

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

At Sydney on Thursday, 7 April 2005

The Committee met at 11 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

ROWAN PERKINS, General Manager, Berrigan Shire Council, 56 Chanter Street, Berrigan,

IAN NEAVE, Manager Natural Environment, Wagga Wagga City Council, PO Box 20, Wagga Wagga, and

FRANK ZAKNICH, General Manager, Bland Shire Council, Shire Street, West Wyalong, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: I am advised that you have been issued with a copy of our terms of reference and a copy of the Legislative Assembly standing orders that relate to the examination of witnesses. Is that correct?

Mr PERKINS: Yes.

CHAIR: The Committee has received a submission from you. Would you be happy for that to be included in your sworn evidence?

Dr NEAVE: Yes.

CHAIR: Would you like to take the opportunity to speak to it or make some introductory comments? Obviously we have a range of questions, which we have provided to you already.

Mr ZAKNICH: Bland shire, of course, is located in the central area of New South Wales, centred around West Wyalong, a large agricultural centre and community currently suffering the ravages of four years of drought, which is having a huge impact on the community and others in the near region in the State heavily focused on agriculture, as I said. So natural resource management is a key part of what the council does and what the local farming community, Landcare groups and the like do.

The council's submission essentially is based around the council's role in facilitating and activating natural resource management in partnership with other State and Federal Government agencies and local groups and also assisting those groups to achieve their objectives and the broader objectives of the council and the community. Detailed in our submission are some of the ways we have gone about doing that where there have been successful areas of improvement and some of our views in terms of where we see that heading in the future, in particular in partnership with the catchment management authorities.

Mr PERKINS: Berrigan shire is in the southern Riverina area of New South Wales located on the Murray River. It is a largely irrigated area, I think about 75 percent of our land mass is irrigated. The area has a strong history of innovation to development and implementation particularly of groundwater management plans for its area through Murray Irrigation Limited. Those plans broadly have the aim of improving the local environment, natural vegetation and rivers, while at the same time promoting sustainable agricultural practices and responsible land and water management. Those plans are funded by the State, Federal and local Governments, and farmers themselves of course, probably most importantly.

In our area the results of those plans in 10 years have just been spectacular, what they have achieved, particularly given that they are all voluntary plans, if you like. Those plans were developed with stakeholder input, stakeholder vested interests and, importantly, stakeholder responsibility and the plans recognised that local priorities were important, and they were implemented with local ownership importantly, so it is something that in particular the irrigation committee has gone on and done itself.

Outside of those plans, just from outside observation, there has been a range of uncoordinated and often conflicting environmental targets being put in place and we were pretty refreshed when the revamp of the CMAs and the catchment blueprints came along. We saw that as an attempt to address that.

The only issue we have with the CMA concept in our area is that it effectively only is managing half a catchment. There is another one on the Victorian side as well. We would see some role for coordinating those perhaps a little bit better and we also feel that the Landcare structure has been left out of this system somehow despite some of the very good work that they have done.

The other thing that we would say is that environmental management is not something just for the land owners, it is for the broader community to participate in and be responsible for. If you are interested later I will go into some of the improvements that have come out of the land and water management plans, but we would say that we have been pretty innovative and have been doing a lot of work for a long time in a coordinated way.

Dr NEAVE: I am with Wagga Wagga City Council. The council is quite a large area. The city is quite large in regional terms, around 50,000, but there is a substantial rural area to our council as well and it is the heart of the wheat belt, so it is very significant from an agricultural point of view.

In looking at the general terms of reference, generally speaking, we would say that our council really works in the urban and peri-urban areas. Our influence in rural areas is less. That is not to say there should not be a bigger role in that and I think that is part of what this Committee is exploring. Our council particularly has an issue with salinity, urban salinity in particular, and while that is affected by what happens in urban areas, it is also affected by those rural and semi-rural areas as well. We do have a couple of policies and programs that do work in the rural area, like we have a tree management policy which covers the whole LGA. I flew up from Wagga this morning and looked out the plane and what did I see? Simplified landscapes, very substantial smoke haze, degraded riparian areas and a number of other problems you would say from a natural resource management point of view and clearly more work needs to be done. I think the CMAs are a good way of moving forward.

Mr APLIN: I was going to ask a question which could be applicable to all of you. Rowan touched on it just a moment ago and said he might elaborate, so I will give him the opportunity: Could you briefly outline the role of local government in natural resource management as you see it?

Mr PERKINS: We do not have a lot of resources so we have a fairly weak role. We are more of an advocate, if you like, in terms of natural resource management. We, I guess, are blessed in our area in that we have had these land and water management plans and now the CMAs. We have not really needed to have the strongest role. The farmers in our area have mainly looked after those issues themselves. I am not sure if it is for all local governments, but if we were to have a stronger role we need the ability to effectively manage that, which we do not moment.

The Hon. RICHARD AMERY: When an application comes into your council for a development, is there a natural resource impact assessment made of that, of water table, of salinity, of vegetation?

Mr PERKINS: No. We have only very limited applications from the rural area. We are basically fully developed, intensive small holdings. There is not a lot of further development going on. There is a move to perhaps some more intensive work in the pig industry, which does have that sort of impact work done specifically, yes.

Mr APLIN: Following on from your statement about the smoke haze, what role would you see local government having in controlling that and do you see it is a problem? I gathered that you do after what you said about flying up this morning.

Dr NEAVE: We have a very strong public advocate in Wagga who is agitating the council to take a greater role in the smoke issue. Wagga, particularly over autumn, is one of the more polluted places in New South Wales.

The Hon. RICHARD AMERY: Air pollution?

Dr NEAVE: Yes, particulate pollution particularly, because that is all that gets monitored at Wagga. There is the clean burning regulation which really allows certain burning to occur without any consents, and stubble burning is one of those things. In that regulation it clearly says that who ever is doing open burning must do it in a way that minimises pollution. Council is the authority in relation to that, so actually council could issue fines across New South Wales if open burning is done without attempts to minimise pollution.

We are looking at working with the bureau of meteorology to provide a daily alert so that farmers have some information about when they might burn, particularly in relation to surface inversions. It is a bit like in Sydney you have a don't burn don't light tonight campaign.

Mr APLIN: Rather than concentrating on the pollution aspects, can we concentrate on the effect on the ground? What alternatives are being investigated or promoted?

Dr NEAVE: In terms of?

Mr APLIN: Burning stubble.

Dr NEAVE: We have not really had a role in that. I know that the Department of Primary Industries and other research organisations are looking at conservation, farming techniques, and minimum till and so on, and incorporating stubble back into systems. I believe that the burning regulation is being reviewed by DEC this coming year for a possible amendment next year.

The Hon. RICHARD AMERY: I think Wagga has been very proactive in the way that they have been trying to battle salinity problems in particular, and I am not fully aware of the outcomes of some of those projects. I remember some years back being involved in the launch of a pumping system where you are actually pumping saline water out of the urban areas. Some years now down the track, what has been the impact of that? With obvious storage problem for salt and so on, did you create as many problems as you resolved?

Dr NEAVE: No, I do not think so.

The Hon. RICHARD AMERY: Did you reduce the water table, and has there been an improvement in the salinity effects on the urban parts of the city?

Dr NEAVE: We continue with that bore fill pumping program that you referred to, but there is also a number of other programs in the city. We are trying to reduce water getting into the ground water system and removing rubble pits and so on. We have a network of 80 or 90 piezometers around the city which measure ground water levels. Last year's State of the Environment report, even though we have been in about four years of drought, there were more rises in ground water than falls, so we are getting these regional aquifers continuing to move, and that impacts on the city.

The bore fill pumping program is very useful in keeping ground water down below the surface and therefore minimising impacts on infrastructure, roads, houses, sewer infrastructures. We did turn it off for 12 months to see what would happen and it came up very substantially. At the moment we have a licence to pump the water that we take from the ground water to the Murrumbidgee River. There is no storage issue at this point in time, but whether we can continue to get that licence.

The key is that we are pumping from rather unsalty deeper aquifer water and allowing the higher water, which is a bit saltier, to drain back down. That is the approach.

The Hon. IAN ARMSTRONG: Gentlemen, in its submission to this inquiry the NSW Farmers' Association observed that "farmers must comply with 56 different environmental and agricultural laws and regulations - many of which are complex, contradictory and often introduced with little understanding of their effect". Would you agree with that assessment and, if so, what are the implications of that from your point of view.

Mr PERKINS: I would certainly agree with it and the implication of course is that we do not achieve a lot.

Mr ZAKNICH: Very much so. It is even worse in local government but we are focusing on farmers at the moment. It really does restrict the farming community's ability to actually get on with their livelihood and their business, and a lot of it is premised on the fact that there is a view out there that farmer are bad land managers generally, and I think that is an inappropriate view and it does not take in account the good work that the farming community does do in that respect. That is the general sort of feeling in relation to that range of requirements.

The Hon. IAN ARMSTRONG: Bland Council in its submission states that local government should operate as an equal partner within the catchment management authorities and catchment planning processes and that there is a need to retain support for Landcare within that CMA structure. Would you care to tell the Committee more about your relationship with Landcare and your local CMAs, highlighting where possible how this relationship is encouraging conservation farming practices?

Mr ZAKNICH: Certainly. I was involved in the establishment committee for the Lachlan CMA and the sense that Landcare was actually losing some sort of ground or representation as a result of the CMA was a real concern to our establishment committee. We went through the process of ensuring that we engaged the district Landcare coordination groups in a role as a consultative group, or retain them as a group in the catchment so that we could actually actively include their feedback and good work on groundwork especially, in that regard with the CMAs going forward.

The partnership with Landcare and the CMAs is critical for local government because, as Rowan said, we do not have the resources at a rural regional level to do that. If we were to obtain the resources we would essentially be duplicating the effort. We need to be smarter about the relationships we have with the CMAs and Landcare specifically.

Mr MARTIN: In relation to the Wagga submission, you made some comments about outside experts being unintelligible and lacking credibility in relation to promoting programs for sustainable farming and so on. Whoever that target group was, is that DIPNR, Department of Primary Industries, Landcare? Specifically who are you talking about, the outside experts that are perhaps not forcing their views, and you are not getting the local input? Is that the point you are trying to make there?

Dr NEAVE: It is probably the range of extension service and people who are implementing NRM type programs across the catchment who interact with farmers. I have had some experience of this myself as a Government official in implementing NHT devolved grant projects with rural people around Wagga Wagga. In some senses it is quite hard to engage with them if you are not a farmer yourself and there are some examples where you have had farmer to farmer type programs which seem to have a fair bit of success.

The CMAs perhaps recognise this through their tender processes for projects. We have one locally where you can access money on farm works for managing biodiversity. The tender was won by a company that actually is farmers, so they have very good rapport with other farmers. They can speak the language.

CHAIR: Apropos the question about CMAs, what is your feeling? Which is your CMA?

Mr PERKINS: Murray.

CHAIR: One thing you did mention when you were talking about Landcare, we had Landcare in yesterday and it was quite an interesting presentation from them. They did emphasise to us that they were making a point of going out and trying to get known to the CMA so they can work with the CMAs more closely. Obviously that is a fairly long process of developing that mutual trust but nevertheless they are obviously trying. Do you see evidence from your local CMA of reaching out to the councils, the other players in the community?

Mr PERKINS: I certainly see them reaching out to councils. With due respect to ours, it is probably in its infancy, still in an establishment phase. I am not expecting to see a lot of that. I guess that the concerns about Landcare seem to be more an institutional or philosophical approach right from the start that Landcare was something else. This is the catchment management blueprint, and that is what we are doing and we do not need to worry about you guys.

CHAIR: We know that Wagga is hosting the Landcare conference. That looks interesting.

Dr NEAVE: We have a quite strong relationship with Landcare. We have an urban landcare group. They started out from the salinity problem so there is still a strong connection between council and what they do. In terms of rural landcare groups, we do have less contact with them. I think they probably struggle to see what council can do for them and I sometimes ask other people what can council do for you and the answer is not that straightforward.

The Hon. RICHARD AMERY: Following up on that point, you made a comment in your opening comments that Landcare felt they were left out of the system. Following on from what the Chairman was saying, is that a view expressed to the council by the local landcare participants?

Dr NEAVE: Yes.

The Hon. RICHARD AMERY: We still have not got that at the national level. I think we are going to see the Landcare Council later on today.

Mr PERKINS: That is at the coal face. We have four Landcare groups in our area which are really focusing on local or micro-issues but nonetheless strategically important ones. They are addressing some of the key issues in our area but do not seem to have been involved at all. I guess they see the small amount of financial assistance that they get at threat as well.

The Hon. RICHARD AMERY: We had them in yesterday and they seemed to have their own program, their own image, their own logo and they set about their own directions. I do not recall them being overly critical of their participation, but I do recognise that at the local level they could be.

Mr PERKINS: From the CMA perspective they can be a great resource to the CMAs because they are very efficient deliverers of high quality service, and I cannot speak for all of the CMAs, but possibly as our CMA grows they will recognise that too.

Mr DRAPER: The Berrigan submission suggests compensation for farmers who provide for environmental services and yesterday the Committee heard from Landcare, as we have just discussed, that adopting sustainable practices gives you a better economic outcome. They seem to conflict a little. Can you explain the rationale behind that?

Mr PERKINS: Not always. Often you will find that a group of land owners become, in effect, the last people standing. They have got the last piece of resource that the superb parrot or the plains wanderer lives in. Their farming viability is very severely affected and they seem to have to bear that cost themselves without support from anyone. Our view would be that if preservation of those areas, say in that case, is important to the community then the community should contribute to

that as well, not just the land owner.

Mr DRAPER: How do you put value on something like that?

Mr PERKINS: I think it is pretty simple actually. If they are going to lose a certain proportion of land or use of land, there is a clear productive value of that land. I think that is quite easy.

Mr ZAKNICH: There is a model that is doing the rounds through the CMAs that takes account of just the protection level and calculated, for want of a better word, based on that value and then a value placed on the environmental contribution of locking that land up as an environmental service that the community can make.

CHAIR: One thing I would like to say is that any questions we do not get to, if you would like to take them on notice, we would appreciate that.

Mr PERKINS: Yes.

The Hon. IAN ARMSTRONG: Harking back to the burning of stubble and so forth, I have recently been shown some new technology which is effected by a slasher with a series of burners under it and a water extinguisher on the back of it. This is to compete where there is a conflict of interest between broadacre farming and intensive farming, such as grapes, where you cannot spray for about three months of the year, so where you have a burst of weeds, as we have this year in many places - and extraordinary burst of weeds - this technology is designed so that you can burn those weeds and avoid conflicts with chemicals and so forth on intensive crops, but it is burning. It should not put a lot of smoke out, but obviously it does. I wonder how we handle these conflicts between the various interests in agriculture and whether this sort of technology is worthwhile continuing to develop because of those conflicts plus the environmental problems with burning?

Dr NEAVE: So this machinery just heats the weeds and kills them, does it?

The Hon. IAN ARMSTRONG: It is a series of burners, gas fire burners, under a platform similar to an ordinary slasher, so instead of having a rotor on it it has a series of burners, and as it passes over the affected pastures, the weed infested pastures, it burns those off but on the rear of it it has a water spraying attachment and a tank follows it along with some chemicals in water to extinguish whatever flames there might be.

Dr NEAVE: I think from a pollution point of view, that would be a far better option. With all of these things it is the cost of moving over to something like that. If you are a farmer and you have your equipment set up for more conventional cropping approaches, it would be a cost impost to change to a different approach.

The Hon. IAN ARMSTRONG: The biggest cost at the moment is threat of litigation in conflict between competing farming interests.

Mr PERKINS: We are actually seeing different things to that happening. What we are seeing is a very large shift to direct drill seeding and not burning stubble at all. Stubble is really only being burnt as a disease control measure and in the 10 years I have been there there has been a radical reduction in the amount of stubble burning that is going on.

Mr ZAKNICH: And that is occurring in the broadacre area.

The Hon. RICHARD AMERY: We have tabled a number of questions to you, particularly some about the share funding arrangements, so if we could get some responses from you on those I would appreciate it.

CHAIR: This Committee did go to Wagga under the guise of the Salinity Committee and your local member was a member of that, and we had a very successful visit. How is the city's salinity issue going?

Dr NEAVE: It is clear that we still have a problem and will continue to have for a long period of time. Council continues to spend some money towards it. We have had negotiations with the CMA because one of their priority projects was an urban salinity project and apart from working on our problem they also wanted Wagga council to take some of its experiences to some of the smaller local government areas nearby, which I think is very valuable, but that has been in the pipeline for nine months now and, as far as we can tell, there is some sort of dispute between DIPNR and CMA and it has not come to fruition yet. It is definitely still a problem. We have a report saying that if we do not do anything it will cost us about \$83 million over the next 30 years, if we do nothing, so in terms of impact on roads and houses and other sort of infrastructure, apart from the impacts on loss of productivity, there is still a lot to do.

The Hon. RICHARD AMERY: Building a house in a salinity affected suburb - has there been any issue about adding to the cost? Has it been an issue at all or is it so marginal that it is not--

Dr NEAVE: The Building Code of Australia I think is now considering that particular issue and that is being driven by DIPNR, so yes, there will be additional costs. It is a bit like additional costs in relation to managing fire now, depending where you live. The costs get passed on. People do not complain about them, I suppose, someone who is building a house, because they do not really know that they are being incorporated, they just find that the house costs a bit more to build.

Mr APLIN: Some time ago the Committee had a presentation - I think it was an off-record one - from the manufacturer of a water conditioner which was operating at Wagga golf course and subsequently I attended an investigation of that with the CSIRO who were bemused as to how it appeared to be operating, but they could not place the scientific rationale behind it. Could you give me an update on that? I think we visited it about a year ago now.

Dr NEAVE: I have to say I am not aware of that.

Mr APLIN: There were severe salt scalds in that golf course area and it was proven that this particular water conditioner, which they are exporting overseas to middle eastern countries, is being effective, but it was in a trial phase. I was just wondering a year on what results there had been?

Dr NEAVE: I have not heard about that. On that particular golf course, which I play, we did have an NHT grant a couple of years ago, which anyone in the catchment could apply for money for, when we were managing it, and the golf course did apply for some money for some revegetation to try to address that salt scald. That is all I know about that particular site, that we did give them a bit of money to do some planting.

The Hon. IAN ARMSTRONG: Is this the golf course on the Narrandera Road?

Dr NEAVE: Yes.

The Hon. IAN ARMSTRONG: With the water table and the first and second holes are above surface level?

Dr NEAVE: From time to time, that is right.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for attending, we appreciate it, and we would appreciate getting some responses to our questions on notice.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(Short adjournment)

JOHN ROBERT KLEM, Australian Landcare Council, Bannister Lodge, 3165 Range Road, Goulburn, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: I am advised that you have been issued with a copy of our terms of reference and the Legislative Assembly standing orders that relate to the examination of witnesses. Is that correct?

Mr KLEM: Yes.

CHAIR: In what capacity do you appear before the Committee?

Mr KLEM: My appearance here is with the Australian Landcare Council. I chair the Hawkesbury-Nepean CMA, I also sit on the Natural Resources Advisory Council (NRAC) and I am a member of our local Landcare group.

CHAIR: We have a series of questions, which I think we have already provided to you.

Mr KLEM: Yes.

CHAIR: Would you be prepared to take on notice any questions which we do not get to and perhaps provide us with some responses?

Mr KLEM: Certainly.

CHAIR: We can then include those as part of your sworn evidence. Would you like to make some introductory comments?

Mr KLEM: No, not really.

Mr MARTIN: The Committee understands the aims of the National Landcare Program are to increase engagement by industry, farmers and the wider community in landcare and natural resource management activities. Can you describe for the Committee the difference between the two components of the program, that is the national component and the community support, and the role of the Australian Landcare Council in achieving these overlapping or overarching aims?

Mr KLEM: Yes. I am the New South Wales representative on the Australian Landcare Council. What the Australian Landcare Council virtually does is it meets four times a year: It meets twice a year in Canberra and meets twice a year out in regional areas, and that is all over Australia. They have been very worthwhile meetings. What the council consists of, as you might be aware, is a representative from each State and they are a community member and they are appointed by Minister Truss. We also have people from the National Farmers' Federation, from local Government, from Greening Australia, people like Carl Binning and so forth sit on that committee. That National Landcare Committee, the Australian Landcare Council, gives advice to the Federal Ministers. The chair of that is Bruce Lloyd and we give advice to Minister Truss and to Minister Campbell from our State point of view. We will get questions from both of those Ministers and reply to those. We work on taxation incentives; we talk about things such as the catchment support officers, what we are doing with those sorts of people, and we also get inquiries about what is happening in our own State. So it is a great vehicle for actually communicating between the States and structures. As you are aware, in New South Wales we have recently developed the catchment management authorities. That has been happening in Victoria for quite a while. A while ago I spoke to the Victorians about their process and I got a lot of really good information on the catchment health program. Now we have developed that on the Hawkesbury-Nepean. So what it has done is brought all of that together.

The Hon. RICHARD AMERY: We had local Government here this morning and there was a comment made that at a local level Landcare felt left out of the natural resource salinity system and I asked was that at a National or State body level or was it at the local level and, to be fair, the chap from the council said that that was the feeling from local Landcare members and the local operations. Is that view coming through with any force or in any substantive numbers from the coalface, so to speak, to the council or to the executive?

Mr KLEM: Yes, it is, and I think it is a very good question. Since we have gone regional, the Federal Government now is giving direct funds to the regional bodies, to the CMAs, and Landcare felt left out because what used to happen prior to that was that Landcare groups would apply directly to the Federal Government. They would be assessed on a Statewide basis and then they would go to the Federal Government, in that order, and then they would approve funding or not approve funding. What is happening now is that that money is going to the regions and the regions are virtually distributing a lot of that funding.

The Hon. RICHARD AMERY: Who are the regional--

Mr KLEM: That is the CMAs. In the majority of cases it is working pretty well. In some cases it may not be working as well because they probably have not got the infrastructure that other CMAs have got.

In our case we have a very strong contact with that and we distribute quite a lot of funding through Landcare groups, but that ties with our catchment action plans, so that what we identify is the issues, and that is tied up with the Natural Resources Commission, and all those sorts of things, so there will be investment in those priorities, but the Landcare groups are the actual ones that are doing the work on the ground and they are invaluable to us as a natural resource body.

There is still some criticism that they are not getting that direct funding in some cases, but they are getting it through the community national CMAs. I have just been evaluating the enviro-funding for New South Wales coastal. We just allocated \$1.7 million to New South Wales through enviro-funding and it has replaced that process. It is a real grassroots sort of operation where individual Landcare groups are tied up with a lot of council funding going through that process with council support, a lot of the coastal work, working on bitou bush and dune care and so forth there, so 1.7 for New South Wales coastal, and I think there is about 1.2 or 1.5 going to the inland, so it is quite a substantial investment.

CHAIR: Within New South Wales, 1.2 roughly?

Mr KLEM: Yes, but I am not sure if that is public.

CHAIR: I was not going to publicise it.

The Hon. RICHARD AMERY: If you were writing a recommendation about how the catchment management authorities and Landcare could better coordinate or work together, how would you thrash it out? If you want to put that in writing later on, that is fair enough.

CHAIR: It sounds as if you are living it, if you are the chairman of the CMA plus the National Landcare Council representative.

Mr KLEM: That is right, and what we are doing now in New South Wales, as you are probably aware, is setting up - and I have just been on the selection committee and we have just approved the name - a Landcare Committee for New South Wales. That is five members, community members - one is from local government to build that relationship - and one from DIPNR, and one would probably be the deputy director-general, who will be on that committee. What that will do is then advise through NRAC. The chair from that committee would sit on NRAC and then they would advise Minister Knowles through that process, through NRAC.

What we do with the Australian Landcare Council is at least twice a year the peak body of that chair would attend Australian Landcare Council meetings, so they would get the information back there. After each national landcare meeting I have I send out one page of what the process is and I also get information back from that process to give to the Australian Landcare Council.

CHAIR: How typical are you in terms of how many other heavyweights in Landcare are also chairing CMAs?

Mr KLEM: Not many. We really struggled with finding people for the New South Wales Landcare Council that had a global view and I think really that is the nature of Landcare. It is very central, very local. To assign somebody who has the global view state-wide and understand the national program is very difficult to find.

CHAIR: Is this all voluntary?

Mr KLEM: No. They pay me from the CMA point of view and they pay me sitting fees on the Australian Landcare Council. I get paid from NRAC but I return that back to the CMAs and we invest that in community projects.

Mr MARTIN: Just in relation to Landcare Australia Limited, the information they gave to the Committee was that basically Landcare farmers recorded higher levels of farm cash income, farm debt and capital invested in their property, so in other words they were doing better than non-Landcare farmers. Would you agree with that?

Mr KLEM: Yes.

Mr MARTIN: Can you explain why these economic benefits accrue to Landcare farmers?

Mr KLEM: They are usually better educated and better informed farmers. I do not mean that in a derogatory sense. They are usually pretty switched on farmers that belong to those processes. I am a member of a local Landcare group. We are doing a paired property program now. We are looking at production and also maintaining sustainability.

We have a local group of farmers and we meet every quarter and we have a day and we go out and kick clods and talk about how we are going to better our farms and we use expert advice. The advantage of Landcare is that it is a communication process. What has tended to happen in New South Wales is a lot of the processes that we had for communication, like extension officers from various departments, are not on the ground like they used to be to the same extent, so we are tending to use that Landcare network. Often New South Wales farmers will have a Landcare meeting first and then they will tack a New South Wales farm meeting on the end.

Mr MARTIN: Given the other information to the Committee is that about 40 per cent of farmers are involved in Landcare, would you expect a bigger take up if the economic benefits are there, or is it a message that is not getting out to everyone?

Mr KLEM: I think one of the big things is to be environmentally sustainable.

(Short adjournment)

CHAIR: You were talking about why is the proportion of Landcare farmers still only 40 per cent of the total farming population or thereabouts.

Mr KLEM: Can we see it getting better, or the advantages of that; I was suggesting while you were away that most farmers would learn from the farmer down the road or the farmer next door. We still do that in a large amount of cases. Landcare has helped a lot with that process because it has been a communications site. Landcare is seen as the friendly process. Some of the other agencies are not seen to be as friendly as they used to be. Landcare is seen as friendly. The local CSA officers, Catchment Support Officers, or Landcare officers are doing that process. They are communicating with those. It is seen very much as a friendly process, the Landcare movement, so I would suggest you would not get much more involvement.

What is happening here in New South Wales is that we have worked a lot of the Landcare over out in the western areas, and out in the farming areas but we are becoming a bit more urban with it, with the urban areas, the fringe areas. We have a lot of bush care. We have a lot of Landcare around the small block type areas. That is increasing in numbers. Our Landcare numbers in New South Wales are still increasing.

Mr MARTIN: So you think it is heading in the right direction?

Mr KLEM: But it needs nurturing always.

CHAIR: You are obviously in a very good position to observe things. As a consumer of natural resource management policies and regulations and practices, how do you think DIPNR is getting on with CMAs around the State?

Mr KLEM: We have a very good relationship with DIPNR. They have provided all the staff. In our case we have about 24, plus we have another 12 or 15 now in other programs. That has been very good. We have just put somebody on from DPI in the Hawkesbury. That is happening. They are also putting on someone from DEC that they are actually putting across, so that process is happening. We have a pretty good relationship. There are obviously difficulties in the start-up period to do with finance and those sorts of issues, and there is limited funding and we want to do a lot more and we find it very difficult through lack of funding, but there is lots and lots happening.

One of the really strong strengths I see in New South Wales with NRM now is the chairs council. There are 13 CMA chairs together. They meet regularly every month and if there is anything you want to know about NRM they have got it. They have been selected on their skills, not on their positions and the boards have too. We have people on our board, for example, like Bob Wilson, who used to head up Sydney Water. He is invaluable to us. They have some very good skills. The general managers are good. They meet once a month. It has been a really good vehicle. I sit on there obviously as a chair but I get stuck in there and I am pushing Landcare in that process and I am getting feedback from there to take back to the Federal Government about issues that they see as well.

CHAIR: Have you picked up the salt team function from DIPNR, which was previously based in Penrith, or not?

Mr KLEM: I have some things which I can hand over here a bit later. They have just had a very big conference in Penrith with salinity. It is interesting for Mr Amery because a lot of that work was done in his electorate. It was funded by NHT. We think of NHT as being rural, but there was a lot of NHT work done in the Sydney basin. I think that we need to really - because we understand it - in the Hawkesbury reinvest in salinity. We are not because we are not part of the NAP. When we look at out of the CMAs they are getting \$17 million each across the border or whatever, we are getting about \$5 million because we do not get the NAP. It is a big issue in that western Sydney area but as far as farming and retaining farming, it is critical. It is the food bowl, so much as you would understand Sydney, and yet we are turning it into urban land.

CHAIR: You are happy to table that?

Mr KLEM: I can give you that. It is a summary of all western salinity. Wesroc did the process but we supported it through the CMA and it was also supported with an NHT program.

Mr APLIN: The Committee understands that the National Landcare Program was reviewed in 2003 by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries to assess how effective it had been. Can you inform the Committee of the results of that review and in particular whether it has been successful in achieving its objectives of improving natural resource sustainability and also whether there were criticisms?

Mr KLEM: I sat on that review and I was part of that process. They found that Landcare was successful that is why they renewed the budget. There were a few criticisms. There were a few criticisms of LAL, in the fact they thought LAL was urban and not enough rural. There was some criticism for that process, but when you look at the structure of LAL and where the money is coming from you would understand the process.

CHAIR: What is LAL?

Mr KLEM: Landcare Australia Limited. I sat on that the other day. LAL has a new chair, Gerry Ellis, the previous head of BHP and he is absolutely brilliant.

CHAIR: Are you prepared to take some of these other questions on notice, the ones that we circulated, and provide answers that we can use in the proceedings?

Mr KLEM: Yes.

CHAIR: There will be an opportunity maybe at some other future time if you could come in. We will be having hearings all year. Is there anything else you would like to throw at us before we go?

Mr KLEM: I have the terms of reference and I put down some dot points here that may be relevant.

[Documents tabled]

The Hon. RICHARD AMERY: I have some questions and I do not want you to have a stab at answering them now but to get some information before the Committee, in Landcare the total amounts allocated, how much of that is taken up in process and administration? The second question is the outcome focus of Landcare in that I think you could probably point me to, off the top of your head, 500 Landcare projects going around. Is there any data, or is it too early to say that because of the Landcare projects in this area or that area, the water table is low or agricultural land has been reclaimed, say from lime land? Has there been any positive natural resource outcomes as a result of a string of Landcare or other projects within a particular catchment.

Mr KLEM: I was down at Harden Murrumburrah a while ago and they have a big salinity problem. Through their local Landcare working group and working with CSIRO they have actually done a lot of work on salinity and cropping and getting good results. What has tended to happen is they have got the results immediately of their cropping regimes and have actually put them on the net straight away. It is not as though it is a research process being held off and then coming out 12 months later or two years later. So it has been really good with that process. We do have numbers available for a number of Landcare groups and we are putting that together further. One of the biggest issues has been insurance. That has been a criticism. What we are doing with that now is, in the case of CMA, the Landcare group take out their own insurance and then we refund that cost. We are doing it for the people delivering meals, Meals on Wheels.

CHAIR: Do you have anything further you would like to table?

Mr KLEM: The other one is Salinity in Western Sydney.

[Document tabled]

**(The witness withdrew)
(The Committee adjourned at 12.50 p.m.)**