural resource issues do not stop at the State boundary and there are a lot of things we can actually work collaboratively and productively on, so no, the relationships there are excellent. In terms of how much water New South Wales gets, though, that is a different matter.

CHAIR: Are you seeing much of the NRC?

Mr TREWEEKE: We have worked with the NRC as one of their trial areas and we have nothing but admiration and the highest praise for them, yes, for their cooperation and for their understanding of the individual issues that emerge within each CMA. We have had a very positive relationship with them.

CHAIR: Is that the same with the Namoi?

Mr TRUMAN: That is right. One of the representatives comes from Gunnedah, so we have found that connection has been very good.

The Hon. IAN ARMSTRONG: A number of local government areas are either reviewing or developing LEPs. There is a new template about to come out. What will be the role of your CMA in contributing towards those LEPs in local government areas?

Mr TREWEEKE: We have just about finalised an MOU with all of the shires that our CMA is involved with and that includes actually DIPNR for the unincorporated area, which is the Regional Director for Far West on their behalf, and we have had a couple of meetings with all the shires that are involved and the memorandum basically indicates that we recognise the responsibilities they have for preparing an LEP, what we have to do under our catchment action plan, and we will make sure that we discuss what parts of our CAP they have to recognise in their LEPs, so it is a joint process as it goes forward in terms of natural resource management. They have particular responsibilities for areas that are under their control, but in terms of how they treat natural resources, if they do not like something the CMAs come up with in their CAP - and obviously they will be consulted while we create the CAP - then they will bring that to our attention and we will have to try to resolve it to everybody's satisfaction.

The Hon. IAN ARMSTRONG: So there is a significant opportunity for the CMA to have considerable influence in an LEP?

Mr TREWEEKE: Yes.

Mr APLIN: Following up on the input aspect, do CMAs have any input into government programs like Landscan, Stockplan and Prograze?

Mr GREEN: Not at this stage, no.

Mr TREWEEKE: Not that I am aware of.

Mr GREEN: The only one that has some input is the Stockgraze where I guess in the development of that in the range land areas probably myself and some of my previous staff in my previous career had a reasonable amount of input with Ron Hacker, who was one of the western range land people working with Ag, but no, not at the moment we have not. It is one of the activities that George talked about, the cotton BMP and the grain council BMP, which I had not heard of that, which is quite interesting, but our CMA has a fairly major action to develop a best management plan or code of practice for the pastoral industry or, sorry, for the industry to produce a best management plan, not for us to do it - it has been done several times in the past and it does not tend to work - but to encourage the industry through some of their industry bodies to develop their own BMP for pastoral management and I think those programs that are relevant, the grazing ones particularly, would be incorporated or used as some of the base for that development.

Mr TRUMAN: Further on from your question, through the salinity side we have identified involvement through the Prograze course, so basically to assist in delivery with that, so that is an area where the CMA can see a role.

CHAIR: The Murrumbidgee CMC is sponsoring a conference in Wagga Wagga in August. We have been led to believe that that is like a central gathering of catchment management authorities for the State. Do you understand that to be the case?

Mr TREWEEKE: As I understand it, we are having our chairs council meeting down there to coincide with the Landcare conference.

CHAIR: So there will be a large representation of CMAs?

Mr TREWEEKE: Yes, all the chairs will be there. I do not know whether it is one that we are scheduled to have a joint GMs meeting.

Mr GREEN: I do not think so.

Mr TREWEEKE: About three or four times a year as part of our monthly chairs meeting the GMs join us, so we have a joint thing to look at some of the administrative matters and what have you.

CHAIR: Do you see a network of CMAs evolving separately to Landcare?

Mr GREEN: I think it has already happened. The general managers meet every months, the general management council or the chairs meet every month and where we have common problems we hopefully head towards common solutions and if there is negotiating with DIPNR, which is I guess our parent organisation to some extent, or not everyone will agree with that but, at any rate, where we have sprung from at least, we have a fairly concerted approach. We actually have developed teams of general managers, two or three, or probably three or four people on most of them, to address certain issues.

CHAIR: Did you drive that yourselves? Did you create that yourselves?

Mr GREEN: Yes. I guess it was just trying to get someone to do the work. If everyone tries to do a bit on everything probably nothing gets done, but if two or three concentrate on a couple of issues you can actually get a lot more distillation and then you circulate it around to all the general managers asking, "Do you agree or not", and that seems to be working okay.

CHAIR: Are you meeting in one place regularly or rotating?

Mr GREEN: Mostly it is in Sydney, just for transport requirements, it is so much easier.

Mr APLIN: Do you understand that using Wagga has actually evolved from a Landcare forum originally? How closely do your catchment management authorities work with Landcare and in what particular ways?

Mr TREWEEKE: Very closely. We have catchment officers, or catchment support officers they are called. They work with the Landcare groups. Speaking from the western area, some of our Landcare groups have actually fallen over during the drought and people have found it difficult to get them going, but I think there is a renewed interest now and we are trying to work as closely as we possibly can with them. We sponsor our own CMA Landcare awards. The CMAs got a bit of out sync with the national Landcare statement, the national Landcare award program. So we will get everything geared around their timing next year and the next year on, because the following Landcare conference from the one that is being held this August is in 2007. They have them every two years.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(The Committee adjourned at 12.50 p.m.)