REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No. 5

INQUIRY INTO THE MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC LAND IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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At Coonabarabran on Thursday 27 September 2012

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The Committee met at 9.00 a.m.

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PRESENT

The Hon. R. L. Brown (Chair)

The Hon. R. H. Colless
The Hon. C. M. Faehrmann
The Hon. L. Foley
The Hon. S. MacDonald
The Hon. Dr P. R. Phelps
The Hon. P. T. Primrose

CHAIR: Welcome to the seventh public hearing of the inquiry by General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5 into the management of public lands in New South Wales. The inquiry is examining the operational, economic, social and environmental impacts of converting Crown land, State forests and agricultural land into the national park estate and other matters pertaining to the management of public lands. Before we commence the taking of evidence I acknowledge the Gamilarray people, who are the traditional custodians of this land. I also pay respect to the elders, past and present, of the Gamilarray nation and extend that respect to other Aboriginal people present.

This morning we will hear from representatives from Warrumbungle and Coonamble shire councils, as well as a representative from the Baradine and District Progress Association. Later the Committee will hear from a panel of witnesses from Andrews Haulage, Hyde Haulage and Gunnedah Timbers. This will be followed by evidence from local residents Mr Rod Young and Mr John Denham, and from Ms Bev Smiles from the National Parks Association. In addition to this morning's hearing the Committee will hold further public hearings in Port Macquarie and Grafton, as well as in Parliament House, Sydney.

I will briefly explain the procedures for this morning's hearing. Copies of the Committee's broadcasting guidelines are available from the Committee secretariat. Under these guidelines, while members of the media may film or record Committee members and witnesses, people in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photography. I also remind media representatives that they must take responsibility for what they publish about the Committee's proceedings. It is important to remember that parliamentary privilege does not apply to what witnesses may say outside of their evidence in the hearing, either before or after giving their evidence. I urge witnesses to be careful about any comments they may make to the media or to others after they complete their evidence, or before they give their evidence, as such comments would not be protected by parliamentary privilege. Witnesses are advised that any messages should be delivered to Committee members through the Committee staff. A full transcript of what is said during today's hearing will be prepared by our Hansard reporters. The transcript will be available on the Committee's website in the next few days.

PETER JOHN LAWRENCE SHINTON, Mayor, Warrumbungle Shire Council, and

RICK WARREN, General Manager, Coonamble Shire Council, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Before we proceed to questions, would either or both of you like to make an acting statement? I note for the benefit of the Committee that Mayor Shinton wishes to table a copy of his opening statement, is that correct.

Mr SHINTON: Yes.

Document tabled.

My name is Peter Shinton. I am Mayor of Warrumbungle Shire Council, and I have been in that position since the amalgamation of Coolah and Coonabarabran shires in 2004. I am Chairman of the Bushfire Management Committee, a delegate to the Castlereagh Macquarie County Council—a noxious weed authority—and a member of the National Parks and Wildlife Service Northern Plains Regional Advisory Committee.

The Federal Government approach that at least 15 per cent of the various vegetation regions throughout Australia should be preserved and managed through our national parks systems is a commendable practice. As a member of the Northern Plains Advisory Committee for the National Parks and Wildlife Service I was given the opportunity to witness how the National Parks and Wildlife Service selects properties for purchase that have a low-farming footprint and a small influence of clearing that, with management, can return to closely resemble the natural environment of the past. They use computer-enhanced overlays of geology, soil type, forest vegetation intensity, farming and grazing intensity, natural grasses and herb intensity et cetera. As each overlay takes its position more and more hectares of land disappear from the map and those that remain are targeted if the properties come up for sale. When the property is purchased most of the farming country is excised and sold on the open market to neighbours. Plans of management are developed and we begin to satisfy the Federal Government targets.

In the case of Toorale Station near Bourke, the primary reason for purchase was the Federal Government's water buybacks; the worth of the land to be preserved as national park in my opinion was probably a very secondary consideration, if it was considered at all. The practice in mining where the mining company purchases environmental offsets and gifts those to the national estate or to the National Parks and Wildlife Service should only happen if the mining company gifts money to manage the land. It should not be rateable farming or grazing country and should closely resemble the land type that they are mining. If no land is available then they should contribute a calculated amount as compensation to the running costs of the National Parks and Wildlife Service for the life of the mine.

The Pilliga scrub as we knew it until about 2004 came to be named the Brigalow Belt South Bioregion. With this now alien name the State Government began the process of dismantling a forestry industry and the local towns of Baradine and Gwabegar. Around 40 jobs were lost when the forestry industry was closed down in the Pilliga and the 20 that were created by the National Parks and Wildlife Service were with a completely different skills set—so 40 jobs were just lost. In 1995 a Baradine forester at that time took the then Coonabarabran council on a tour of the forest to see how they logged an area, to see how they selected the logs to be harvested and to show us how previously logged areas were reharvested years later on their rotation of compartments. We saw areas being thinned where cypress trees were growing thicker than the hairs on your arm and were totally impenetrable to man, beast or bird. These young cypress trees were no bigger than a 50 cent coin in diameter but were in excess of 60 years old when we counted the rings.

The forester went to great lengths to explain that areas like this in the Pilliga—and they are everywhere—lacked biodiversity and would eventually become uninhabitable monocultures. With no forest management in the Pilliga its productive capacity is reduced, its biodiversity is stifled and with the reduction in area for State forests its future is now very questionable. The cypress industry has a future but only if the large tracts of land given over to the national parks and community conservation areas are revisited to determine their real worth in conservation versus their worth as a sustainable well-managed timber resource.

As a delegate of the Castlereagh Macquarie County Council, which is a noxious weeds authority formed by the Coonamble, Gilgandra, Warren, Walgett and Warrumbungle shire councils, I am aware of the complaints and the management problems associated with neighbouring national park, LHPA lands, State Rail,

State and Federal highways or Crown Lands, to name just a few. In 1996 the then mayor of Walgett, Peter Waterford of Lome Station, brought a piece of spiny cactus to one of our county council meetings and told us how it was infesting about 10 hectares of Crown land near Lightning Ridge. No-one could identify the cactus so we named it Waterford's pear—probably 12 months later it was identified as Hudson pear. All approaches to fund a campaign for its destruction through Crown Lands went unanswered or were met with a reply that the weed management budget was exhausted. In 2006, when we finally received funding from the CMAs, Walgett shire and Crown Lands to start the destruction campaign, Hudson Pear covered an area of about 60,000 hectares around Lightning Ridge and it is now found in nearly every mainland State.

I have been Chairman of the Castlereagh Zone Bushfire Management Committee since 1997. Every eight to 10 years we have a massive wildfire that consumes great tracts of the Pilliga, causes massive losses of flora and fauna, cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to extinguish and risks the lives of hundreds of fire fighters who volunteer to fight them. Over all these years the Bushfire Management Committee has suggested constructing a fire break about 100 meters wide on each side of the Newell Highway by either complete clearing or by less radical means of just very regular control burning. No-one ever seems to have the money to construct this fire break to divide the Pilliga, even though we have a burgeoning coal seam gas industry right in the middle of the east Pilliga Forest. We always have plenty of money to throw at fighting a fire but not to preventing or controlling one.

Thank you for receiving our submission today. I realise the importance of public land to our towns and villages not only in the shire but statewide. I realise that conservation and land management are important tools in the preservation and continuance of purpose for these lands, but I feel that if they can be used sustainably and produce an income then that is most probably the better outcome.

CHAIR: Mr Warren, would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr HAYMAN: Thank you. My opening statement certainly could have been dealt with better by way of submission and giving evidence. However, certainly from Coonamble's point of view we share a lot of the issues that Coonabarabran-Warrumbungle shire has presented. Certainly one concern of ours is the conversion of private land to national parks and wildlife land. We have a place called Pillicawarrina, which was basically sold to the Government. It was taken up for the water rights again to feed into the marshes. It comes at a loss to council of revenue in excess of $20,000 and while that does not seem a real lot—it is probably half a per cent in our rate base—it is $20,000.

Another thing that is now happening is that voluntary conservation agreements are being made by various landowners. All the property is exempt from rates if it is a total conservation agreement or the portion if it is declared as only a portion of the property. Another of the concerns we have is with travelling stock routes. We are finding that they are continually being fenced off and people cannot access the rivers and creeks. They used to go there and do the fishing and those sorts of things, but they do not have that access anymore. Coming on top of that are noxious weeds.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Fenced off by whom?

Mr WARREN: I imagine it would be the LHPA—they would be the authority for that. I realise there is not a lot of travelling stock going but coming across this morning to here I passed two lots of cattle both with drovers on the stock route. Further down towards Nyngan, Bogan shire, there are a lot little rivers and creeks where people did go and took their kids, access has been denied to them—they are basically moved on by the LHPA rangers. Another concern is noxious weeds. We also border into the Macquarie marshes and into the Pilliga as well. Noxious weeds are a concern, as are feral animals. A lot of farmers are saying that they border a national park, animals come in and animals go, and they control on their land but nothing seems happening to the national park area.

Fire hazard has also been touched on by Mayor Shinton from Warrumbungle. We have a north-west fires committee zone over there. We have fairly good reasonable meetings with the agencies that are represented locally. Unfortunately, when we do take issue or request information from the head office or further up the line to Sydney or those areas we get sent back a wonderful letter espousing philosophy as to why they have done these things. When we say, "Are you doing anything about this? Can you do something?" We are basically told continually, "We are preparing a plan". Surely the plan should be getting down onto the ground but it doesn't seem to be happening. Any control that is done within the national parks in relation to fire hazards seems to be

mechanical. We are of the opinion that probably burning is the better way to do that—it reduces the fire load and fuel load considerably.

Again we are talking to the Brigalow Belt. We have got the town of Gulargambone, 500 people. There was a sawmill there. In 2008 quotas were removed. They were not able to access the timber that they needed. Some 14 jobs went. The mill closed. The town of Gulargambone, 500 people, has a very low socioeconomic base. The ability to pick up, move and go somewhere else just is not there. That was quite a blow to the community. What we have also seen and carried on was a down trade in other businesses that depended on those sorts of things—it affects things like school teacher numbers and those sorts of things. Having said all that, what my council and I are concerned about is that it seems to be the case that there is a lot of planning going on and we get told there is a strategic plan. We understand that but, in closing, we would like to see less planning and perhaps more doing. It just does not seem to happen.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Mayor Shinton, I am curious about the jobs that you mentioned in your submission. Yesterday we were shown around by some Forests NSW staff and Parks staff. It was my understanding that one of the gentlemen who showed us around was now working for National Parks but he had been working for Forests NSW—they transferred him directly over. That is one example, but I am not sure of the other 20 staff that we were told about within Parks. Your submission clearly states that 40 jobs were lost in the forest industry and that the 20 that were created by Parks were completely separate. Are you sure about that?

Mr SHINTON: In my opinion, yes. I am reasonably sure about that. I remember when the National Parks and Wildlife Service was advertising these jobs. None of the forestry people who applied got them. People moved from Coonabarabran to Baradine. If you found one who got a job, I wonder if it was a complete transfer or if he had to retrain or something like that and got a job later.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: That is true: he probably did have to retrain.

Mr SHINTON: There were no positions that people from forestry could move straight into, except some of the thinning jobs. I am not sure how long they lasted. Some came and went pretty quickly. But I believe they have all gone now.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: How does tourism impact on your communities? What impact has the Warrumbungle National Park had on your community?

Mr SHINTON: Tourism is probably the second biggest industry in Coonabarabran and the council fosters it pretty well. We have meetings with the National Parks and Wildlife Service about it, but it does not pay into it. If we want people to come to the Warrumbungle National Park, we have to promote it. The National Parks and Wildlife Service does very little of its own promotion work. We have now convinced the astronomy people on the mountain at Siding Spring that if they got tourists they could make some money. They have started to come on board and it looks like they are developing something bigger on the mountain.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: What did you say about tourism and the National Parks and Wildlife Service?

Mr SHINTON: The service does not do promotion.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Is that your experience within the shire? Obviously the National Parks and Wildlife Service promotes the Warrumbungle National Park on its website.

Mr SHINTON: That is true, but there is no good accommodation there. We have been trying to promote that for quite some time. I have been to Queensland a couple of times and stayed in national parks. I could hop off a plane carrying a suitcase and stay in a tent. Here, if you hopped off a plane with a suitcase and went to the Warrumbungle National Park you would be standing there by yourself. There is absolutely nowhere that you could get accommodation. In Queensland they will accommodate you in tents and supply you with everything. That is not happening here. That is all done by the national parks people in Queensland.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: What is happening with the promotion of tourism in the Pilliga?

Mr SHINTON: It is going very well. We are starting from no base and I believe that we are up to 5,000 or 6,000 people visiting. Every time I have been out to the sculptures in the scrub if I do not see the cars

then I can hear the people; they are there. I would guesstimate that every time I have been out there there have been 30 or 40 people camping somewhere around that area and looking at the sculptures. That has been working.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Yesterday we were told that there were 8,000 visitors to date to the centre. Obviously we are three months out from the end of the year.

Mr SHINTON: Yes, and that is good.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: You are on the local bushfire management committee.

Mr SHINTON: That is correct.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: It is my understanding that those committees develop a risk management plan that incorporates some type of controlled burns in the area. Is that correct?

Mr SHINTON: Yes.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: We were talking with National Parks and Wildlife Service staff yesterday and they told the Committee that they had their own separate plan of management for their parks.

Mr SHINTON: Which is incorporated into ours.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: They do controlled burns, but your submission seems to suggest that they do not.

Mr SHINTON: No.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: What happens if there is a massive wildfire?

Mr SHINTON: We have massive wildfires through that area on a regular basis regardless of what is done.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Regardless of controlled burns?

Mr SHINTON: We have seen country that has been controlled burned burn. Theoretically it should not happen the way it has. It will carry a fire through to the next compartment that is not burnt and it is off again. I think I was the first person to drive on the highway on the night of the 1997 fire. The bitumen was on fire and it was horrific. That is when ideas started to formulate that we should try to clear a barrier on the highway. It does not seem to happen. I remember Bob Carr saying when he came to Coonabarabran that he would open the Treasury doors until the fire was extinguished. The first thing that happened was that all the firefighters moved into the best motels instead of camping. That being said, there was plenty of money to fight the fires, but there is never enough money to put in a break to stop these things happening. It will go from the west to the east, and it has done it a number of times.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Are you talking about all land tenures?

Mr SHINTON: At the last bushfire management meeting we realised that it is not worth having them. I think there are 12 staff between Inverell and somewhere down south. There are not enough of them to drive all the vehicles—the graders and so on; not all of them will be used because there are not enough people. They have said that they will have to call on the rest of us. The way the Rural Fire Service is funded is unfair because being a land manager and not being able to look after your own land is a real problem. Having realised what is going on, the National Parks and Wildlife Service has now been opening the park where it abuts private land and saying, "Come on in so that we can show you the tracks and we can fight together." They think it is going to be a bad season this year. We now know that one land manager is totally under staffed with regard to managing the situation.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Mr Warren, you mentioned feral animals and said that you are hearing anecdotally from landholders about them coming through parks. Which animals are of most concern?

Mr WARREN: We are getting a lot of pigs down towards the marshes area. People are also saying there has been a remarkable increase in the number of foxes. While we have a lot of cropping, there is also a large number of sheep farmers. They are saying that many lambs are being lost to foxes. The damage that cats do to small rodents in national parks does not get a lot of exposure, but it is a real concern. However, pigs are the greatest concern.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: We heard yesterday that the National Parks and Wildlife Service has two full-time employees, and most of us recognise that that is not enough. They are undertaking active management, and at certain times of the year they are doing feral animal control—primarily fox baiting. They spoke about pig shooting and other things. Is that type of feral animal control taking place on Forests NSW land and on other land tenures? You seem to be saying that feral animals are coming from national parks, whereas the active control we heard about was taking place in national parks.

Mr WARREN: Control measures are underway, but their effectiveness is debatable. Private landowners seem to have formed the opinion that while they do that type of activity fairly well on their own property it is not being done to the extent that perhaps it should be in national parks and forest areas.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: I did not hear the name of the property that you said would be purchased soon.

Mr WARREN: It is Pillicawarrina. It is on the Warren and Coonamble shire border. The Macquarie River feeds through it and down into the marshes area.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: How big is it?

Mr WARREN: I think about 8,000 hectares.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: How much of Coonamble is now national park?

Mr WARREN: I cannot give an exact figure, but I can provide that information on notice.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: And that represents about $20,000 worth of rates?

Mr WARREN: That was about $20,000 to us. A couple of voluntary conservation agreements have been entered into for parts of properties that involve a couple of thousand dollars here and there. It does not sound much and people will mount the argument that it is less than 0.5 per cent of our rates. It is, but when you get down to it we are looking for the most effective spend of our dollar. The other thing that concerns us is the consultation process with regard to those types of purchases. We hear about them after they have happened. I am getting back on my old hobby horse, but it is cost-shifting and local government is yet again left to deal with the ramifications.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: What is your strategy if you have lost $20,000, $30,000, $40,000 or $50,000? Do you increase rates or do you find savings?

Mr WARREN: We try to maintain the rate base, but we are restricted by rate pegging.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: The Bourke shire representatives said that they increased their rates by 4 per cent on top of the rate pegging.

Mr WARREN: Yes, we will apply that across the rate base. However, the capacity to pay also comes into it. We have a $4-million rate base. About $400,000 comes from our urban centres and the balance comes from our rural ratepayers. While it might be another couple of hundred dollars here and there, it does add up. We already have an impost on our rural ratepayers. Given the socioeconomic profile of our towns, the capacity to pay is not there.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Do you let ratepayers know about this? We are encouraging electricity companies to tell consumers how much the carbon tax will cost them. Have you thought about putting this information on rate notices?

Mr WARREN: We have not thought about that, but it is certainly something we could consider. We have tried to look at the use of facilities. It is probably a discussion for another day. As I said, the emphasis now is on community. Our community is basically in the urban centres and services are provided by the council there. As a result, rural ratepayers are paying for services used by people in town. Unfortunately, that is the nature of the rating structure. Whether that is right is another story.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: You are still expected to maintain roads and the other infrastructure?

Mr WARREN: Yes. We are expected to maintain infrastructure and to respond to constant demands for improved and increased services. The population expects more and more. They once expected to be able to drive on a sealed road at 80 kilometres an hour; they now expect the council to provide a sealed road everywhere and they want to drive at 100 kilometres an hour or 110 kilometres an hour.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Mr Shinton, I understand that the Pilliga is about 250 hectares or 600,000 acres. What percentage of the Warrumbungle National Park is that?

Mr SHINTON: Between one-third and a half.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Is that right?

Mr SHINTON: Yes. The Pilliga scrub comes all the way down the Oxley Highway to here and right through Baradine.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Would you say that you have a tipping point? If it was more than one-half or two-thirds, would you no longer have a sustainable local government area?

Mr SHINTON: I do not think that will ever happen, but that point could be reached. The Brigalow Belt South Bioregion is 15 per cent or more and I think we have enough of that now. The National Parks and Wildlife Service is now concentrating on the rivers around the Namoi and that area to get some of the land that has not been farmed or abused too much and it is trying to get that into the national estate.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Mr Warren, did I ask you what percentage of Coonamble is national park or reservation?

Mr WARREN: You did, and I took the question on notice.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: If you were in the firing line for more, what would that mean for the future of your shire?

Mr WARREN: I do not think we are in the firing line for more. Our boundaries are in the foothills of the Warrumbungles through to the marshes and out to the edge of the Pilliga. While we do not have land and wilderness that would be compatible, it will probably not affect our shire as much as it will those that have the Warrumbungles and down around the Narromine areas.

Mr SHINTON: We are in the throes of a mine being developed around Cobbora, which is near Dunedoo at the southern end of the shire. We have about 12,000 hectares of environmental offsets there. The coalmine is in the Mudgee council area and they have been buying farming land and excising it out of the council rate base.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: But there are no operating costs in the future. You have a capital purchase or a capital gift, but there is no contribution for the future.

Mr SHINTON: That is correct. That is why we have always said that if they are going to start doing things like that and there is no country around that is exactly the same, instead of planting trees and excising it out of a council's rate base they should make a contribution to the National Parks and Wildlife Service. We have made these statements to the people who run the national parks and they say it is a good idea, but there does not seem to be any action on it.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: We were told yesterday a little bit over 8,000 visitors. Do you recall back in 2005 what the forecast for visitors was?

Mr SHINTON: No, I am sorry, I do not but I think it might have been substantially more than that. I think it was going to save the town and reinvigorate everything but we took that with a grain of salt.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: We were told similar sorts of stories at Yanga and Bourke, Toorale. The observation was we have had two or three years where we have not been able to build the infrastructure or get the people out there but that has not been the situation here, has it? You have not been flooded?

Mr SHINTON: No, we have not been flooded, but people are coming. It is a certain person who visits national parks, it is not everybody.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: I would like to ask about the timber industry but could I start with the apiary industry. We have not heard anything about that on our visit. We had some presentations when we were down on the Murray River from apiarists about some of the restrictions there. What can you tell us, if anything, about the apiary industry in the Pilliga and how it has been going since 2005?

Mr SHINTON: No. We have only one commercial person in town and I think he is in the throes of retirement. So, no, I am sorry, I could not make a comment on that.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: The stated rationale from the former Government when it introduced those reforms, it claimed it was balancing conservation objectives with the sustainable timber industry. But do you think the decision delivered balance?

Mr SHINTON: No, not in my opinion. It was pointed out when the consultation period was on that this was not going to work. Experienced people, some of them here today, did make presentations and they said right from the start this is not going to work. When we had our tour of the forest and saw how they managed it, revisiting compartments, seeing the size of the timber that was being cut there, that seems to be mined out now. That timber seems to have gone. I remember when the last fire went through the Pilliga, we had a period where everyone was letting the foresters come in and take burnt timber from areas where they were not supposed to be to quickly mill it before it went rotten. I think you have about a three or four month's period to get the timber and process it. They allowed them to come in and take any timber at that stage just to get it processed and out of there. It is not sustainable the way it is.

Some of the areas that National Parks have inherited, they have no money for it for a start. They set up community consultation committees. There does not seem to be any plans that come out of those committees to National Parks. We do not have the money. I think we have driven through them a couple of times having a look at what is there but it is not pristine. It has been logged. It has been affected before. It has tracks through it where they have had exploration drilling. At that stage we had no idea where the boundaries are for the community conservation areas in the Pilliga. And we are pretty sure at some stage there the gas blokes have been on there drilling.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: So do you reject the whole notion of conservation reserves? Do you submit that all of the forests in the Pilliga should remain available for timber harvesting?

Mr SHINTON: There are pockets in there that National Parks most definitely have to look after. The Aboriginal areas that have been selected seem to be ideal. You can see the effects where Aborigines use that country but other tracts have been burnt out year after year. They have been logged before and I see no reason why they should not be excised out of the community conservation areas and just let the National Parks have the places they can preserve and look after and that fit the bill. A lot of the Pilliga just does not.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Can you be more specific—not necessarily today, but perhaps with some further written submissions to us? We see four zones. Zone one is akin to a national park. Zone two is akin to an Aboriginal reserve. Zone three is akin to a State conservation area and zone four remains available for timber extraction. Can you give us some advice on what concrete reforms you would like to see? Presumably you want some of zones one and three moved into zone four, do you not?

Mr SHINTON: Yes. Some parts of zone one, as I said to you before, when the National Parks and Wildlife Service target a property to buy we do not keep it all. We excise off the pieces that have been affected by farming. There is no way you are ever going to bring them back except by planting them. So we sell those and preserve the pieces that fit the bill. Just getting tracts of land by drawing a line around it and saying that it is

yours, and no, let someone go in there and study it and say we do not need all that. Most of that has been logged, it has been affected by European settlement, but all this area has not, so let us preserve that.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Studies were done over a period of years.

Mr SHINTON: Not good enough. Not the way we do it now with all the overlays and see what is actually there. These are being done by aerial mapping and things like that. It is just not good enough for people on the ground to walk around and say this is and this is not, in my opinion.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: The forestry assessment that was done in this bioregion involved the Resources Assessment Commission, did it not? Are you saying they did not hit the ground?

Mr SHINTON: Probably not. A number of reports were written and that was the one the Government ran with. A number of reports did not agree with the area that has been taken now and I think you should seek to address that today.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: How large is the private forestry industry in this area?

Mr SHINTON: Private forestry?

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Forestry on private land. What contribution does that make to the regional economy?

Mr SHINTON: If it is still contributing, it would not be very much. No, we lost our mill that only had supplies coming off private land. It has now folded. That was at Mendooran. He said he had run out, and that was that. I do not know how many jobs were affected there, but at least 10 I think. So we lost that industry as well but it never accessed the forest at all, it was just private lands.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: We heard a bit yesterday about the social impact of the closures, about loggers and mill workers who ended up in jail or one instance of sitting on their front porch and drinking themselves to death because there was no prospect. Could you just elaborate on what you see as the social impact of the closures?

Mr WARREN: Certainly in relation to Gulargambone we lost 14 jobs, 14 positions at the mill. Council was trying to talk to other mill operators. They just could not happen, it was not going to happen, and that one closed. Several of those families have left town. A few others have found employment in Coonamble, which is 50 kilometres up the road. At one stage council had a couple on as temporary employees. We did that in the short term to try to keep the school going and keep the self-esteem and that higher. But the town basically lost a teacher from the school in effect because people were moving from the town. I have not seen the effects of people sitting there and drinking on their front porch or those sorts of things, but Gulargambone is a fairly self-sufficient community and any impact like that does impact on the ability of the town and has a flow-on effect.

Mr SHINTON: I can remember when the whole thing happened and we were told to try to convince people—they offered you a cash payment and there was a payment with education attached—and I tried to convince everybody at a public meeting the best option would be to take a small amount and educate yourself, but we noticed that boat sales increased and new car sales went up and they blew the money. That is all there was to it, there was no education. If that is the inference, I would say yes, it probably has happened.

Mr WARREN: Certainly those sorts of things were made available but the opportunity is not locally and for them to go elsewhere for that education or to re-educate themselves or re-skill themselves it again means going to another area. Certainly the financial ability for that to happen just is not there.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Have you been given any indication of the expansion of reserve areas in the Pilliga?

Mr SHINTON: I think the Pauls were trying to convince people from The Nationals that this would be a great idea to release some areas, but I do not know where it went. They may well have spoken to local members but I do not think anything has happened.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Just in relation to the loss of rates from properties and businesses, presumably as more and more land gets locked up you will have to place a higher and higher burden on the existing landholders. Is there any way around that that you can see? It strikes me as becoming a self-defeating cycle, where landholders will simply say it is just impossible, I can move and buy a property elsewhere, sell this for whatever I can get for it and buy a property elsewhere and pay a lower rate regime. Then you lose that land as well.

Mr SHINTON: The only thing I can come up with, with the mine, for instance, they are trying to buy 12,000-hectare offsets. That is ridiculous. That is where we will come into this situation where National Parks would inherit tracts of land that have no purpose, and that should not be encouraged. With mining companies coming in we can charge them a mining rate, so a new rate suddenly comes in, but unless you are really smart with the mining rate the State Government catches you there too. It is calculated in with rural rates and all that happens is in an area that surrounds the mine, rural rates go up and elsewhere the rural rates go down because of the value of the area that is being mined now. When a mine goes in and buys up land they have inflated the value of that land probably four or five fold. So it is going to have a tremendous effect on the rates when they are finally calculated.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: The other thing is, and it has been raised previously, that perhaps the State Government should make a contribution for lost rates. After all, it is acquiring the land for broader purposes, broader state-based environmental purposes, and in doing so, it should make a contribution for the lost rateable land and the lost rates that councils would have received.

Mr WARREN: I would certainly be happy to see that come to fruition. In regard to rates, when you look at it, you have a certain amount of money you can raise and you need to raise it as equitably as you can across your rate base. It is difficult. As Mayor Shinton said, a mine will come in and there is a mine rate you can apply. Again, that may affect the ad valorem of all your rates in other categories. Should the mine close down the rate base again will be lost and it would go back basically to primary production or the rural rate. Historically the rural rate has had to be the lowest rate. It does not have to any more. It has always been the lowest rate. It is difficult to place an additional impost on rural ratepayers by a change in the piece of legislation that says where it has always been the lowest rate, now it does not have to be so. The impost is there and the rates are relative to a shire or to a council. You can go from one to another and the rates are relative again to the whole operation and the revenue base of the shire. While you may go somewhere else and it could be cheaper or could be more expensive, it is somewhat fixed in that sphere of the ability to raise income, and basically that is a closed argument.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Do you foresee a time when some of the smaller towns in your shires will just fade away because they do not have the economic base, because so much land has been locked up for non-productive purposes, that they are just not sustainable?

Mr WARREN: From Coonamble's point of view that is probably not going to be as great a concern for us because the geographical nature of our shire is not such that that may come to fruition. Having said that, I do not think we will have the conservation activities tied up that other shires will be with the natural resources.

Mr SHINTON: I would agree with that. As a matter of fact some of our towns are growing. Again, we are not affected by the huge acreages being locked up now but the towns are building because the land is cheap. There are not many services there so people buy in.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: What about Baradine? Is Baradine growing?

Mr SHINTON: It is very difficult to say because when they did the census this year they changed the boundaries again so we have no way of comparing even Coonabarabran. We do not know what is happening here because they have changed the boundaries so radically. But an interesting one was that Coolah, where they didn't and Dunedoo where they didn't, which are both in our shire, Coolah grew by 300 and Dunedoo dropped by 400. I do not know if they just moved up the road or if something went wrong that day. To me both those towns seem to be going quite well and to find that 400 people have suddenly gone missing is rather strange.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: What is Baradine's economic driver if not forestry?

Mr SHINTON: It was forestry but now that has been attacked again. They are downsizing, as I alluded to before. Most people in Baradine usually have a job in Coonabarabran, a lot of them do. Those that do not are working on the farms. That is all there is now.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Its future is as a commuter town?

Mr SHINTON: Twenty people drive from Coonabarabran to man the National Parks and Wildlife Service out there and probably 40 or 50 drive back here to take up jobs in Coonabarabran.

CHAIR: You are probably aware, coming from the local government area, of a number of inquiries or government considerations of things such as strategic land use et cetera. Almost all of those inquiries, which have either just concluded or are currently proceeding, including the Livestock Health and Pest Authorities [LHPA] inquiry that is going on, seem to have the potential to affect the rating base or the equity within rural shires. For example, you talked about the addition of a mining project and offsets that have needed to be bought do not buy rural land to do that.

What is your view about trying to get a more conclusive outcome from all those inquiries and consider things such as royalties for regions, so that mining royalties get a more direct path to local government? Perhaps then you will not need to look too much at inequitable balances in your ratings. Some two-thirds of your rates are paid by rural communities, for example, and they also have to pay LPHA levies. So they are doubly hit whereas the commercial and residential areas are not. At the conclusion of today's inquiry the Committee might ask you some questions that would elicit from you some recommendations as to how you could see some of these problems being solved. I note some recommendations have been included in Councillor Shinton's letter, but the Committee would like to see the same thing from Coonamble Shire Council. The Committee will engineer some questions to allow you to give it your recommendations on all of these issues you have raised and as to how it affects your local government operations.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Councillor Shinton, what is the current unemployment rate in your shire?

Mr SHINTON: I think we are around about that 5 per cent mark here and I think it is about 8 per cent in Baradine, something like that.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: How is employment for individuals in the shire affected by nearby mining initiatives?

Mr SHINTON: I think we determined that the third or fourth biggest employer in Coonabarabran is a mine in Western Australia; we have a fly-in, fly-out lot here. I do not what the mining company is but somehow they have an effect on this area. The pilot actually lives in town too and he brings them backwards and forwards. In the council area we have lost grader drivers and things like that to mines in Mudgee but with the new development that is going on at Cobbora we have been talking about taking on the young trainees, we will train them knowing full well that probably in three years or so we will lose them, but they are quite happy to talk about funding that sort of operation. There is an effect there but we are trying to counter it with what is going on when that mine starts.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Do many people work, for instance, in Narrabri?

Mr SHINTON: From here?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Yes.

Mr SHINTON: More Gunnedah than Narrabri. I know of five just on one road that all go together, but probably in the order of 20 people have moved out. They were mostly people who ran small businesses, they had graders and rollers and things like that, they ran those sorts of businesses; they are out there now.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: As I understand it that is sort of a fly-in, fly-out operation as well, so people do travel from all over the place to get there.

Mr SHINTON: Most definitely.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: The rates issue I wanted to talk about has already been well covered and the Committee will no doubt be asking more questions. The only other issue I wish to ask you gentlemen about relates to the ongoing concern about the level of staffing in the various State facilities that we are talking about, for instance, in national parks in relation to pest control and in relation to forestry. One of the things being raised is that people believe that the level of staffing is inadequate and with the current cuts people are experiencing it may actually go down. I was wondering, without putting words in your mouth, about the level of staffing to maintain the infrastructure, the services on that land, how adequate the current level of staffing is and if you want to make any recommendations?

Mr WARREN: I will go back to the bushfire management committee and we will have our meetings there and all the agencies will be there. They are all very loyal to the cause—their own agency—but it is quite obvious from what comes from that that it would be their opinion, as well ours from having been involved in that, that there is not enough on the ground here actually doing the doing, so to speak. If you extrapolate that to other agencies and other services to rural and remote communities and towns it is the case, there is a lot of drive-in, drive-out activity that goes on. We experience that in Coonamble, not so much in relation to these land agencies but in relation to education, the Department of Community Services, health and those things, there are people that are commuting daily from Dubbo—160 kilometres. Anecdotally we believe that there is not sufficient national parks and certainly forest people, there is just not enough on the ground out here. That again would probably be borne out from the attendance at those meetings when often people are not available to come.

CHAIR: When you say "those meetings", which meetings are you referring to?

Mr WARREN: The bushfire management committee meetings. That is basically where most of the interaction comes with those agencies.

Mr SHINTON: I have alluded to what has happened with forestry; obviously they do not have enough employees. We had a meeting in Coonabarabran about 12 months ago to discuss noxious weeds and feral animals. It was run by National Parks and we had agencies from all over the place. I was always led to believe through the Castlereagh Macquarie County Council that National Parks did nothing at all but I have been out and seen what they have done. I mean the blue heliotrope problem at the Warrumbungle National Park I think you could write tons about it and there was no control. But over the last two or three years that problem has completely gone—they have been spraying and doing the right thing—and so have the complaints from neighbours. Green cestrum and things like that are a bit of a problem still but we are still trying to find out what the source is—it is a dangerous plant. In my opinion the National Parks are probably understaffed as well but they are doing a way better job than they did 10 years ago at least. I was a bit upset that the people who needed to hear and see what was going on did not come and they were mostly the country councils, which was unfortunate.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Councillor Shinton, while the census does not show anything, what is your assessment of what is happening in Baradine and Gwabegar? I think you mentioned that Coolah had actually gone up but is the population in Baradine and Gwabegar less than it was?

Mr SHINTON: There appears to be, yes. We know that people have moved out but we would not quantitatively have a clue now. We were looking forward to that data and when they pull a trick like that on you it makes it absolutely useless. We know we are in a declining population but I would like to see which towns were most affected. It is my belief that Gwabegar and Baradine have dropped population but I could not put a figure on it. Business turnover out there has fallen. They lost one club, for instance, where the national park was set up, but the evidence is that the population has fallen.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: What about the number of businesses? Have a number of businesses closed in those two towns?

Mr SHINTON: Most definitely. The ones that serviced the sawmills went pretty quickly, and I think the hardware store business dropped and now they are in Coonabarabran as well. In Gwabegar it is an overall drop in population. There are vacant houses and things like that when you drive through Gwabegar and places like that. Definitely the population has fallen and so have the businesses.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: You mentioned earlier that when you go out to the Sculptures you can hear people in the scrub, so people are obviously there. How much do the tourists who come to town spend in Coonabarabran and Baradine? Do they spend enough to compensate for the loss of the timber industry?

Mr SHINTON: No, never. We have free camping areas, like the ones at Mendooran, and the town people are trying to convince us that the hotel is full. You might find 30 or 40 people camping for nothing. They have stopped at Woolworths at Dubbo and filled up and they pass through us until they come to the next Woolworths—they know where they all are. I would doubt that there is any. The way that I always go to the Sculptures in the Scrub does not go through Baradine. I go straight towards Narrabri and turn in off the highway. That is what most people are doing. They try and keep on the main drags and then turn in; they probably bypass Baradine totally. That is why we are trying to promote them to go through Baradine and out that way.

CHAIR: Are any of those smaller towns or even Coonabarabran, Baradine, et cetera, RV friendly towns?

Mr SHINTON: Previous councils were against that sort of thing. We viewed a dumpsite once, the first one I think was at Walgett, and we walked away a gasp. Since then they have improved immensely and we are in the throes of putting them in all the towns that have sewerage.

CHAIR: Because the association was given $150,000 by the State Government to go and actively talk to these councils.

Mr SHINTON: Yes.

CHAIR: The anecdotal evidence is that they do spend money.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: I refer back to your comments about the Cobbora mine and the 12,000 hectares of offsets. What is the total area of the mine?

Mr SHINTON: That is a very good question. They have taken the whole lease area and then they have offsets on the area and offsets outside it. There is about 6,000 on and 6,000 off, or it might be 5,000 and 7,000. It is that sort of thing. They are looking off site for more. We have some conservation areas there now, but I do not think anyone from the National Parks and Wildlife Service has been there for two years or so.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: What is the total proposed disturbed area for the mine?

Mr SHINTON: It is much less than that. They are bringing in railways, there is a huge turning circle and so on. All of that is also calculated. I think they are taking a small part of a State forest that is not a commercial forest as well.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: How many people will be employed?

Mr SHINTON: That is also a moving target. I think it is about 500; it used to be 700.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: There has been a lot of controversy about the developing gas industry in the Pilliga. What is the potential for employment once that industry is up and running?

Mr SHINTON: It has only small potential. Once the drilling has ceased and the wellheads are operating, a few people will be employed at the plant. I think there will be about four or five.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: It is still less than the loss from the timber industry.

Mr SHINTON: Yes, definitely.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Yesterday the National Parks and Wildlife Service people told us that the lockup of cypress in the Pilliga was not widespread nor was it a problem for them. Were the foresters you were speaking to concerned about large areas of lockup in the Pilliga?

Mr SHINTON: When we went around there was nothing locked up in the Pilliga; it was a free-for-all. In those days they were clearing the thick areas. If a fire goes through and there is a good season, the next round of growth is unbelievably thick. They showed us an area and we were amazed that the really small timber was so old. It will exist like that and kill itself. We never had those barking owls around our way, but it is so thick in

the parts that are not managed that you cannot walk through it and the owls cannot fly through it, so they come out and annoy our dogs.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: This might be a question better addressed to people in the timber industry, but is it possible that there has been a very recent germination of cypress pine? Could it be germinating now and could it create a lockup in the future? It germinates in events.

Mr SHINTON: Yes.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Surely after the rainfall we have had there would be a big germination?

Mr SHINTON: Yes, there would be. However, I have not been there for probably 12 months—when we had a look at the gas development. The forest looked good, but it is thick and it needs culling.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for appearing before the Committee. I can assure you that the Committee will be sending you some questions on notice because we would like some recommendations, particularly from Coonamble. Councillor Shinton, we might write to you requesting a supplementary submission containing clear recommendations about what you believe you need. If those questions are acceptable to you, we would like answers within 21 days. Is that acceptable?

Mr SHINTON: That is fine.

(The witnesses withdrew)

TED HAYMAN, President, Baradine District Progress Association, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: I note that you have provided a written submission to the Committee. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr HAYMAN: My submission was thrown together very hastily and I would like to add some information.

CHAIR: Are you are prepared to table that additional information?

Mr HAYMAN: Yes. I am a farmer with a property in the centre of the Pilliga forest and I have been there for 30 years. Prior to the closure of the forest I had a business producing trellising made from cypress pine for the organic vineyards. During the Brigalow assessment process I was a member of the Brigalow Region United Stakeholders [BRUS] group and was very involved in the research and development of the group's conservation position. Since then I have done a lot of work on commercialising the management of invasive native scrub and using it as a resource for bioenergy. I have done research and written several papers on that topic, including about management costs, supply and commercialisation. I have also headed up two biofuel projects. One was a feasibility study into the conversion of forest thinnings waste for use in the production of bio-oil and bio-char using pyrolysis technology. The other involved the development of a firewood briquette plant. I have also contributed to several government and commercial reports on these subjects. I was also a member of the Namoi Community Conservation Advisory Committee.

This submission is made on behalf of the Baradine and District Progress Association and concerns the conversion of the State forests of Brigalow Belt to national parks. More specifically, our concern lies with the validity of the process and the rationale for conservation. There are also concerns about the effort put into dealing with the social and economic impact on communities and the inaccuracies in the stated benefits that were supposed to be a result of the change of tenure. There is also unease about the integrity of this very high cost process because there appears to have been a strong political motivation. Outcomes from the decision were supposed to deliver a sustainable timber industry, an increase in the employment base and a more viable community as a result of National Parks and Wildlife Service spending and greatly increased tourist income. None of this has happened.

As a consequence of the decision the Baradine community lost 44 jobs from a full-time jobs base of around 250—that is, 17.5 per cent. Two other businesses that were partly dependent on the timber industry also closed. Jobs created in national parks have been offset by reductions in Forests NSW jobs. Census data from 2001 to 2006, 18 months after the decision, shows a drop in the district's population of 15 per cent, with a drop of 12 per cent in full-time employment. The unemployment rate is 12 per cent and median household income is half of that in the rest of New South Wales. It is unlikely that these figures will have improved since 2006 because Forests NSW has continued to shed jobs. As for the boom in jobs that was supposed to come from tourism and national park visits, that has not happened. Although there has been an increase in visits to the National Parks and Wildlife Service visitor centre, that has delivered only one job—which is now subject to a six-month contract. This lack of interest from government in developing tourism has left an unfunded community to attempt the work.

During the Brigalow assessment process an alliance of community groups called the Brigalow Region United Stakeholders was formed, of which the Baradine and District Progress Association was a member. The members of BRUS were not against conservation, quite the opposite; however, they wanted a workable outcome and were concerned about the way the process was being implemented, that is, focusing on the timber industry and not on the conservation realities. By and large, the members of BRUS were not idealists; they were practical people who had spent much of their lives working in or with the environment and as a consequence they had a more open view about the benefits of functional conservation. The cost of conservation was also a concern.

Throughout the process the group put forward a number of proposals that offered better conservation outcomes while maintaining communities and offering a much greater conservation return on expenditure—in short, the triple bottom line outcome we had been asked to achieve. The first of these papers was the BRUS option, which allocated 189,000 hectares for direct conservation. This 189,000 hectares comprised areas mentioned in the scientific surveys as having the highest biodiversity of all public lands in the bioregion. These areas were least affected by cypress pine and buloke infestation and because of their type were best able to maintain their biodiversity without any form of management. The BRUS option delivered conservation values

within 2 per cent of the maximum obtainable on public land while having an impact on the timber industry of only 3 per cent. This was all supported by surveys carried out for the assessment as well as work from the Department of Environment and Conservation, and the facts were never challenged.

The BRUS option was one of nine options under consideration. Because of the number of options put forward the then State Government asked Mr Ian Sinclair to assess all the proposals and to report his conclusions. The BRUS option was his preferred option because, among other things, it offered the best balance and had the greatest support, including from most Aboriginal land councils. Along with other comments, he concluded his report by saying that management is more important than tenure. That point was strongly advocated by BRUS and it believed that in this situation the timber industry and active management could be part of the solution. A companion paper to the BRUS option detailing the option's principles and arguing its values, particularly the economics against the other options, was also submitted. That paper addressed the cost structure of conservation in the region and the community issues and looked at the future conservation needs of the region. However, the paper, like most information coming from the community, was seemingly ignored.

Another paper but forward by BRUS was titled "Debunking the Myth". That paper analysed the proposition that national parks and tourism would generate more income and jobs than the timber industry. The paper used figures from the National Parks and Wildlife Service and other government departments and completely discredited the claim. An audit by a government-appointed auditor supported the paper's contention. However, that was also ignored and the false claim that tourism would solve job losses continued. The paper's conclusions have subsequently been shown to be correct.

Another submission titled "Best Value Conservation Management" dealt with the economic aspects of conservation in the region and was based on the broader landscape because the surveys had pointed out that most of the ecosystems needing protection were on freehold land and not in the forests. This submission offered several scenarios and argued how using money that would be spent in park management and industry adjustment could be better used obtaining access to the isolated remnants of endangered habitat on private property that does not exist on public land. This broad landscape approach offered a more valuable use of funds because areas in most need would be targeted and linked with corridors to State forests and national parks. None of these scenarios had a negative impact on landowners. This proposal was well accepted privately by most but was never discussed at large and, like other community input, it disappeared.

Since that time there have been several areas of private land that were considered to be of high conservation value lost through illegal clearing. These sites could have been saved with a more intelligent approach. The Brigalow assessment, at least from the position of the Government and the environmental groups, appeared to be less about the conservation needs of the region and more about how much land could be converted to national park. The environmental surveys commissioned for the assessment showed that a broad landscape approach was needed and that concentrating on the forests would not achieve the best outcomes. The surveys showed the habitats in most need of protection were on private land.

All stakeholders understood the history of the forests and that the forests here today are not the same as the open forests of pre-European settlement. The Department of Environment and Conservation produced evidence that showed only a 3 per cent improvement in biodiversity protection could be gained if all public land in the bioregion was converted to national park. Scientific studies had shown that thinning dense stands of cypress pine can deliver a 50 per cent gain in biodiversity, with the wildlife surveys showing endangered species such as barking owls, koalas and many species of woodland birds preferred the more open conditions of a managed forest. None of the surveys commissioned by the Government showed that the timber industry as now practised in the region was detrimental. Collectively all stakeholders agreed with the evidence that for most of the forest some form of active management would offer the best conservation outcome.

This was a large body of evidence, but still the Government and the environmental groups persisted in pushing for the high cost and least effective national park outcome. Why? This lack of logic continued with argument from the environmental groups that the precautionary principle should be instigated as a reason for moving to national parks. Why, when it was accepted by all stakeholders that forest thinning or other corrective work is needed, would you choose an option that prevents that work? If a species is threatened by changes to its habitat and those changes have been caused by our influence, surely that negative action needs to be repaired. In this case the do nothing precautionary principle is of no value. A more intelligent approach was needed.

With the unique conservation requirements of this region the ill-considered assumption that land simply put into a national park will improve in habitat and biodiversity values must be questioned. Other options should

have been looked at. For the most part the assessment of the Brigalow forests appeared to be less about the realities of conservation and more about how much State forest could be taken from the timber industry. Prior to the decision, the cypress industry had a combined log allocation of 68,000 cubic metres per year, well below the sustainable yield of the forests at 75,000 cubic metres. This volume was taken from an area of almost 500,000 hectares. At this level of extraction there was a buffer of 7,000 cubic metres per year and the industry was considered very sustainable. In fact, forest standing volumes had increased from 0.63 million cubic metres in 1950 to 1.86 million cubic metres in 2000. By this measure the forest could not be considered over stressed. While at the time the environmental group's claim that average log size was getting smaller was partly correct, it was shown by State Forests that this was due to an increase in the supply coming from areas of an age where commercial thinning had become necessary. Once again a reasonable answer was not accepted.

However, in the beginning of 2003 a moratorium meant that the industry had to supply the full 68,000 cubic metres from just 28 per cent of the area. This went on for over two years and has had an impact on the industry's current supplies. None of the surveys carried out for the assessment or other scientific works stated that the cypress industry was a degrading process. It was understood by anybody with an intimate knowledge of the forest, including many on the environmental side of the debate, that the harvested and thinned areas had the greatest biodiversity values. Yet the industry was demonised rather than accepted as being part of the solution. Following the decision, the Government stated there would be 57,000 cubic metres of log available to industry with 20-year supply contracts. This was an absurd situation as with the reduced area of forest left to industry tree growth rates would need increase two to three times to maintain that volume of supply. Everybody in the industry including State Forests knew this was unworkable, particularly as much of the area left to industry was of lesser quality.

The situation today is that the volume of small log has had to increase as a percentage of total supply in an attempt to maintain quota as there is insufficient larger logs to achieve a profitable balance. This is due directly to the misinformation used in the forest decision. The effect this is having on the mills is a great loss in efficiency, as the small logs are more costly to harvest and mill and only produce product that has a low market demand. This assessment has taken what was once a benign and sustainable industry that had supported community for over 100 years and ruined it at great expense to the tax payer. Under these circumstances the community is now concerned as to what is the future of our largest employer.

Had the Government taken the advice of Ian Sinclair and opted for the BRUS option, combining it with other suggestions from the community, the environment, the communities and the taxpayers of New South Wales would be better placed. The decision on the Brigalow forests if judged on its merits and not from an ideological or political view point has to be seen as wanting. However, while State forests, national parks and private lands are all losing biodiversity none of these tenures should be immune from critical examination and revision, but this examination should not be carried out without prejudice or agenda. The assumption that current National Parks and Wildlife Service management is the only method that can deliver good conservation must be challenged and the options broadened to allow adaptive management that better suits variable situations. The great difficulty with this is the cost of managing regrowth pine and other invasive native species on all land tenures. However, as is happening overseas, in the future biofuel will offer a cost effective management tool for the control of invasive regrowth, provided there is government support. Using this material as a resource will also reduce greenhouse gas emissions and provide job opportunities for deprived communities. Production can support the environment.

Where big changes are made the dependent communities need to be considered more and not lied to, propped up with short-term work projects or told that tourism will solve all their problems. The community came out of this process with the feeling they had been used by the Government as a means to curry favour with the city vote and with a lack of concern for their communities or having a real appreciation of the environmental needs of the region.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Can you go back to where you said you could only achieve about a 3 per cent increase in biodiversity with reservations going over to national parks?

Mr HAYMAN: They were some figures put out by the Department of Environment and Conservation at the time.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: What year was that?

Mr HAYMAN: That was back in 2003. It was based on its assessment that because of the varying types of biodiversity that needed to be conserved if it locked up all of the public land in the bioregions—

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: This is State forests and all those categories?

Mr HAYMAN: All of that. If it was all locked up into national parks or some reserve tenure, it would only gain 3 per cent in biodiversity protection. This was because most of the biodiversity that needed to be protected was on private lands, in frequently small clumps. As I mentioned, some of that land was lost through illegal clearing and some of it was areas of swampland and what have you in the north-west of the region, and on some plains country. They are the habitats that have suffered from most clearing, and the remnants out there were the ones that had the biodiversity that needed protection. That is how they finished up with that 3 per cent figure.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Notwithstanding that, did you ever hear about any data about threatened species? We have heard about the Pilliga mouse. You might have had a very modest increase in biodiversity with more appropriate lock up, but have we got a better outcome with threatened species—say, the Pilliga mouse or the koala or scrub turkey or whatever?

Mr HAYMAN: No; because the impact on threatened species comes from the changes in forest structure and the densification of the forests. To give you an example, the barking owl, which is quite a large bird—it has a large wingspan, like this—cannot operate in trees that far apart.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: In a monoculture?

Mr HAYMAN: Yes. I have seen this myself. I have barking owls on my property. When we used to work in the forests we have to work in an area of some open box country, which was still fairly clear but pine is encroaching. It was marked out as owl habitat and there were owls in there. You could hear them of a morning while you were greasing up machinery, just at daybreak. They would basically follow the harvesting equipment down. As you went through and opened up the scrub day after day to start with you would hear them in their area and as time progressed and you moved through a block you would start to hear them moving into the area that had been harvested.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: I think we probably all understand that, but what about the things that are not as obvious, like the mouse or other small marsupials?

Mr HAYMAN: The mouse primarily lives in areas of broom bush, and they are excised. You do not harvest in those, there is nothing to harvest in there anyway. They are always areas that are marked out. Other little critters in there do not get impacted. They are underground or in hollow logs. One of the most detrimental things that has happened in recent years was the big fire in 2007. That was an unnatural fire, a complete wildfire. It burned every hollow bearing tree that came through. A National Park worker at the time, somebody from the coast, said, "These forests are used to that." I pointed out to him, no, you have had 400-year-old trees completely disappear because the fire was so intense. Why was the fire so intense? Primarily because of this stacking of timber, ground-up timber.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Fuel load?

Mr HAYMAN: Yes, fuel load, allowing it to climb up and become a crown fire. In its natural state, 150 years ago, when the forest was an open woodland, you would only ever have got ground fires. You would not have got crown fires because the tree spacing was too far for fire to jump from tree to tree. When it is stacked like this you have this huge temperature coming up from the ground, it takes everything.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: I have to say I find it rather extraordinary that you have just said that other little critters do not get impacted. You are saying that before a parliamentary committee?

Mr HAYMAN: We do not know whether they are getting impacted or not. The survey said, and that is where I am taking most of that information—

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Which survey again?

Mr HAYMAN: The surveys done for the Brigalow assessment said that the timber industry was not detrimental.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: I have before me some of the information. Were you involved in that consultation, the Brigalow Belt assessment?

Mr HAYMAN: Yes.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: A lot of different studies have been undertaken. One was the response to disturbance and land management practices. That was pulling together various research. Are you aware of that?

Mr HAYMAN: I am. I have a copy of it at home.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: There is quite a bit of research in there that the top land disturbance—can you remember what that was?

Mr HAYMAN: Fire.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Land clearance.

Mr HAYMAN: Land clearing, sorry, yes.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Inappropriate fire regimes and I think grazing is the second?

Mr HAYMAN: Grazing, animal predators. The timber industry does not get a mention.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: No, it does get a mention.

Mr HAYMAN: Where? It is not in the list.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: It does get a mention, and it is one of the practices that they have assessed in land disturbance. It pulls together all of the research of the impact of forestry on the environment and on biodiversity, lots of different studies. There is a study by Liddelow. Are you aware of that one, 2001?

Mr HAYMAN: Not at the moment I am not, no. I may have read it in the past.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: That says that following logging there was a significant decrease in bird density. That was one of the studies. It also says that in a one square metres scale species, richness in the buffers was 20 to 30 per cent higher than in the logged areas. You are making claims before a parliamentary committee that logging has no impact. In your submission you stated that anybody with an intimate knowledge of the forest, including many on the national park side of the debate, knows that harvested and thinned areas had the greatest biodiversity values. You are before a committee now.

Mr HAYMAN: Fine. That came from conversations with many of the environmental people who were within the Brigalow discussion. A lot of them agreed that the harvested and thinned areas had better biodiversity.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: In terms of research and evidence, you are presenting before a parliamentary inquiry saying that logging is good for biodiversity. You are saying you were part of the consultation beforehand and that you had read the document that I have just read out?

Mr HAYMAN: There was another study done by a birdwatching group in Gunnedah, Tamworth that wrote out several pages that I have at home somewhere claiming just the opposite, that the birdlife is more dense in harvested and thinned areas. There was conversation that I did not have myself but National Parks were looking at thinned areas, and one of their environmentalists commenting that the birdlife was much higher in the thinned areas. That was only a couple of years ago. I am not sure that information is correct.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: This information was pulled together from a lot of different scientists who have studied the impacts of logging, including Forests NSW people. Chair, I was wondering if we could ask Mr Hayman to table on notice all of the science and evidence that he has before him—

Mr HAYMAN: I can do that.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: —that says that logging is better for biodiversity than national parks.

Mr HAYMAN: If that is a generalisation—

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: You are the one making generalisations.

Mr HAYMAN: No, no.

CHAIR: Order! Mr Hayman we will ask you to table the documents you have quoted, including a copy of the BRUS document you mentioned.

Mr HAYMAN: Yes.

CHAIR: Be assured that anything you wish to keep will be photocopied and the originals will be sent back to you. Your information will be protected.

Mr HAYMAN: Yes.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: You said, "We know that 150 years ago it was a much more open forest." How do we know that?

Mr HAYMAN: A lot of it comes from the Oxley papers, when he explored the area. A lot of it comes from 100-year-old documentation from the original forestry surveys. Look, just to point out something on that: In the west of the Pilliga there are a lot of roads that are dead straight. When they were surveyed through they were done by line of sight—with three markers. You could not do that today because you cannot see far enough. So there is some information from the early foresters—I have got that document and I can send it to you.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: We had some discussion yesterday with National Parks that basically the jury was out on whether lock-ups produce detrimental outcomes. What is your view of that? Is the jury out on whether lock-ups produce detrimental outcomes?

Mr HAYMAN: Certainly just to view it on my property it is not. Probably almost one-third of my property is locked-up pine. I could show you the erosion that we are getting because there is no groundcover under it. When I say "no groundcover" I mean virtually nothing. We are getting a lot of erosion off that. Those trees have just been standing there for the 30 years that I have been there. They are neither growing nor dying; they are doing nothing. Nothing lives in them. If you go looking for nesting birds or anything like that, which I do, you do not find anything in there.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Do you have any early 2000 or mid-2000 environmental reports in relation to the environmental effects of locked-up land that you could bring to notice?

Mr HAYMAN: I would probably have something at home.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: If you could take that question on notice.

Mr HAYMAN: I would have to. I would probably have something at home. I have boxes and boxes of information from back then.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Basically we have received advice from National Parks to the effect, "We are not really sure whether it is good or we are not really sure whether it is bad. We need a bit more research into it." I am wondering whether research has been undertaken into this.

Mr HAYMAN: If you are going to argue the way the forest was 150 years ago as European settlement was better, if that is what we are trying to get back to then some work needs to be done to achieve that. The increase in growth, the densification of the forests has been caused by European settlement—primarily by reducing fires.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Over the whole Pilliga area what percentage would have been logged at some time since white settlement in the area? Are we looking at 50 per cent, 20 per cent? How much of the area would have been logged at some stage?

Mr HAYMAN: If we are talking about the Pilliga forest I would say almost all of it.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: More than 70 per cent, 80 per cent?

Mr HAYMAN: Yes. At one time you had the sleeper cutting industry in there as well.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: The ironbark?

Mr HAYMAN: Yes. What I am getting at is that you are dealing with different species. In some areas there is more ironbark and no pine but it would have been impacted by harvesting for sleepers.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: What you had was 100 years of logging had produced such good environmental outcomes that they had to lock it up?

Mr HAYMAN: Pretty much.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Is that right?

Mr HAYMAN: Yes.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Was it not the case that the forestry assessment found that species decline, extinctions in this area, was amongst the worst anywhere in Australia?

Mr HAYMAN: That was said, yes.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Did not the forestry assessment find that over 70 per cent of the original vegetation in this bioregion had been cleared?

Mr HAYMAN: I think it was more like 65 per cent, but yes.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Did they not identify 47 species of fauna on the threatened species list in this area?

Mr HAYMAN: Yes, most of those were bird species.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Is it not a fact that the Commonwealth Government has declared the Brigalow a biodiversity hotspot, one of only I think 15 in Australia?

Mr HAYMAN: That is right.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: You contend that ongoing timber harvesting in all the forests would not be a problem for biodiversity? Is that your fundamental view?

Mr HAYMAN: Yes, and it is the view of a lot of people, even though it is perhaps disagreed with in some of the written work. What has to be looked at when you say there is a decline in a particular species, when you look at the list of birds that are supposed to be declining in the area—I do not know the number—but so many of those birds require a different habitat to the habitat that is there now. They require a more open habitat. If I could just go back to the decline of the barking owls, there has been increases apparently in the number of barking owls in the forest but they are not in the national park areas; they are actually in the areas that are being logged.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: It was put to you a couple of minutes ago that logging of 80 per cent of the forests here over the last century has delivered good environmental outcomes. The forestry assessment found to the contrary—namely, that the extinctions of species that have occurred in this area are amongst the highest in Australia. That was the finding, was it not?

Mr HAYMAN: It was but it does not say that it was because of logging.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: That is right. It could be feral animals; it could be land clearing or a range of things.

Mr HAYMAN: The amount of feral animals in the area is quite high. We are constantly shooting cats for a start. We shoot foxes wherever we can, and poison. We have shot probably 20 cats this year—that is without looking for them.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: In response to the findings of the forestry assessment regarding extinctions, species decline and loss of biodiversity, it is your view that timber harvesting has not been a contributor to the loss of biodiversity?

Mr HAYMAN: No, and I think what needs to happen is that we need to look further as to why these losses are occurring rather than just saying, "Because you are cutting down trees that must be the problem." There was a definite problem with the harvesting of the hollow ironbark trees—that is accepted. In hindsight everybody says that should never have happened.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: But that is done and dusted.

Mr HAYMAN: Done and dusted, over and done with. If we are settling mainly just on the cypress industry, which is—

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: What remains?

Mr HAYMAN: Yes, and does not have hollow-bearing trees, it in itself I do not believe is a problem. I believe it is demonstrable that it lifts biodiversity, particularly ground covers. When you say that species are declining, yes they certainly are, but we need to look at why they are declining. Once again I will go back and try and finish the business about the barking owls. I have seen circumstances where a barking owl has chased a honeyeater—one of the things they eat—and the honeyeater ducked down into a thicket of cypress pine, it got feathers knocked out of it but did not catch the honeyeater. Now it cannot hunt in that area, not only that it can damage itself. You have got these types of problems that can happen. Most of that particular bird species has contracted back into the open box areas, which are getting smaller.

On my property I had barking owls along my creek: they are still there. I had barking owls down the far back of my place where there was some open box land, they have all gone now because the fire came through and took them out. They were breeding down there but we never ever found any young ones. We would know they had nests because we knew where the nest tree was—it's now burnt. What happens to the fledglings? Where do they go? If their parents can make a living in a small area of box woodland, then they hatch and their parents chase them away and they have to go out into this thick, dense forest, an immature, uneducated bird and try and earn a living, the chances are they do not live. These are the things that I believe need to be looked at more—namely, not that the species are declining but why. I believe that most of that is coming because of changes in habitat.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: That was looked at in the forestry assessment process, was it not?

Mr HAYMAN: I do not believe it was well enough.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: You have talked about your membership of the Brigalow Region United Stakeholders [BRUS] group and the documents that they produced. Do you know if those documents are still available?

Mr HAYMAN: I have got one copy of each at home in hardcopy—they are not on computer. Would you like a copy?

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Would you be able to make them available to the Committee so that we could scan them and return them to you?

Mr HAYMAN: By all means.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Do you also have a copy of Ian Sinclair's report?

Mr HAYMAN: Yes.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Would you be prepared to make that available to the Committee also?

Mr HAYMAN: Yes.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Are you aware of a gentleman, who is now deceased, by the name of Eric Rolls?

Mr HAYMAN: Yes.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Where did he live?

Mr HAYMAN: He lived as the crow flies about 10 kilometres from my property. He was also surrounded by Pilliga forest.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: How long did he live in the Pilliga?

Mr HAYMAN: I think it was about 50 or so years.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: What was he best known for?

Mr HAYMAN: Certainly to us was the book "A Million Wild Acres", which was interesting and it raised a few interesting points. Just on that, his wife, Elaine van Kempen, has written a far more interesting book on the Pilliga forest, which rather than a story deals more with a lot of the facts.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: What is the name of that book? You can take that question on notice.

Mr HAYMAN: I will. Copies of it are not available any more but I have got a copy at home.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: If you could just send us the reference to it—the name and the publisher and so on.

Mr HAYMAN: I will.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: How long have you lived in the Pilliga?

Mr HAYMAN: Thirty years.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: How far from Baradine is your place?

Mr HAYMAN: Twenty kilometres.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: You would have seen Baradine change over those 30 years?

Mr HAYMAN: Yes.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: And what has happened to Baradine in terms of its population and business community in the last five or six years?

Mr HAYMAN: The closure of the forest caused the most disruption. As I mentioned in there, we lost 15 per cent of our population. Just to display that a little more, in my quite small business the loss of my five employees meant that 19 people left town. That gives an idea of the numbers. There were other mills on top of

that. A total of 157 people left the district—not the town, the district. That is from census data. The town has changed. It has become a bit of an old folks' home. We have had a lot of people move in from outside. If a house comes up for sale it is nearly always sold to someone from outside. That is because real estate is cheap and people see it as a cheap place to retire. Income levels are very low, although they have never been high. As I said, our median household income is only about half of the New South Wales average. That in itself is a problem because there is not a lot of disposable income and most of the money is spent on groceries and fuel.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for providing that evidence to the Committee. The secretariat will contact you about the document the Committee would like tabled. If the Committee forwards any questions on notice, we would be grateful if you could provide replies within 21 days.

(The witness withdrew)

HEATHER DORIS ANDREWS, V & HD Andrews Haulage;

PAUL JAMES HYDE, Hyde Haulage; and

PATRICK BERNARD PAUL, Gunnedah Timbers and Baradine Sawmilling Company, affirmed and examined.

CHAIR: Mr Paul has already made a submission to the inquiry. Before we proceed to questions, would you like to make an opening statement?

Mrs ANDREWS: I am the only threatened species in this room. First, I am from Gwabegar, and we run a firewood business. Ours was the only business left after the Brigalow decision. I was also a member of the Brigalow Region United Stakeholders group. Throughout the assessment process the community worked very hard to do the right thing. The right thing was, first, for the community, second, for the environment and, third, to keep our work practices up to standard. Everybody worked really hard to get the right decision; it was a really hard slog for people like me who had never been involved in any kind of decision like this. I really looked at it in the best way possible and I was very disappointed that a $30-million review—or the Brigalow decision—came down to a 30¢ pen used by Bob Carr. We could have spent that money propping up my community.

We provide the only forestry employment left and we are family owned and operated. I was on a lot of other committees such as the Country Women's Association, the CTC and the RTC. I am not on any committees now because I am too busy trying to save our jobs. Gwabegar has a post office but it has no store and no hotel. We have an RTC centre and a CT centre. We no longer have any meeting place and slowly but surely we are losing our skills to communicate with one another. After the decision, when Tommy Underwood's mill closed, we had a lot of social problems. We had three domestic violence cases, which happened because of the loss of jobs and the financial situation. As stated, a lot of them opted not to take the training; they took the money and spent it on new cars, alcohol and drugs. That is what Bob Carr's 30¢ pen did to my community.

Mr HYDE: I am here representing Hyde Haulage. We have been in business for more than 50 years and we have probably shifted two-thirds of the product coming out of the forest over the past 10 or 12 years. Our situation was unique because when the Brigalow decision was made we were supplying six customers. Some of them exited and some stayed on. We were disappointed with the outcome at the time because we knew it would put a lot of pressure on the existing resource. We were already struggling to find and supply wood. The information we were given at the time was limited. A small business like ours does not have the resources to take every opportunity to find the different scientific evidence and we could not dig too deep. We were too busy trying to survive the process. Given the best information we could gather from Forests NSW and averages, we decided to restructure our business.

We obtained some government funding, which was helpful at the time. It was on the basis of critical information given at the time that the Brigalow decision would give us the same average volumes per hectare and the same average log sizes that we had previously been harvesting in the 10 years before. On the basis of that we restructured our business. We were hoping to employ up to nine people and for the first time in our company's history we are hoping at that point—we had long-term wood supply agreements—we could see some security, so we bought a lot of equipment, and five years down the track we are really struggling. We are now down to four staff. We have three existing customers and we still struggle on a daily basis to find timber. The social effects for us are that we basically do not have a social life anymore because we have had to tighten up our business that much we cannot afford to put staff in the right places. We operate on a shoestring amount of staff to keep supplying the industry that is very volatile with relation to markets, and the size of the timber we get out of the forests to meet customer requirements. In some cases we struggle to find that without spending a lot of extra time in the forests, unpaid time, just walking through finding timber to keep working.

CHAIR: Mr Paul, would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr PAUL: Yes. I am a director of Gunnedah Timbers. We have a wood supply agreement of 16,800 cubic metres. We employ 35 people full time. I am also representing Baradine Sawmilling Company. We have a wood supply agreement of 20,000 cubic metres and we employ 15 full-time people there. At the moment their jobs are in jeopardy until a decision can be made either way so we can be put out of our misery either way.

CHAIR: This is probably an issue with a bit of sensitivity, but as employers in the region what do you think about the general level of literacy and numeracy amongst your employees? Are they the sort of people who are readily trainable in other areas or not?

Mrs ANDREWS: For us, no. Even when we had forestry training, there had to be extra staff to help our employees deal with training, especially what is coming up. This is what is called the IFOA. This will be our Bible. If you would like to read it and confirm every rule and regulation we have to live by is in this book. When we have literacy problems, it will drop right through the system.

Mr HYDE: The staff levels with our new equipment have had to change. We have had to employ people who have a different understanding of production and systems. The other problem we have also had is competing with the mines. Once we train these guys up from scratch, teach them the control systems and things like that, the mines are obviously able to offer a larger, better package for them. So, we lose those guys. It is really hard, not so much to train our guys but to keep them in our industry.

CHAIR: So you have modern, up-to-date mechanical harvesters and those sorts of things?

Mr HYDE: Yes.

CHAIR: Mr Paul, would you like to comment on that?

Mr PAUL: It is an ongoing problem. Even our induction process, when they first start on the first day of the mill, we induct them, and they have trouble reading. We have to read that to them ourselves and there is a huge issue there, yes. It would be very difficult for them to relocate or retrain in other areas, yes.

CHAIR: So, most of those employees, most of those ordinary workers in the towns that are affected, when something like the Brigalow assessment comes along, they are probably nowhere near empowered enough, because of their abilities, to be able to have their say? They rely on you, the employers and councillors and the people in the town, who normally have a bit better understanding of these things?

Mr PAUL: They certainly do rely on us to help guide them and advise them as to decisions and even what paths to go down when they get bank loans and other things. They ask our advice. We are free to give it to them. I have a brother who is a solicitor and I often put them on to him, at no cost to them, of course, to assist them in any ways he can. When they have other issues like DUIs and things like that we assist them and give them great credit for their ability to work and look after us in the work and be very loyal to us.

CHAIR: When those packages were put to the workers, were they given any advice like financial counselling by the Government or by local organisations to help them make those decisions?

Mrs ANDREWS: I believe they were, but you would have had to ask Tommy Underwood that. Just to reiterate, when Tommy ran the mill he was everything from the guidance counsellor to the bank loaning officer to getting them out of jail. That is the kind of influence Tom had on the community. To lose someone like Tom was devastating. He nurtured his staff incredibly well, the same with the Pauls. You have to be everything to them—counsellor, bank manager, that kind of thing. I know it is hard for people in the city to understand that we have people in our communities like that, but we have. Unfortunately, we have to deal with it as employers and as community members the best way we can. As was said, we are all so tied up with the rules and regulations and trying to keep our own businesses afloat, it is tiring.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Mrs Andrews, you said in your opening statement that everybody worked hard to get the right decision. Can you outline for the Committee the consultation process that you were involved in before that? That statement implies there was some consultation, working hard with others?

Mrs ANDREWS: Yes, I was one of the members of the Brigalow assessment. I represented my community. We all thought we were working pretty hard to get a decision but that is not how it ended up. Because the BRUS option and other options, even from other interested parties, they were put there but in the end, even after the Sinclair report, Bob Carr just signed off. It was a waste of money, time and effort. We thought as individuals we were doing the right job but apparently we were not.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: When you say you were a member of the Brigalow assessment, can you explain to the Committee what that means and who else was part of that?

Mrs ANDREWS: Ted Hayman reiterated that in his statement. There was National Parks and Wildlife, there was apiary, New South Wales Farmers.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: How early did the consultations start? When did you first know that this was touted or planned? When did discussions start?

Mrs ANDREWS: I think it was 2003.

CHAIR: 2002?

Mrs ANDREWS: Was it 2002? A meeting was called at the Baradine community to say that this review was going to happen by government. It was outlined by National Parks and Wildlife, State forestry and other government agencies. They outlined what the process would be. They asked for community nominations. Baradine Progress put in its nomination. My community at the time put in nominations. I think there were shire nominations. You nominated to go on to the Brigalow assessment. It was a wide range of community members and I felt it was a good balance within the Brigalow assessments.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Once the decision was made—and this is a question for all the witnesses, whoever would like to answer—was there any structural adjustment or compensation paid by the Government?

Mrs ANDREWS: Yes.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Could somebody outline what that was? Does anyone know those details?

Mr PAUL: Structural adjustment, investment back into the ones that stayed on. It was two for one, for every dollar sawmills invested in plant and machinery to make it safer and easier for the staff and it was $2 by the Government for every dollar the mills put in.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: There was obviously some arrangement, though, for those mill operators who closed?

Mr PAUL: There was an exit package and there was assistance for those who stayed on, yes.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: The timber mills in the area, how many closed and how many stayed? If you do not know, that is all right.

Mrs ANDREWS: Four or five.

Mr PAUL: Approximately six closed or took the package.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: And existing businesses like yours, which you have two of, you received the structural adjustment to change your business in some way—the two for one deal?

Mr PAUL: Yes

Mr HYDE: In regard to the adjustment package, a business like ours that was affected by several customers, as I noted earlier, the time was limited for us to go to different meetings and understand the full package. We had large customers and the decision had not been made at that point when the first mills were exited, so we went to the first round of talks with the exit mills and we were instructed at that time how business was eligible for any losses to be paid out as part of the structural adjustment package. We would be paid out for the mills that exited. For our business that was around $300,000 for the customers we lost at the time. When we put that exit package in it came back because our business had not stopped, because we were still supplying industry under this circumstance and our turnover had not been affected at that point. However, when it was assessed it was said our business was, looking forward, supposed to be just as productive and as viable as it was prior to the decision, and the $300,000 loss was going to be made up. Unfortunately, because of other mill closures after the decision was made and other mills had exited, our business now halved its turnover in that

time. While we were not initially eligible for the exit package, as time has gone on under the new arrangement, new estate, we certainly would be today if you put it back there today.

CHAIR: To be clear, you did not receive an exit package?

Mr HYDE: We did not receive an exit package because we stayed.

Mrs ANDREWS: Because we were in the firewood industry we had to wait for a review before we were even going to know whether we were going to be staying or going. We did not get the first round of business funding because the review took that long. Yes, we were able to work but the conditions as soon as the Brigalow started, that put us out of business. So we had to wait for the firewood review so we did not take the first round of funding but we did take the second which was one for one. There was funding there: that is the only reason we could get it.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: I am sorry for laughing before, but it strikes me that you are as valued as some of the threatened species. I am sorry if I sounded flippant before.

Mrs ANDREWS: It does not seem like it.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Has anybody treated you honestly, do you feel, in the last 10 years, in any of these consultations?

Mrs ANDREWS: During the consultation, yes, I think I was a pretty well valued member of the committee. I felt that. But once the decision was made I think we were—especially Gwabegar—just left floundering.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: So you do not think they were in good faith?

Mrs ANDREWS: No.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Once the train had left the station, so to speak?

Mrs ANDREWS: No. We asked the counsellor for our community. We asked to get some business and financial advice.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: So you could have gone to 100 more meetings and 100 more consultations and probably the outcome would not have been terribly different? That is the impression I am getting.

Mrs ANDREWS: Can I say something honestly, and I have to be honest? I think the same thing is going to happen here, sorry.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: When you say here—

Mrs ANDREWS: I do not think—

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: We are wasting your time, in other words?

Mrs ANDREWS: No, not wasting my time, because talking about my business and my community will never waste my time.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: So what did you mean?

Mrs ANDREWS: It never goes anywhere. It seems these government things never go anywhere. We never get anywhere.

Mr PAUL: We believe in our two businesses it was purely a political decision. It was nothing to do with the environment back in 2005 because of all the evidence that they had, were given and was completely ignored. They could not make a decision so far as we could gather, so Bob Carr overruled everyone and he just

signed off on his 348,000 hectares of national parks. All this that went on back in the early days amounted to nothing.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: We heard before in an exchange that there is some evidence, science or data saying that there were threatened species actions, if you like, whether logging or whatever, but you are saying you do not think that was the case?

Mr PAUL: No, it was not a true indication of the actual decision that had to be had. Yes, there had to be a reduction, we knew that and we were all agreeable with that but not the substantial amount that was taken from us to make us virtually unsustainable.

Mr HYDE: With regards to the actual outcome of the decision, just from my point of view as being in the forests, I class the forests as my home—I have been there probably more hours than I have been in my own home for the past 10 or 15 years. I am there working every day managing the estate under the control of the Forestry but I am the one physically doing the work and moving the timber out of the forest, and we want to do the best thing by the forest for better outcomes. We have been trained in a way that when we go into a forest we only harvest it if the outcome we can get at the end of the day is better than when we went in there. The question I have asked is when you go into a forest on one side of a road and you log it because that is the better outcome for the forest but on the other side the same country, the same stand of timber, you cannot touch it and you drive back in 12 months time and you see the timber deteriorating. I do not see that as a better outcome for the forest.

If I never cut another log again that does not really worry me—I am young and I can go and do something else—but the Baradine community, the Pilliga forest is my home and it concerns me that maybe it is right the way it is being managed at the moment or maybe it is not but when you ask the question, "Why do we do this?" I do not get a straight answer from anyone who I have asked on the ground operating there on a daily basis. I know at different meetings that the scientific evidence got thrown up at us who had concerns about how much was in the forest. We questioned that with people on the ground but when it is now starting to be put into play and we start to see the way it is rolling out, the question is still there: Are we doing the right thing by the forests?

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Mr Paul, It might be helpful to get some of the information you provided to us yesterday on the record now. Can you meet the allocation that you now have under your wood supply agreement to 2025?

Mr PAUL: Can I meet it or can Forestry meet it?

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Can your companies deliver the amount of timber that you are required to deliver under the wood supply agreement?

CHAIR: And stay in business, is that what you mean?

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Yes.

Mr PAUL: The Forestry has not backed us to date. It has said yes it can deliver and we are sure it can deliver but as we saw yesterday at the mill—I showed you that minimum spec log, which we are continually being hounded by State Forests that if it is in spec we must take it. That will send us broke. I am not sure whether you are aware that since the decision, to my knowledge, two mills have closed up and gone broke mainly due to the resource. That was Millabill Timbers at Mendooran and Gulargambone Cypress at Gulargambone, which was the biggest employer in the shire, has closed since 2005.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: I think you told us yesterday—was it 20,000 cubic metres?

Mr PAUL: Yes, 20,000 at Baradine Sawmilling Company.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: You can deliver that but the problem is that the size of the logs is getting smaller?

Mr PAUL: That is a huge problem.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: That is your number one problem at the moment?

Mr PAUL: It is our number one problem. The actual size of the trees is getting smaller and becoming virtually unmarketable in the market place: we cannot sell them. It is becoming harder for the contractor to log and maintain his viability because he is cutting that many more pieces per load to get a load of logs and he is covering that much more area. He is becoming unviable at the same rate as us basically.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: You are required to deliver an average log size of at least 0.15 cubic metres?

Mr PAUL: Yes, 0.15 cubic metres per log.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Have you continued to meet that every month to date?

Mr PAUL: It is becoming smaller. The log size was 0.18, 0.19 and 0.2 and now it is coming down in the last 20 loads I just paid Hyde Haulage was .156 out of compartment 90, near where we were yesterday.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: What happens if and when you are a tip under 0.15 cubic metres for a month? What does that trigger?

Mr PAUL: We would not even make the month. We would be virtually closed up before the end of the month because we could not make any money and lose a substantial amount of money and therefore close very similar to the other two sawmills that have closed since 2005.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: What negotiations have you had with State Forests about them finding you some compartments with greater log sizes in their estate?

Mr PAUL: Through our local member for Tamworth, Kevin Anderson, he has been in contact with the chief executive officer of State Forests, Nick Roberts, for the interim, until something becomes of it. They have been asked to get some bigger areas, better compartments—that is, bigger stands of timber—better going for our logging contractor and, hopefully, maintain a bit of viability for us until a decision is made either way.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: With your knowledge of the forests throughout the Pilliga, do those compartments exist in the existing State Forests estate?

Mr PAUL: In our proposal what we have asked to be returned back to, yes, I definitely believe that it is there and available and will keep us going beyond 2025 when the wood supply agreement ends.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: That is different. I think your proposal, which I have read, is a concrete proposal to take around 18,000 hectares out of zone one or zone three protected areas—

Mr PAUL: Yes.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: —and put into zone four for timber harvesting?

Mr PAUL: That is correct.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Do you put that submission because you believe that there are just not the compartments with adequate log sizes in the current zone four?

Mr PAUL: That is right. If we continued at the rate we are going, as I have said, the log size average is diminishing. As I have said, we signed up in good faith in 2005 that the average log size would not become the minimum requirement as per the wood supply agreement.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: You refer in your submission to a previous submission of 3 May 2011 that was rejected by the Government. What information can you give the Committee on that? I was not aware of it.

Mr PAUL: It was rejected by the environment Minister as not being like for like. How can it be like for like when she has taken—not the environment Minister but Bob Carr back in 2005 took the best forests off us? It will never be able to be like for like because the best timber, as far as we are concerned, for the life of the cypress industry to be continued is a far whack of it is in national park to this day.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Was that a written submission you put to the new government last year?

Mr PAUL: Yes.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Did you receive a written response with reasons as to why it was rejecting your submission?

Mr PAUL: We went through our local member.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: When the forests were reserved—I do not want to go too deeply into your business—but what percentage of your business do you estimate you lost as a result of that decision to reserve?

Mrs ANDREWS: The first decision when they had the moratorium, our business ceased that day.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: So you lost 100 per cent.

Mrs ANDREWS: Yes, then because I was pretty vocal on a certain radio station and voiced my opinion about what happened, all of a sudden there was a rush of blood and we had a rush of pollies come to our compartments and investigated what we were doing. We had a magical mystery tour through a compartment. We had them all walk through and observe what we were doing. They all looked around and said, "Gees, a lot of bird life here."

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: What was said to you?

Mrs ANDREWS: I am just going to give you an example—

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: When it was operating at capacity pre-lockup to the present day, how much smaller is your business today from that period before the areas got locked up? Roughly, is it two-thirds, a half?

Mrs ANDREWS: The last 12 months have been pretty bad. This would be the worst 12 months since we signed the wood agreement. There have been a lot of problems. The Integrated Forestry Operations Approval [IFOA] has been a real stumbling block for the firewood industry. We run a retail yard in the Blue Mountains for firewood and for the first time in 15 years we had to stop trading twice this year.

Mr HYDE: In 2002 we invoiced out 32,000 cubic metres of all product and last year we invoiced out 18,000, so we have dropped a fair bit of

CHAIR: That is whole log, is it?

Mr HYDE: That is all types of log. As part of the process we are integrating our operations with ironbark and pine to make the operation more viable because we knew in the new estate in that the stands would be, as far as the cypress went, less volume per hectare. However, we had our historical averages so we based our business on that. With the integration of the ironbark and firewood there was obviously going to be a lag time between when the ironbark got rolled out. We were prepared to put up a difficult period of time to get through; however, we spent three years without hauling any ironbark at all to any sawmill customer and very limited firewood due to the restrictions that were on us at the time.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Mr Paul, what is so good about cypress? Why is cypress such an important timber?

Mr PAUL: First of all it is natural rejuvenation, so it does not need to be reseeded or replanted by anyone; it just does it naturally. It is naturally termite resistant so therefore needs no chemical treatment whatsoever for use internal, external or anywhere it is utilised.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: It is primary for housing?

Mr PAUL: Yes.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Its optimal use is for housing because of its natural termite resistance?

Mr PAUL: Yes.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Presumably there are other woods that are usable for housing?

Mr PAUL: Yes.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: But they would require chemical treatment, would they not?

Mr PAUL: That is correct.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: So the environmental movement has essentially said to move away from a naturally resistant timber to imposing higher degrees of chemicalisation in the environment by its plans to try and lockup the cypress forests?

Mr PAUL: That is right.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: It is slightly ironic is it not?

Mr PAUL: If anything this is a green user-friendly timber that is available on the market and in plentiful supply, or has been to date.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: You are the only two saw operations left?

Mr PAUL: In the Brigalow, yes, in the north of the State. There is another two mills at Condobolin and Narrandera that have wood supply agreements with the Government as well, they are family-owned and operated sawmills too.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: One of the problems you face is that you are compelled to take what are essentially uneconomical, are you not?

Mr PAUL: Yes.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Do you believe there should be a change with Forestry so that you are not compelled to take uneconomic logs, for example, to let them remain and for State Forest to open up new areas, which would allow you to take economic logs from?

Mr PAUL: Exactly and remain viable.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: So you maintain the same quantum of 20,000 cubic metres but they do not have to just deliver the quantity but the quality with it as well?

Mr PAUL: That is correct.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: It is correct, is it not, that the yield of individual logs is expressed in cubic metres of sawn timber per log—for example, 0.15 cubic metres?

Mr PAUL: No, that is the actual log, not sawn timber. That is the actual log that comes into your yard: 0.15 cubic metres per piece of log.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Unsawn?

Mr PAUL: Unsawn, yes

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Prior to 2005 what was the average yield of the logs you would take into your mills?

Mr PAUL: It is 0.2.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: And what is it now—0.156?

Mr PAUL: The last 20 loads we have just taken to Hyde Haulage are 0.156.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: What is the breakeven point in log yield, when it drops below what figure can you no longer make money?

Mr PAUL: We need a mix of logs.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: But we are talking about an average.

Mr PAUL: Yes, and the average size should be 0.15. We need the mix of logs because the orders vary on a daily and weekly basis. Builders want three-inch timber up to 12-inch timber. You usually get that out of the tails of the smaller trees. We need a mix of trees. We cannot take all big ones and we cannot survive on all little ones.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Is 0.15 the minimum size or the minimum average size?

Mr PAUL: That is the minimum average size.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: What is the minimum log yield that your industry would need to survive in the long term?

Mr PAUL: We have to get back out to 0.2.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: It needs to be around that average size?

Mr PAUL: Yes, for us and our logging contractor to survive and to become viable, to invest and to employ more people.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Is the extra 18,000 hectares of resource that you recommend in your submission what you need to bring that average log size up to 0.2?

Mr PAUL: Yes.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: How that was calculated?

Mr PAUL: We have had great help from Forests NSW in getting all these facts and figures. That is how we arrived at the block and compartment numbers that are in the submission. That is what we need to survive, not only for the life of the 20-year wood supply agreement but for ongoing sustainability. We need that for the cypress industry to continue. As members saw yesterday, the forest needs to be cut. It needs to be open and the trees need to be spaced out. It needs to be cut on an ongoing basis for the forest to survive.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: If we are successful in negotiating with Forests NSW to find that extra compartment to access, will that be only a short-term solution to your problems?

Mr PAUL: Yes. But I was told yesterday by the forester at Baradine that it will take at least two months to get some of these compartments licensed up and ready to log. That will take us out to December and we close in mid December for three weeks. You might as well say next year. That is not good enough; we need it now to maintain our and our contractors' viability and to service our customers' requirements. We are becoming less able to do that with these smaller trees that we are continually getting.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: If we are able to negotiate that sooner rather than later and then negotiate the extra 18,000 hectares to be converted, how quickly would you need access to that area? In other words, if we negotiate that short-term fix, how long will that keep you going?

Mr PAUL: It will be continuous; it will be ongoing. We will be able to survive and become more viable.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: But if you get that short-term fix we were talking about, what will the timeframe be for you to survive before you need the extra 18,000 hectares?

Mr PAUL: It depends on how many they can find and open up for us for harvesting plans. It would be a short-term fix for perhaps six months.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for appearing before the Committee. We may want to ask further questions on notice. Would you be happy to answer any questions that are forwarded to you?

Mrs ANDREWS: Yes.

Mr HYDE: Yes.

Mr PAUL: Yes.

CHAIR: We would appreciate answers within 21 days of you receiving the questions. Thank you for your input. I assure you, Mrs Andrews, this time was not wasted.

Mrs ANDREWS: I hope not.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(Short adjournment)

RODERICK ALLAN IAN YOUNG, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr YOUNG: I will not read my submission; I would rather answer questions. I trust that Committee members have read my submission. I want to comment further on the mesopredator debate. I will read quotes from a paper I have recently read on the internet. It was written by Lee Allen, Ben Allen, Peter Fleming and Guy Ballard, who are Department of Primary Industries research scientists involved in the Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre. Their paper entitled "Top-Predators as Biodiversity Regulators: Contemporary Issues Affecting Knowledge and Management of Dingoes in Australia" states:

> [large] predators ... are now considered to be of high conservation value in many parts of the world ... and exploring their roles and functions has arguably been one of the most prominent fields of biodiversity conservation research in the last 10–15 years.
>
> Knowledge of the roles of top-predators on other continents ... and recent research focus on the positive environmental effects of dingoes ... has led to calls to cease lethal dingo control ... and even restore them to sheep and goat production regions ... actions collectively referred to hereafter as 'positive dingo management'.
>
> Understanding the roles of dingoes in highly altered ecosystems (i.e. sheep grazing lands and urban ecosystems) may actually be most important, because such systems are those expected to benefit most from positive dingo management.

I have major concerns with such papers. In New South Wales we have major production systems involving prime lamb, wool, mutton, beef and goat meat, which will be under threat from such false ideas as positive dingo management. I quote what has happened in Queensland. At the height of the reserve price scheme Queensland was running 23 million sheep and it is now down to 3 million. That huge drop in sheep numbers is not all attributable to wild dog predation; there are undoubtedly other factors. However, wild dogs play a major role in that Queensland is now a basket case as far as wild dog control is concerned. New South Wales is now 50 per cent wild dog affected. If we cannot turn around the control system in five to 10 years New South Wales will be the same as Queensland.

A paper is attached to my submission. It includes a page that virtually heralded the introduction of schedule 2 land for the protection of the dingo. The Rural Lands Protection Act and the pest control order in my opinion both need strengthening so that a farmer can run livestock of his choosing in paddocks adjacent to national parks without suffering wild dog predation. In many areas this has become impossible and that is why the proposal to have 40 pest controllers attached to the livestock health and pest authorities system is so very necessary. Wild dogs must be eradicated from private land and be kept to a compatible level on public land. The taxpayer must be prepared to pay for this in return for protection of the dingo, which is now regarded as the wild dog.

As far as the rest of my submission is concerned, I support what Mayor Peter Shinton said about forestry. I represent New South Wales farmers at the local bushfire management committee level. Forests NSW has been so reduced that it now has only 13 staff from Gilgandra to Inverell to protect its resource this fire season. The Rural Fire Service will be expected to fill that gap. I am a group officer within the Rural Fire Service. Volunteer farmers have businesses to run and we cannot afford to spend weeks fighting fires. We certainly will fight them, but the volunteer service should not be expected to fill the gap because of government decisions over the years to take forest country for national parks. As a result of that, Forests NSW no longer has a viable firefighting staff.

As far as the forestry business is concerned, I speak on a statewide basis—socially, economically and environmentally—on forest management. There has a huge resource of ironbark, cypress and coastal timbers and, of course, the red gum, which are all now tied up in our national park estate.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Thank you for appearing before the Committee. In your submission you talk about the hybridisation of dingoes. Do you have any information about the percentage of dingo in the dogs now in the wild?

Mr YOUNG: A lot of DNA work has been done. The National Parks and Wildlife Service maintain that it has some areas of wild dogs that might have 70 per cent or 80 per cent dingo DNA. However, the vast majority of them are a hybrid mixture. The hybrid mixture animals become very lethal because they breed twice a year and purebred dingos breed only once a year and have small litters. The hybrids breed twice a year and have bigger litters. They have heavier birth weights and are a more aggressive animal.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Do you have any information as to what National Parks consider to be a pure bred dingo or what percentage becomes a pure bred dingo?

Mr YOUNG: No, I really cannot answer that, I am afraid. You would have to quiz some of the enthusiasts within the National Parks and Wildlife Service. But there are some areas, for instance, the Guy Fawkes National Park, I believe is considered to be one of the more pure dingo areas. I quote that in my submission, where that area is run out of the Dorrigo office. That is one area where the growers are having a hell of a doing from the dingoes coming out of that public land.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: The figures you just tabled a moment ago, showing the number of dogs that have been killed has increased from 146 in the year 2000 to 1,015 in 2008. That is an extraordinary increase which may reflect that what we are dealing with is very much wild dogs or feral dogs, hybrids, rather than pure breeds?

Mr YOUNG: Yes, absolutely. That was based on the old Kempsey Rural Lands Protection Board figures. I apologise for that, I meant to attach that one to my submission but it got a bit mixed up. The point is, I have been receiving more and more reports, probably one every fortnight now for months, of farmers who have never been wild dog affected before and they now are. It just shows that the wild dog population is spreading further and further on to private land.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Those figures that have been compiled by the Kempsey Rural Lands Protection Board figures, are they dogs that have been killed in national parks, on private land or on both?

Mr YOUNG: They would have been dogs that would have been trapped and randomly lucky under the circumstances in having been shot by farmers. The point here is in such an area like Kempsey, as you would understand, there is a huge amount of public land, both national park and forest, and it just allows such a spread of dogs to come out onto the remaining private land.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I was interested in your comments in relation to fire control in national parks and forests. Can you expand or is there anything else you would like to say about that? You made some practical comments. I am interested in particular in what things are they doing right at the moment and what things do they need to do better?

Mr YOUNG: Fire control on both forestry and national parks?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Yes.

Mr YOUNG: Prior to the downturn of forestry I have always considered that the forestry people were always more effective firefighters than the National Parks. The Pilliga, for example, was set up with roads wide enough that the log carriers could pass. They had plenty of room to get their loads backwards and forwards and if you question some of the local people out there now, a lot of those roads have been allowed to become overgrown. As I say in my submission, the same thing occurred in Kosciusko National Park before the major fire down there that ended up burning homes in Canberra. When all those lightning strikes that started that big fire, the fire trails were overgrown, therefore the Rural Fire Service and the National Parks considered it was unsafe to send crews in there because of the state of the fire trails, so you end up with a major fire. In other words, the fire trails need to be maintained. I am a member of the Volunteer Firefighters Association and I have quoted figures in there. They need to be wide enough for trucks to pass. They need areas where they can turn around and get out if they have to.

It is the same on private land. I am deputy group captain out here in my farming area of Purlewaugh, and we are gradually developing fire trails through 100,000 acres of scrub called the Binnaway scrub area. We want to be able to get in there smartly when we get a lightning strike, find the fire and nip it in the bud before it develops into a big fire. That is what we need. We need a system of serviceable fire trails and quick action to nip fires in the bud. We prefer small fires, not big fires.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: One of the things we are looking at is the various land titles. Do you find there are better managers from the State Government point of view? Do railways manage their land better or State Forests, or National Parks or the Department of Main Roads, whatever it is these days?

Mr YOUNG: Over the years there is no doubt in my mind that Forestry has managed its land well in that we know, looked at from the triple bottom line, it has always been able to produce a very practical ecological and environmental outcome. That was proven before the Brigalow assessment. There was a bigger percentage of biodiversity in the logged and managed and thinned areas of forestry country. From an economic point of view it maintained the rural communities. The whole point about it is that it is long-term sustainable. It can go on and on forever and a day if it is logged at a sustainable level. That is what should have continued to happen.

Of course, from a social point of view, if it maintains our rural communities, everybody prospers, everybody can continue on. So, the Forestry management of land was sustainable. In my opinion, from the fire fighting point of view and my observations over the years, there is no doubt that Forestry, when they had substantial numbers of crew, they were the best firefighters because they had resources to protect. That is my point of view.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: They had more incentive to look after your property and neighbouring properties than did National Parks?

Mr YOUNG: Yes. They had more incentive to get out there and get the fire out. To manage it they would often have cool burns, et cetera, and keep things under control.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: There has been a degree of controversy about opening up national parks for recreational hunting. Do you believe that will have a significant impact on feral animals within national parks in your area?

Mr YOUNG: It could possibly in some of our local areas. I have some reservations of it as far as wild dog control is concerned.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Why is that?

Mr YOUNG: The wild dog is a very sly type of animal and we have had issues already, particularly in some forests close to the Sydney metropolitan area, where wild dog control measures have been disrupted due to shooters disrupting the dogs, say, prior to a strategic baiting program. That is an issue.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Why is that any different to foxes?

Mr YOUNG: The point is with foxes, foxes can be successfully baited. I do a fox bait regularly on my property. Particularly if we combine it with neighbours, it is very effective. Fox control, in my opinion, is not really an issue. It is something that can be dealt with with a baiting program. I realise recreational shooters will be in there. It is just something we will have to monitor and hopefully have cooperation on, so that we do not get into strife with programs of wild dog control in particular. That would be my major concern.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Maybe to continue with questions around feral animal control, in the email or letter you tendered today, it talks about the operations of pig shooting. This guy Cameron says that in the national park they apparently shot between 400 and 500 pigs alone—this is a helicopter shoot, I think?

Mr YOUNG: Yes.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: And the landowner—I am assuming Cameron—funded a chopper and between a couple of local landowners shot 100 over about 40,000 acres. There is obviously a big problem?

Mr YOUNG: Yes.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: What do you think, taking on the recreational hunting perspective, about ground shooting in controlling feral pigs? Is that effective?

Mr YOUNG: It would be effective to a certain extent, but the problem was that particular case study that I put in reinforces what I am proposing with 40 pest animal controllers attached to the Livestock Health and Pest Authority system throughout the State. If the pest animal controller had been able to go in there after the flood rains and realise that the big numbers were building up to such a proportion, action could have been put in place. Maybe, if we had got half of Sydney's recreational shooters to go out there and get stuck into it, they

might have reduced them before lambing started on those neighbouring properties. As it was, they could have had a major pig shoot. It seems the aerial shoot is reasonably effective with pigs, but it is the timing of it. They are huge figures there. I think the particular landowner lost something like a quarter of a million dollars worth of prime land and Clyde Agriculture lost $800,000 worth. They were just two properties. There are a number of properties in the area. So, it is a huge economic loss.

If the system had been there that a person, like a pest animal controller, could work on a nil tenure basis and establish that there was going to be a wild pig population explosion, maybe if the recreational shooters were brought in at the right time, they could possibly save a fair bit of cost in helicopters. You do not run a helicopter under $1,000 an hour. They could have done the job but it is the timing and effectiveness of it that is required.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Still on pigs, what about pig doggers? Would they have had any impact?

Mr YOUNG: I try to keep them off the place because they pose problems in lots of ways. They are inclined to farm an area in that they will take the heavyweights and leave, say, a sow with a litter to grow up later so they can come back and have another go. It is not the long-term answer to the problem.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: If you had a seat at the table that was proposing to expand the national parks and reserves—the target of 15 percent or whatever it might be—what would you say to those decision-makers in terms of your dogs or whatever else might come to mind before you bought the purchase and set up the operation to get the thing up and running?

Mr YOUNG: You are talking about more land in addition for national parks?

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Say, more around the Great Dividing Range or wherever. What would you say to those people who had identified a property and who thought they wanted to add it to the national parks? What would you ask them to consider?

Mr YOUNG: As I have said in my submission, it is obvious that probably future governments will continue to supply a certain amount of finance for the purchase of more private land for national park. I am not happy with that idea, but, if that has to be, the first consideration would have to be finance for ongoing management. They have not got enough money now to keep up with the land they already have.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Maybe they should dispose of some of that land.

Mr YOUNG: I would certainly agree with that. The point is with the Great Dividing Range area there is not much more land that they could buy. Therefore it is going to have to be concentrated in the western division. Now you people have been out there and seen what the purchase of Toorale has done to the economics of Bourke shire. Other western division shires cannot afford to be treated the same way and you are talking huge areas and that means that the management is going to cost a heck of a lot more. The logistics of management of these huge areas just becomes unrealistic. They are isolated areas and the private properties around them are big areas and you can get to the stage that a farmer out there will not realise that he has got wild dogs or wild pigs affecting his livestock until it is too late; the damage is done. I think really an expansion of the national park system in the western division is just not viable.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Do NSW Farmers—I know you also wear that hat—have a seat at the table in any of this? Do they say, "This is what it is going to cost you to control pests and dogs; it is one thing to buy it but it is another thing to think about funding it ad infinitum."

Mr YOUNG: NSW Farmers is a lobby group. The only way we can affect any further expansions to natural parks is to lobby the politicians to say, "If you are going to purchase more land you have got to be able to first manage the land you have got, and then have additional funding to manage any further additions of land." How far can we go from a viability point of view as taxpayer's funds? It is mind-boggling.

CHAIR: Thank you for coming to talk to us. The Committee may have some questions for you on notice. Are you happy to answer any such questions?

Mr YOUNG: Absolutely.

CHAIR: Normally we ask that the answers be supplied within 21 days of when you receive them.

Mr YOUNG: Right.

(The witness withdrew)

BEVERLEY SMILES, National Parks Association of New South Wales, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Before we proceed to questions would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms SMILES: Yes, thank you. I am a member of a number of environment groups. I have previously had the role of Western Program Manager with the National Parks Association during the Western Regional Assessment, which was conducted between 2000 and 2005. I am currently the president of the Inland Rivers Network, secretary of the Central West Environment Council and western representative on the executive board of the Nature Conservation Council. I welcome the opportunity to participate in this inquiry into public land management. In my opening statement I wish to address a few key issues—namely, the importance of having land that is publicly owned; a landscape management approach to natural resources; the value of environmental services; and the intrinsic and unique values of the Australian natural environment.

From the public land perspective, conservation reserves, travelling stock routes and reserves and other Crown lands are an important factor in our society. We are a very wealthy country, with a very high living standard. Not only can we afford to keep land under public management, I believe we have a duty to provide these services in the same way as we have a duty to provide public health, public education and public transport. These are the services that create an egalitarian society where everyone has an opportunity to enjoy open spaces, natural environments and a rich, biodiverse and protected natural resource base that provides us with our basic needs of fresh air, clean water and a range of ecosystem services. There is a duty associated with the management of public land, that it not be over exploited for the creation of individual wealth and that it be cared for in a manner that provides future generations with the same advantages that we enjoy.

From the landscape management perspective, the conservation of natural ecosystem functions is critical in the Australian landscape. The management of natural resources—that is, soils, water and vegetation, must be considered and conducted on a landscape scale. The outcome of the Western Regional Assessment was the Brigalow and Nandewar Community Conservation Area Act 2005. One of the provisions of the Act was to establish three catchment-based community advisory committees to consider the broader context of landscape management across tenures. This was a response to a model put to government by the local community in this area. It is very disappointing that the current New South Wales Government appears to have abandoned these community committees. They have not met since the beginning of the year and there has been no clear direction given to the community chairs.

I was on the Central West Community Conservation Area Committee. This area here was covered by the Namoi committee and there was a Gwydir-Border Rivers committee. These committees had representatives from across the key stakeholder groups plus the key public land management agencies and the Division of Mineral Resources. They had local knowledge and learnt a lot about the different approaches of the different government agencies to land management. A number of good cross-tenure program have been conducted in these areas with a combined conservation and agricultural production benefit, such as the fox baiting program in the Goonoo area, which was started by State Forests with the rural lands protection boards and local neighbouring farmers and has been continued on with the change of tenure of that reserve.

I have proposed for many years that a landscape-scale cross-tenure natural resource management weed and feral animal program would create local employment in regional areas, particularly for young people who enjoy working outdoors. In the same way that our publicly funded health and education systems add to the economic value of a local community, through providing employment and essential services, so could a well structured program of natural resource management. The Catchment Management Authorities have come part way to filling this role; however, their investment incentives focus is on private land management. A structure similar to the rural fire service that produces comprehensive regional plans and state wide coordination for weed and feral animal control across all tenures would provide an efficient investment in public resources with measurable outcomes—I think this suggestion has been put forward by other land managers.

In relation to the value of environmental services, the investment in natural resource management over many years is an indication that we do value environmental services. It costs society a lot to replace them or repair damage from past poor practices. Ecosystems that are healthy and functioning well are much easier and cheaper to manage and maintain than those that have been severely degraded. The protection of healthy ecosystems from degrading practices is an important function of public land and particularly conservation reserves. It is more cost effective to have freshwater naturally filtered through healthy riparian vegetation and

naturally occurring wetland systems, than having to invest in expensive engineering solutions to provide the essential service of good quality drinking water. The protection of water catchments is a vital service of public land. Many other services are provided for humans through the natural environment—for example, pollination and seed dispersal of useful plants and trees, sources of food and medicines and soil retention and stability, to name a few. These services are still not adequately accounted for when considering the impacts of human activity and neither is the balance required for natural systems to function unassisted without huge investment of cash and labour, whether paid or voluntary.

In relation to the intrinsic value of nature, Australian native animals and bushland is unique and clearly loved by most people. These values must be recognised for themselves. I do not want to be part of the generation responsible for the extinction of the koala in Australia or the platypus or our beautiful woodland birds, our lizards, ground orchids, white box—the list of endangered species goes on. Many species are specialists. They require particular elements in the landscape to survive, like tree hollows that take hundreds of years to develop. Many of these values are now irreplaceable yet are still being allowed to be destroyed. I would like to leave the Committee with an analogy for the tree hollow because it saddens me when a project is approved to destroy an area of healthy bushland, particularly endangered ecological communities, with a mixed range of vegetation ages. There is invariably a requirement to revegetate a larger area in hectares, but the trees are all young and all the same age, some may survive. If one had a wine cellar with three bottles of 100-year-old port and someone wanted to smash those bottles but replace them with 30 bottles of last year's vintage, would one feel that one had ended up with the same value or were better off?

Finally, I make one last comment about the wood supply models for the Brigalow Belt South assessment. They were never provided during that assessment process to the community stakeholder group. I believe that recent information on wood supply models that has been released in the north-east has revealed considerable issues with Forests NSW management of the resources.

CHAIR: Yes it has; it does not have enough land.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Thank you for your evidence. We continue to hear during the inquiry that logging can take place sustainably, that some of the national parks recently converted from State forest are a locked up resource and that the logging contractors should be able to go back in and harvest some of the logs because they are a wasted resource. What has been the general impact of logging in the Pilliga area? What impacts have you witnessed from logging operations historically?

Ms SMILES: Not only in the Pilliga but also in the red gum forests, the silviculture practices were first to go in and ringbark all the large trees.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: That happened in the early days?

Ms SMILES: Yes. That significantly impacted on the way the forests worked for conservation outcomes. Then more recently more effective harvesting techniques developed for harvesting plantation timbers were introduced into the natural forest. That had a much greater impact on the way the forests were managed and logged. Because of our climate our timber species are very slow growing. While we had particular cohorts that were the result of previous wet weather last century, most of that timber had been harvested or was in the process of being harvested anyway.

The very comprehensive assessment work done during this process brought a lot of that information to light. The information about the biodiversity that still existed in these forests related to what was left on the cleared land that surrounds these forests. When you compare those two things, yes, the forests certainly do have wildlife in them because that was one of the few places left for them to survive and continue. The fact that they were large contiguous areas was one of the reasons there was evidence of biodiversity. The requirement then to protect those areas is actually more important because they are the only places left in the bioregion that can continue to allow those species to survive. We are talking about species whose populations are crashing nationally. The size of these contiguous bushland areas is critical for the survival of those species.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: It has been put to the Committee by a number of people here and also in the Murray region in respect of the river red gum forests that biodiversity outcomes are better when white cypress forests and red gum forests are logged. Do you agree with that view? Can you explain your reasoning?

Ms SMILES: The view of people who harvest timber and manage an area of land to obtain harvestable timber revolves around silviculture. They look at how to manage an area to grow good logs. The fact that some native species can use some of those elements in those forests is a sideline to the consideration of the way those forests are managed. Managing an area for the benefit or survival of threatened species is totally different. While there have been increasing requirements for those managing native forests to consider conservation values, when you look at the number of habitat trees that are retained in a compartment it is just not adequate for the species we are talking about. These forests have been disturbed for a very long time, and for them to get back to some balance will take a long time.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: It has been put to the Committee that when forests are turned into conservation reserves—with respect to both white cypress and red gums—they thicken and that delivers worse outcomes for biodiversity. The forests are extremely dense and that is a poor outcome for biodiversity. Do you take issue with that contention, which has been put to the Committee by many witnesses?

Ms SMILES: I fully understand the arguments put up for ecological thinning. That was one of the key discussions and debates during the assessment period. However, it depends on what conservation values you are managing for. As I said, these areas have been hugely disturbed and it will take a long time for them to get back to any sort of balance. That really thick regrowth is part of getting back into balance. While there is still scientific debate around the mosaic management of fire, mechanical thinning and so on, it is still experimental. We cannot say categorically whether areas are worse off in terms of conservation. They have not been managed for conservation for long enough for us to be able to come to those conclusions because they have been so disturbed for so long.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: You said you wanted to get these areas back into balance. One of the things that Oxley noted was that it is a relatively open forest. There are issues about whether it was managed by Aboriginal people using fire. An alternative was put to us yesterday by a National Parks and Wildlife Service officer relating to medium-sized herbiverous animals. Given that most of them have been killed off, how do you get back to that natural state without reintroducing massive numbers of those animals, implementing Aboriginal fire practices, or arranging for the artificial removal of small-scale plants via selective logging?

Ms SMILES: It needs a range of those things. If any of the species that are left have the ability to rebuild their population that is a plus. There should be a range of different approaches; no one solution will fit all.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: But you cannot reintroduce species that no longer exist in those sorts of numbers. There is nothing that can now eat out the undergrowth. Do you leave it to grow unnaturally—in other words, pre-European interference—or do you attempt to mimic what medium-sized herbiverous animals would have done to that landscape with, for example, selective clearing?

Ms SMILES: I am suggesting a range of those things over time. Because the landscape has been so disturbed for all the reasons you have outlined, we need to look at a range of different management tools in a mosaic method. We really are looking at designing something because of that disturbance level. Getting anything back to its original state is not necessarily possible.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: You said earlier that the intention would be to get as close as possible to that level.

Ms SMILES: If we left some of those areas alone a lightning strike would come through and sort that out.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: But permanently for the young cypress given their fire intolerance.

Ms SMILES: And something else would then come up. The cypress is important to the timber industry and it has some conservation values as well. However, when you are managing those areas for conservation you are not necessarily as interested in what is happening for the cypress to grow a number of stems per hectare as you would be if you were trying to produce a timber product.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: There are people in the industry here today who have indicated that if they cannot get access to extra resource the mills in Gunnedah and Baradine will close. Forestry people told us yesterday that they do not have another market to sell into, although they could take the logs all the way down to

the southern mills. If the two mills that are supplied by the Pilliga forest now were to close and Forests NSW had nowhere to sell timber, forest management would decline as a result. What would you want to see happen to the zone 4 areas after that?

Ms SMILES: I sat through the assessment process and the wood supply models were never provided to the stakeholder panel. There was always an expectation that the wood supply agreements were far and above what the forest would be able to produce. That is now being demonstrated quite quickly. From the conservation perspective, we said that the smaller town mills should be protected. However, the key large mills were retained with the wood supply agreement and the smaller ones were removed. We are always conscious of those social impacts of change. However, given the logging that was happening before the decision, it would not have been long before everyone would have run out of wood anyway.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: There is debate about that issue.

Ms SMILES: Of course there is, and that comes back to the information on which the decisions were based in the first place.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Mr Patrick Paul told the Committee that the transfer of approximately 18,000 hectares of zone 3 to zone 4 in exchange for 70,000 hectares of zone 4 for zone 3 would enable the cypress industry here to survive. Would it not be a good idea to pick up 70,000 hectares of forest in exchange for 18,000 hectares of country that is better suited to timber production? Would that not be a good deal for the conservation outcome?

Ms SMILES: Someone would have to do a survey to tell us the values. Are you talking about 70,000 hectares that has just been logged as part of the decision and now we want to get into an area that has been conserved? The final outcome was that an important area of the West Pilliga that was in the initial announcement went back to zone 4 right at the very end before the bill was finalised. If that is the outcome we are looking at now and then the 18,000 hectares is logged and in five years it is swapped back—

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: That is not what the projections are saying.

Ms SMILES: I have not seen any of the information.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: The projections worked out by the industry are clearly saying that if that extra 18,000 hectares were swapped for the 70,000 hectares they would be able to maintain their log yield above 0.2 cubic metres per log—

Ms SMILES: For the 20 years?

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: For the next 200 years. They were the figures they provided. That would ensure a sustainable industry here rather than focusing on shutting down the industry.

Ms SMILES: The problem is we have no confidence in the information that State Forests use to calculate the volume of timber that is available in those forests.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: You may not, but others do.

CHAIR: I move on now to Mr MacDonald.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: I heard what you said about the value of environmental services and that we should as a community have a reserve system and all the rest of it. One of the ongoing tensions we seem to have is, yes, we have a will to do that and we have money to purchase properties but we really seem to struggle with the ongoing funding, whether it be noxious weeds or feral animals or bushfire control or whatever. As a society we have priorities—education, health, whatever. Can you expand on how you think we should manage that now, with the estate we have, and as it may grow in the future with the projected expansion of nearly two to one? Should we tax people more, should we cut back on health? What should we do? It is a genuine question.

Ms SMILES: I understand that. That is why I was suggesting there are models out there for more efficient management of the animals and weeds, in particular.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: So a bit of efficiency?

Ms SMILES: We know we are losing money. There has been information provided as to the loss to our agricultural production from those problems. Also there are the conservation impacts as well. Having a more efficient landscape approach and, as I was suggesting, I see there are employment opportunities there, so the outcome may be more taxes, it could be more royalties from mining. There is a whole range of ways to find the income you need.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Would you countenance more funding coming out of the parks—multiuse? If they could, within the parks, find more tourism or any sort of multiuse income, would you countenance that, or is our reserve system such, especially those at the top two or three levels where you are saying no, sorry, we cannot go in there? Is the door shut on that sort of thing?

Ms SMILES: Not at all. National parks are open to visitation anyway. There are areas that are nature reserves for particular purposes that have a high conservation value that people can still go to but they have to inform the local land manager that they want to go in there for a particular purpose. Education and research is one of the other key purposes and functions of a nature reserve. A lot of the outcomes we are talking about here in the Pilliga region were State conservation areas, not even national parks. So, we have a number of different aspects of conservation outcomes now. There are a lot of opportunities there.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: To generate more revenue?

Ms SMILES: And for local communities. People are interested in going to national parks.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Have you any qualifications in environmental science?

Ms SMILES: No, I am a community representative.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: We had a question in Deniliquin where someone was patronised about that.

CHAIR: Thank you for agreeing to come in and talk to us. We appreciate your evidence. Would you be prepared to take questions on notice and get answers back to us within 21 days?

Ms SMILES: Definitely.

(The witness withdrew)

JOHN IVOR DENHAM, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Before we proceed to questions and your opening statement, a document has been tabled. I note a number of persons are named in that document. I remind you that adverse comment about individuals should not be made at any time. Comment about organisations is a different matter. If you wish to refer to a person perhaps you could describe them by their station at the time. That might get us over the problem of having an adverse comment in the record. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr DENHAM: Yes, I will just make a few comments if I may about where I am coming from. I am a geophysicist with over 30 years of industry experience, including 22 years with BHP Petroleum, where I was chief geophysicist for a number of years. I have also been editor of a major technical journal for six years and I am presently largely retired although occasionally I do consulting work and present papers at technical conferences. I have owned my present property, or part of it, for about 30 years; the rest for over 20 years, and have lived on it for almost 20 years. My next door neighbour is my sister and nephew, and that property has been in that family for over 40 years. I have been visiting regularly in that time. My property adjoins the eastern boundary of the Goonoo State Conservation Area, and my principal and only legal access is through this area. I also comment I have been a volunteer fire fighter since I have been living in the area. I assume you have read my submission. I apologise that it was compiled rather hastily because I only found out about this inquiry almost at the last minute.

CHAIR: Yes, we have read your submission. Are you happy for us to proceed to questions or would you like to add anything?

Mr DENHAM: Just to comment that the two documents I have tabled, one is just a timeline of my interactions with National Parks. It is more for reference rather than to go through in detail. The second one is a set of pictures. These are in chronological order and reflect, firstly, the problems I encountered with the Spring Creek Crossing, which is mentioned in my submission, and secondly the pretty much current state of some of the roads I use. This morning I came up Mount Carl Road and the photographs I took a year ago that are in that submission, in that document you have there, could well have been taken today.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Could you expand a bit on your second paragraph where you said, "I was told they were required to maintain access for those who required it but with surprising frankness the speaker said that the National Parks and Wildlife Service would do their best to evade such responsibility."

Mr DENHAM: This was at one of the public meetings that were held when the whole change of status of the Goonoo was being discussed. This was in Mendooran. There was a speaker from National Parks there and I put the question what happens to my access through the forest, because this was my principal concern. He replied—I cannot remember the exact wording, but it was something along the lines that they were required to maintain access, and then he indicated—

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: For people with existing access?

Mr DENHAM: Yes, for people with existing access. This includes me and there are a number of adjoining properties. I assume there is a similar situation in other areas. I was astounded when he said they would do whatever they could to avoid this commitment.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Did you think to ask what he meant by that? Would they abandon maintenance or find some other subtle ways to make it hard?

Mr DENHAM: He suggested they might try to excerpt the roads being used from the national park so they would not have to maintain them.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: What sort of authority did he have?

Mr DENHAM: I do not know what position he was. He was a fairly senior person. Unfortunately I did not note down his name. I am at a bit of a loss there. But he was someone who was at a fairly senior level within National Parks. I point out this was quite a few years ago now.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: You mentioned erosion. Can you describe the edges of the roads? Is there any buffer zone these days? You said you came across one fallen tree there somewhere. What is the maintenance like these days?

Mr DENHAM: My main access is along Freemans Road. Today I came up Mount Carl Road because it is north-south, the main north-south road in that part of the Goonoo. Parts of Freemans Road have been graded in the past six months and they have improved it in places. That is quite good. Coming up Mount Carl Road, it is about a year since I have been up there previously, and quite obviously there has been no maintenance whatever done in that period. There are still major washouts—a couple shown in those pictures you have there—and I had to drive either around or over the top of at least four trees on the way to get here.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: If you had a seat at the table when conversion was being talked about and you have the experience of someone who has neighboured a State forest converted to a national park, what would you ask for to guide them?

Mr DENHAM: I think the biggest difference between my relationship with Forests and National Parks is, as I mentioned in my submission, the first thing we heard about national parks was one of my neighbours had been filling in some potholes which he had been doing for years under forestry administration and he was warned off and told he would get prosecuted if he did that, but they did not do anything about it.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: In your submission you state that the problem seems to be the restrictive legislation under which the National Parks and Wildlife Service operates. You say your personal relationship with the local National Parks and Wildlife Service staff is quite good. How can they be better neighbours and what do you mean by restrictive legislation in comparison with Forests NSW?

Mr DENHAM: It may not be the actual legislation, it may be the interpretation of it. For example the major problem I had with the Spring Creek Crossing, all it needed was just to stop the water running down the road after the fire. I could have done it in an hour or two with a shovel. By the time they came to do it, it involved heavy machinery and about a week's work 2½ years later. Before they could stop the water running down the road they had to do an engineering study, an environmental study, a search for Aboriginal artefacts, and, I point out, it is a crossing that has been in use, to my knowledge, at least 100 years. It had just had a bulldozer put through it during the fire, but, no, you cannot stop the erosion without doing all these studies.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Did that happen when it was Forests NSW land?

Mr DENHAM: To my knowledge they never did anything but they did not object to me stopping the erosion either.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Do you believe there might be a case here of benevolent neglect? Perhaps if you get so aggravated with the state of access to your property you will eventually want to sell up so that they can expand Goonoo?

Mr DENHAM: I do not think there is any evidence to suggest that.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: You say on 21 November 2008 you were supposed to receive a visit from an officer of the National Parks and Wildlife Service but "he considered the crossing too dangerous to cross". Is that not the whole point of your problem?

Mr DENHAM: I think that emphasises the problem. There was always the possibility that he did not want to come and meet me on my own ground. I am assuming seriously that he thought it was too dangerous to cross.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: If the Government were to amend the Act would you seek a grandfathering provision for the previous access routes and the maintenance of them? What exactly are you looking for? I am not saying that I think there is probably a good argument for grandfathering of access routes—

Mr DENHAM: I think the problem is that everything the National Parks does is tied up in red tape. This is a typical example. They cannot do anything when it is needed so by the time it gets done it cost 10 times as much. We are talking about financing these national parks. One way of improving the financing is surely to use a bit of common sense.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: You have hit on a theme that others have raised—namely, there is a neglect of inexpensive prevention for the sake of expensive cure?

Mr DENHAM: Because before you can do the inexpensive prevention you have to carry out an environmental study, a heritage study and a threatened species study.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Your timeline is most informative. I see in recent times a stream of responses from luminaries in the new government, but you only tell us there have been responses. Have you been satisfied with those responses from the likes of Troy Grant and Kevin Humphries? Have they resolved your difficulties?

Mr DENHAM: That particular one I am talking about there the answer is yes but long after it would have been a good idea. I am afraid I have to say that the most useful parliamentarian in all my dealings in this area has been the former member for Dubbo.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Dawn Fardell?

Mr DENHAM: Yes. I must say that I find Troy Grant more useful than my own member. Mind you, I am right on the boundary—the creek crossing we are talking about is the electorate boundary.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: At the end of your timeline you have received a response from Robyn Parker. Robyn Parker is the Minister for the Environment, and Minister for Heritage in this State. What has she told you about the operations of her agency: the National Parks and Wildlife Service?

Mr DENHAM: About three paragraphs that don't say anything.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: Really?

Mr DENHAM: They did not really say very much. Actually what they suggested is that I ought to make a maintenance agreement with National Parks, whatever that is.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: That was Robyn Parker's advice?

Mr DENHAM: Yes, that is the only concrete thing in the three paragraphs.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: In her three paragraphs.

Mr DENHAM: Yes.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: What did you think of that advice?

Mr DENHAM: I have not had a chance to pursue it further. I seem to have had a very busy time. That was in about March I think it was—you have got the timeline there; unfortunately I do not have a copy of it in front of me.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: February.

Mr DENHAM: February, was it?

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: The Committee has to make some recommendations to the Government and it will probably make some to Robyn Parker as Minister for the Environment, and Minister for Heritage. What would you like the Committee to recommend to the Government and particularly to the Minister who presides over the National Parks and Wildlife Service?

Mr DENHAM: I think the recommendation that I would like to see would be some way of reducing the red tape. It is not just red tape, it is the culture. For example, this fire we had in 2007, they could not fix the drainage on the crossing but, while the fire was still burning, they were able to lay logs across where part of one of the roads had been widened to make a firebreak as part of the fire control process. There was time to lay logs

in the widened section and narrow it back to a single lane but they could not do anything for preventive maintenance.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: So it would be your hope, would it, that Robyn Parker, the Minister for the Environment, and Minister for Heritage, would lead sweeping cultural change within her agency?

Mr DENHAM: I think it would be a big ask. That is what I would like to see.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: The Committee will pass that on to her.

CHAIR: You and your neighbours are not innholders, are you? In the event of a fire do you have other egress ways to get out of there?

Mr DENHAM: I do. But one of my near neighbours—who in fact is deceased and I do not know who owns the property now—there is one property where the only way out is through the forest. I can get out through neighbours' in two directions into cleared land. About two-thirds of my property is bush.

CHAIR: As long as one of those roads is trafficable you could get out?

Mr DENHAM: Yes. The only catch is that it involves getting across the Talbragar River, which can be a problem if it is up, but you can get into open country.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: You were talking about the culture of the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Mr Foley made some suggestions that the Committee might look at a recommendation about the culture. Can you tell us how long that National Parks culture has been in place and under whose ministership did it develop?

Mr DENHAM: I am afraid I cannot comment on that because I have only had anything to do with them in detail since Goonoo was taken over by National Parks, which I think was—

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: So that cultural problem has existed since the Goonoo park was established?

Mr DENHAM: It has not changed.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Did you have any issues dealing with State Forests prior to the conversion?

Mr DENHAM: There were problems with the roads but they never objected if I filled in a pothole or even ran a blade over short sections.

CHAIR: The Committee knows you have come a way and that you have had some difficulties in putting the time aside to get here. We thank you very much for coming and giving your evidence today. The object of these inquiries is to put recommendations to the Government. Some Committee members may wish to ask you some further questions on notice. Are you happy to receive those questions?

Mr DENHAM: I am happy to receive any questions that the Committee or members care to ask. I will answer them to the best of my ability.

CHAIR: We generally ask 21 days for a response. Would that suit you?

Mr DENHAM: That will be okay. Can I suggest that sending them by email would be best because I only usually pick my mail up about once a week—

CHAIR: And that depends on the crossing.

Mr DENHAM: Yes.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Good luck getting home today.

Mr DENHAM: As long as it does not rain until tomorrow I am fine. Actually it will be okay because the ground is dry enough. It will take more than a day's rain.

CHAIR: I think they are forecasting 15 millimetres tonight.

Mr DENHAM: Even 15 millimetres would not be a problem.

CHAIR: That concludes the series of hearings in this region. The Committee thanks all participants for his or her time and patience. Further hearings will be held in Port Macquarie and Grafton next week, and following that further hearings will be held in Sydney. If anyone present has not put in a submission but wishes to do so I am sure the secretariat will consider looking at any such submissions. It is all about getting information from you, not about the Committee talking at you.

(The witness withdrew)

(The Committee adjourned at 12.56 p.m.)