

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

**INQUIRY INTO PASTORAL LEASES  
IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE  
TAKEN AT CARNARVON  
TUESDAY, 5 NOVEMBER 2013**

**SESSION ONE**

**Members**

**Hon Liz Behjat (Chairman)  
Hon Darren West (Deputy Chairman)  
Hon Nigel Hallett  
Hon Jacqui Boydell  
Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson**

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**Hearing commenced at 11.33 am**

**Mr JOHN PERCY,**  
**Chair, Lyndon Land Conservation District Committee, sworn and examined:**

**Mr SEAN D'ARCY,**  
**Chair, Gascoyne Catchment Group, sworn and examined:**

**Mrs JODIE McTAGGART,**  
**Committee member, Upper Gascoyne Land Conservation District Committee, sworn and examined:**

**The CHAIRMAN:** I am officially calling to order at 11.33 am this hearing of the Standing Committee on Public Administration of the Legislative Council. Firstly, I would like to welcome to this public inquiry everyone who is here to give evidence, and those who have come to listen.

My name is Liz Behjat; I am the chairman of this committee, and I will introduce you to our committee members a bit later.

At this time, I need to make a statement to everyone in the room. It seems through some information that may have come to the public via members from a chamber other than the Legislative Council that there is an expectation that this hearing today will be a type of town hall meeting or community meeting at which members of the public will get the opportunity to ask members of this committee questions with regard to our inquiry. I have to say, unfortunately, that that was a bit of misinformation that was put out, and that is not the case. This is a hearing of a parliamentary committee, and the committee members will be asking questions of those people who have agreed to be a witness today, and there is no opportunity for a backwards and forwards exchange of commentary. I wanted to make that clear from the outset, and hopefully it will not upset anybody too much with any expectations that they may have had.

As I have said, I am the chairman of the committee. To my left, we have Hon Nigel Hallett; Hon Darren West; our advisory officer, Dr Julia Lawrinson; and the fourth member of our committee today, Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson.

We will get underway. However, before we start, there are a number of formalities that we need to go through. On behalf of the committee, I would like to welcome you to the meeting. Before we begin, I must ask you to take either the oath or the affirmation.

[Witnesses took the oath or affirmation.]

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you. You will all have signed a document entitled "Information for Witnesses". Have you read and understood that document?

**The Witnesses:** Yes.

**The CHAIRMAN:** These proceedings are being recorded by Hansard. A transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. To assist the committee and Hansard, please quote the full title of any document that you refer to during the course of this hearing for the record, and please be aware of the microphones and try to speak into them. Ensure that you do not cover them with papers or make noise near them. I remind you that your transcript will become a matter for the public record. If for some reason you wish to make a confidential statement during today's proceedings, you should request that the evidence be taken in closed session. If at any stage you want to do that, I

have to warn you that you should make that request before you start to say anything that you think should be private. The committee will then deliberate; and, if it grants your request, any public and media in attendance will be excluded from the hearing. Please note until such time as the transcript of your public evidence is finalised, it should not be made public. I advise you that publication or disclosure of the uncorrected transcript of evidence may constitute a contempt of Parliament and may mean that the material published or disclosed is not subject to parliamentary privilege.

That is the formal part over and done with. Would any of you like to make an opening statement to the committee?

**Mr D’Arcy:** Yes, I will say a few words. Thank you very much for taking the time to meet with us and thanks for taking our submission. The Gascoyne Catchment Group is essentially a natural resource management group. We branch into other areas a little bit, but we are basically formed from three land conservation district committees. Our area of expertise is rangeland health and natural resource management, specifically rangeland monitoring. We represent 42 pastoral properties in the region through those three LCDCs. We would like to focus specifically on the stuff in our submission, which is the natural resource management issues. As you read in our submission, we are concerned about some of the data that has come out and obviously has been presented to this committee. We do not agree that the rangelands health is going backwards. We believe it is going the other way, from our evidence and from our monitoring tool. We agree that there has been some historic degradation. But we think that has turned around probably for the last 30 years since the original pastoral monitoring stuff was done in the 1980s—that is what our evidence is showing us.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Our understanding is that you developed the monitoring tool.

**Mr D’Arcy:** The Gascoyne Catchment Group did, yes.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Okay.

[11.40 am]

**Mr Percy:** We did not fully develop it. We derived it from the PM sites. Our original mantra for putting things together was that we had been under fire as an industry and a region and had been told that the country was going backwards.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Under fire from whom?

**Mr Percy:** It varies. We get it from various departments. There was a report on Lake Macleod, and that implicated us for various things—it is more to do with finger-pointing—but it seems to be something that our industry is living with. We as a whole reckon that things have been improving. Sure, historically there has been degradation, but we thought the tide had turned somewhat. The ag department had put in the PM sites in the mid-1980s, and that was right through the area, and I think it is pretty much through the state. We just wanted originally to analyse the historic data and get an idea of where things are now so that we can step back and see what has happened over a longer-term period of about 30-odd years. That is where that has come from. As far as us developing the PMS, we fiddled around at the edges with doing different things with it. But that is the guts of the PMS.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Our understanding is that DAFWA’s rangeland condition assessments were used up until 2009. How does the tool that you developed differ from what the department was doing?

**Mr Percy:** On the PM sites?

**The CHAIRMAN:** Yes.

**Mr Percy:** Nothing, because we just count the plants.

**Mrs McTaggart:** There are a few differences between us, John.

**Mr Percy:** Apart from what mainly Jodie has put in.

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**Mrs McTaggart:** There are some quite substantial differences between our tool and what was being used by the Department of Agriculture up until 2009. Very briefly—I could go into a lot more description, but I will try to keep it brief—is that there are three parts to our monitoring tool. We monitor plant, soil and erosion, all in one single PM site, and we then take the recordings of those three elements and we put those together to form a proper perspective of what is going on, based on pastoral monitoring sites. Some properties will have 20 sites, others will have 100 sites, depending on the size.

**The CHAIRMAN:** How do you determine how many PMS you will have? Is it based on the size of the property?

**Mrs McTaggart:** The pastoral monitoring sites have already been put in place. They were put in place by the Department of Agriculture. The monitoring tool is based a lot on the methodology of collecting the PMS data, which is counting perennial plants. We count every single perennial plant that occurs within every single monitoring site, whether it is a grass or a shrub. Regardless of the fact that the Gascoyne catchment is classed as a shrub land, we also count all perennial grasses as well. That is one of the main differences.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** Has it been the same sites from way back?

**Mrs McTaggart:** The same sites since the early 1980s, yes, on each property. The other differences are that we collect soil and erosion information specifically within those sites as well; so plant, soil and erosion. There are five soil attributes that we look at. We make an assessment of the percentage coverage of those soil attributes, and we then make an assessment of three different types of erosion, again based on the percentage coverage of those attributes of those erosion types within that site. Each of those three elements is awarded a value between one and 10. Those three values are added together at the end —

**The CHAIRMAN:** Ten being the highest?

**Mrs McTaggart:** Yes, 10 being the highest. Erosion actually has a negative value, because it is taking points away from a site. The idea is that at the end of the assessment of your individual PM site, you have a number, and that number can reduce, remain the same or increase over the next measuring period, which could be 12 months, three months or 10 years, and you can make a comparison. You add all of your pastoral monitoring sites and early index figures together to get an overall property number. That is basically how our tool differs from that of the Department of Agriculture.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Is that all done manually, where you physically go and look at the site and count the plants? It is not done by a computer program or GPS?

**Mrs McTaggart:** Not at all.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Or GPSs?

**Mrs McTaggart:** We do use GPSs to log the waypoints of those sites and we use a computer program that we enter that information that we have collected in the field.

**The CHAIRMAN:** To collate the data.

**Mrs McTaggart:** Yes, to collate the data, so there is definitely a computer program there. But the main crux of it is all physical, manual labour.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** You do that when you are out and about.

**Mrs McTaggart:** Yes.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** And just put that back into a central sort of a database, if you like.

**Mrs McTaggart:** That is what we do, yes. So we go around and we do that on our properties. And then we have developed one phase of the monitoring tool which is exactly what I have explained to

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you. We are in the process of developing the next phase now, which is bolting on livestock production elements and short-term trend elements to do with food on offer and forage budgeting—that sort of thing. So, that is the next phase that we are just rolling into now. The work that we have done so far in the last six years with the monitoring tool is going to several properties, carrying out the monitoring tool on individual sites on those properties, collating that information and then coming up with a catchment-wide number basically that we can then break into averages or averages per land system or averages for waterways.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** So you use that as a management tool as well as a monitoring tool.

**Mrs McTaggart:** We do, yes. It is a management tool but it is a very long-term management tool, as you would understand. With rangeland monitoring those things happen over a long period of time.

**Hon NIGEL HALLETT:** Jodie, what do you put down as the main reason to getting a good increase in your plants and your environmental growth?

**Mrs McTaggart:** To get a higher score in the site?

**Hon NIGEL HALLETT:** Yes.

**Mrs McTaggart:** Usually the higher scoring sites are not every single perennial plant, but for the most commonly occurring perennial plants in the Gascoyne catchment we have come up with a value of between zero and 10. So, if you have a site that has a high frequency of highly valuable plants—and that is valuable in terms of its livestock utilisation value, and its ecosystem value is also what it is indicating about its presence in that landscape and what it is also putting back into the landscape—if you have a high frequency of high-scoring plants, then usually your plants will get you the highest score. Soil attributes as well. As I said, if you have a high frequency of high-scoring plants with a good coverage, like a very high percentage coverage of those soil attributes which are litter, a biological crust and just those sorts of things, then that is what we have been finding is scoring very highly. And very little erosion because, like I said before, the erosion will actually take points away from what you have gained through your plants and soils.

**Mr D'Arcy:** Can I just go a bit broader and just clarify something, if that is okay? I think in the original question, the ag department way of assessing the rangelands is transacts, where they stop every kilometre and make a visual assessment whether the rangeland conditions are poor, fair or good. And their second way is WARMS sites, which are essentially the same as PMS sites but they are very broadly spaced.

**The CHAIRMAN:** WARMS sites?

**Mr D'Arcy:** WARMS sites. Our property, for example, is 1.2 million acres and I think we have six; whereas we have 65 PMS sites. So they are a very small snapshot—WARMS sites—of the area.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** Do they sort of look for sweeter country or are they just randomly logged, or how do they sort of pick their sites?

**Mr D'Arcy:** The WARMS sites?

**Hon DARREN WEST:** Yes.

**Mr D'Arcy:** I think they were originally supposed to be on areas they thought would not change very much so they could get a catchment-wide site.

**Mrs McTaggart:** Which a lot of PMS sites were.

**Mr D'Arcy:** And the difference is on the WARMS sites in the shrub lands—we are all called shrub lands—the Department of Agriculture and Food is only counting shrubs and they are ignoring grasses. We count shrubs and grasses because we believe that is the whole picture. And I think that is the big reason for why we are finding such a different result from them, because we are getting a lot less winter rain now. We used to be more predominantly a winter rainfall belt; now we are

predominantly a summer rainfall belt. And winter rainfall country tends to be shrub lands; it tends to have more shrubs than grasses. And as a more summer rainfall pattern comes in with climate change, as we are seeing, we are getting more grasses on our sites and sometimes less shrubs. So we think that with the change in season, we are not getting the winter seasons anymore that the desirable shrubs need to reproduce. We are seeing a lot more grasses, and we are seeing those grasses as a good thing because it means we are in transition. They are a very useful thing in the pastoral system and they are very useful for the rangelands. To take such a snapshot that is not looking at the rangelands as a whole is why I think the latest round of monitoring by the Department of Agriculture and Food is showing that the shrub lands are going backwards so dramatically.

[11.50 am]

**The CHAIRMAN:** How would you describe your working relationship with DAFWA and DPaW, or is it not a working relationship?

**Mr D’Arcy:** I do not think the working relationship with DAF is particularly good at the moment.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** What are the resources here? What resources do DAFWA have to do what they are doing?

**Mr D’Arcy:** In Carnarvon?

**Hon DARREN WEST:** Yes, or in the sort of broader Gascoyne, I suppose, in your areas.

**Mrs McTaggart:** There are very little resources from the Carnarvon office coming from —

**Mr Percy:** They have got good people, though, just got a lot less of them than they used to.

**Mrs McTaggart:** Yes.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** That is why I asked because it is the same everywhere.

**Mr D’Arcy:** Yes. It is just that resources are getting pulled.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Sorry, can we just limit it to one at a time otherwise Hansard is not going to be able to get this down.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** Sorry, you were talking about the resources.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I want to know about the relationship between DAFWA, DPaW and your group; and leading on from that, Hon Darren West was wanting to know about the presence of DAFWA. Evidence was given to us yesterday when we were in Kalgoorlie that there has been a diminished presence of DAFWA personnel in that area, which then leads to problems in the association with management of areas. What have you observed in this area?

**Mr D’Arcy:** Just on the relationship with DAFWA, we very much feel that the industry is being vilified a lot on a lot of grounds, but mainly on this rangeland health ground. And there have been some reports —

**The CHAIRMAN:** That DAFWA itself is vilifying the industry?

**Mr D’Arcy:** Yes, and there are some reports that have been written lately with no pastoral consultation and have painted a very grim picture of the job pastoralists are doing on the rangelands. And we very much disagreed with those and met with DAFWA on those reports; the main one lately being the report on the 2010 floods, which we disagreed with a lot of stuff that was written in that and we have not really had any satisfaction out of those meetings. But I think that some of that stuff that has just come out, and there has been no consultation or no use of the huge amount of knowledge that pastoralists have, has really damaged the relationship I think.

**The CHAIRMAN:** They are not using an advisory group from the pastoralists to assist them in the management of the area.

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**Mr D’Arcy:** No.

**Mrs McTaggart:** Not that we are aware of.

**The CHAIRMAN:** What about your relationship with DPaW; do they come into the picture at all?

**Mrs McTaggart:** Not so much with the Gascoyne Catchments Group. I think you will find that on a personal level there is some interaction one way or another with pastoralists in the area that the Gascoyne Catchments Group falls into, but not so much directly with the Gascoyne Catchments Group committee. We do not really have a lot to do with them

**Hon NIGEL HALLETT:** Sean, who from DAFWA—is it the city—is writing those reports or is it a district office or where is that misinformation from?

**Mr D’Arcy:** My understanding is that is all South Perth, and it is all coming from there; and a study that followed on from that study was the study—I forget what it was called—about the rangelands being on the brink. We have a lot of issues with that study as well. We certainly do not believe the rangelands are on the brink and we certainly do not believe that the environmental collapse they are talking about is happening.

**The CHAIRMAN:** What is happening with the stock numbers in this area? Again, evidence that we heard yesterday was that there has been a massive decrease in stock in the areas where we were yesterday, largely due to a dog problem. What has been happening in this area with regard to the stock numbers?

**Mr D’Arcy:** I think they are essentially stable. I mean, there was a big change 10 years ago from sheep and cattle, but there was a dramatic reduction during the end of the 2000 decade, which was the worst decade that we have ever had. Through that and towards the end of that there were some big places that almost completely de-stocked, but I think numbers are back up again.

**Mrs McTaggart:** I think that is probably a fairly difficult question for us to answer because, you know, we can say what we know for our own properties —

**The CHAIRMAN:** Yes, fine, just what is happening on your own properties really.

**Mrs McTaggart:** I know our numbers on the station that we are from, which is 1.7 million acres, have not changed dramatically at all. In the last six years that I have had anything to do with that property, we have remained at the same number.

**The CHAIRMAN:** What are those?

**Mrs McTaggart:** That is 5 000 breeder cows. We de-stocked dramatically in 2010 as a result of the flood and did not actually restock the property until about halfway through 2011 after the floods, but our numbers have essentially remained the same year in, year out.

**The CHAIRMAN:** You do not have a dog problem in this area, as they did in the area where we were yesterday?

**Mr Percy:** There is a dog problem.

**The CHAIRMAN:** But not as prevalent, obviously, because —

**Mr Percy:** It is becoming that way.

**Mrs McTaggart:** It is different stocking as well. I think you see a lot more of a dramatic effect on smaller stock units than what you do on cattle. We certainly have enormous dog numbers.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Is there a baiting program undertaken in this area?

**Mrs McTaggart:** Yes, there is.

**The CHAIRMAN:** With 1080 or —

**Mrs McTaggart:** Yes. All baits are 1080 baits. The dogging groups employ doggers who look after areas which trap and bait as well.

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**The CHAIRMAN:** Do you know how many doggers there are working in the area?

**Mr D'Arcy:** Are there four or five Carnarvon —

**Mr Percy:** It has changed though.

**Mr D'Arcy:** The people sitting behind me will know exactly. I think it might be five in the Carnarvon regional biosecurity area, which goes all the way down to not that far north of Geraldton. It is quite a big area.

**The CHAIRMAN:** One of the terms of reference of this inquiry, as you are probably aware, is the proposed 2015 pastoral lease. Do you have any comments you would like to make with regard to that process and what has been happening in that space?

**Mr D'Arcy:** We have come here, essentially, to talk about the natural resource management stuff. We are very concerned about the process. But, essentially, we had a bit of a talk this morning and I know you have received submissions from the Pastoralists and Graziers Association. Really, our stance is pretty much what they are saying. I am sure you will hear lots of stuff on tenure.

**Mr Percy:** They do it a lot better. We are all members of the PGA and have spoken with them, but they are far better equipped to deal with that issue, really.

**The CHAIRMAN:** If I get this correct, you are saying that the picture that is being painted publicly, if you like, is very different from the reality in relation to the monitoring system.

**Mr D'Arcy:** I think so—the rangeland health and also the general state of the rangelands in this area. They are good, strong, businesses. They are going through a very tough stage, obviously, mainly because of factors outside our control and government intervention and things like that. We very much believe in the industry and we very much believe in the strength of the businesses in this area. I think they are good, strong, viable operations that have raised families for generations and we think they can remain that way with maybe the opportunity to do our job and go about it.

**Mr Percy:** One of the variations of what the information —

It is understood by most of the government departments that climate change is a reality and the model seemed to indicate that a shift south with the winter patterns is involved with that, and a shift south with the southern patterns is part of that. If you take those elements as happening, and the evidence is that they are, as far as what the rainfall has been doing in this area, and understand that we are a transitional area between the grasslands and the shrub lands—you get into the Pilbara and you are pretty much more into the grassland—it is a fairly logical step to think that if the climate shifts south, the grasslands are going to shift south. So if the WARMS site monitoring of this area is all done on shrubs and ignores the grasses, it is dismissing what is happening on the ground. It is a fundamental flaw in the process.

**Hon NIGEL HALLETT:** I am just trying to understand your leases. Do you have a restriction on the number of cattle that you can run on it? Were you affected by the Indonesian closure or is that further north than you guys?

[12.00 noon]

**Mrs McTaggart:** We have guidelines that we are to abide by that are set by the Pastoral Lands Board. Those numbers are taken on advice and given to the Pastoral Lands Board by pastoral lease assessments, so yes, we do. The numbers that we are truthful about when we do our pastoral returns need to reflect what our capacity is that has been given to us by the Pastoral Lands Board. I cannot comment on the live export trade to Indonesia because at the time that occurred we had completely destocked and had no cattle to sell due to the drought and the floods, so our business was not actually affected by that up until probably 2012, at which stage it was probably starting to strengthen a bit. But I can say that in the last three months we have been mustering cattle and we have found that this has been one of the better years by far for accessing trade markets overseas.

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**Hon NIGEL HALLETT:** Going back to that rangelands report of the department, is that going to go back to the lands council to put pressure on you to drop your stocking levels?

**Mrs McTaggart:** I would imagine so.

**Hon NIGEL HALLETT:** How are you going to go with that?

**Mr D'Arcy:** We have written to the PLB about that report and I am comfortable that they have heard our side of the argument.

**Mrs McTaggart:** The evidence we have been collecting for the last six years is very comprehensive for all the people who are involved in the Gascoyne catchments group and for our property in particular, ourselves, through the monitoring tool, because it is such a comprehensive way of monitoring and collecting pieces of information that we can possibly think of, we are fairly confident that on an individual property scale, our evidence will overthrow whatever was recorded by that report anyway.

**Mr Percy:** We did put a submission to the PLB for a reassessment of this area on the basis of the increase in buffel grass, as has already happened in the Ashburton, Pilbara and possibly the Kimberley, from my understanding.

**The CHAIRMAN:** When did you make that submission?

**Mr Percy:** When did we go down there?

**Mr D'Arcy:** Two years ago.

**Mr Percy:** Yes. They approved our recommendation. But that gets tied up in the wheels of bureaucracy, no doubt.

**The CHAIRMAN:** They have not approved —

**Mr Percy:** They did; they approved our recommendations that there be a reassessment of the area.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Has the reassessment taken place?

**Mr Percy:** No. They have to take those to Lands as far as I know.

**The CHAIRMAN:** They have not set down a time frame as to when that reassessment may occur?

**Mr Percy:** No; I do not think it is in the PLB's hands. I am not exactly sure of the workings.

**The CHAIRMAN:** There seems to be a bit of a mystery as to how the whole hierarchical matrix works and who makes —

**Mr Percy:** I think Sir Humphrey is in there somewhere.

**Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON:** Because this inquiry is focused around the leases and the lease process, are you concerned about the environmental process that the department has embarked on? Do you fundamentally disagree with the impact on the renewal of your leases and any terms and conditions that will be in that? Is that your fundamental position?

**Mr Percy:** Absolutely it is. Yes we do wonder about the motive for all these reportings coming back and the timing—absolutely we do, because there are other reports. I cannot reel them off, but there are, historically, reports that have come out showing positive things for the industry. They do not see the light of day at the moment.

**Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON:** On your request to have the assessment redone, have they agreed to redo it widening the scope of the assessment or just on the WARMS sites again?

**Mr Percy:** No; that would be, I think, before Alan Payne was involved and Tom Speschen. They go around and do an assessment on it.

**Mrs McTaggart:** It is a different process from WARMS monitoring.

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**Hon DARREN WEST:** I have a couple more questions. I am quite interested in this data collection that you are doing in terms of monitoring and regulating. You are collecting data yourself—counting the plants and checking erosion and the soil. Is it right that you have a pro forma that you fill in annually? Do you do that yourselves?

**Mrs McTaggart:** The PMS model goes on every five to six years, so that is what we have been basing ours on.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** So you are doing it at reasonably regular intervals. This sounds to me like a bit better way than someone just driving around going through your average —

**The CHAIRMAN:** There is some science involved, it would seem.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** And also it is more objective than subjective.

**Mrs McTaggart:** Absolutely. That was our sole aim.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** If you have this sort of system, it clearly saves the department, or whoever used to do that, a whole lot of work. If you are doing it, they just have to come along and randomly check, just like we do with our tax returns. Do you feel that the system that has evolved is going to be something that would stand up to the rigours of bureaucratic assessment? Do you think that the data would be sound enough that it would be able to withstand that level of scrutiny and regulation of government?

**Mrs McTaggart:** Absolutely. I have got every confidence that it would. It was a difficult project to take on because it was developed by landholders. We had a lot of outside help from all members of the pastoral community. We had rangeland scientists. We had department of agriculture experts come and advise us on some of the decisions we were making. We had ruminant nutritionists come and look at what we were doing. We travelled all around Australia, looking at all the different types of monitoring to see which would fit best to a tailor-made system for the Gascoyne catchment. The thing that I believe strengthens our approach to monitoring, or the monitoring tool, is that it is so comprehensive. We have just tried to make it so that we are not leaving any gaps out. We do arrive at the site and we do count every single thing that is perennial that is occurring on that site. We actually even count the annual cover on that, but that is listed as a soil attribute. One of the purposes is that if we ever were to be questioned on the vigour of the information that we collected, it is so comprehensive. There is so much that we have collected that I think it is indisputable.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** I could also see it as useful. Obviously, every year is going to be different and the details looking back historically. I think all of us involved in agriculture understand the reality of climate change and we do need to be a bit pre-emptive and perhaps learn to try to predict it as well as the black one.

**The CHAIRMAN:** With this whole system that you have developed, and you explained a bit more about how you have travelled extensively to do it, did you fund it yourselves?

**Mrs McTaggart:** It was funded through the state NRM initially; is that correct?

**Mr D'Arcy:** And the National Heritage Trust.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Have you patented the system?

**Mrs McTaggart:** Yes.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I was going to say that if you had not, you should! Is there anything else that you would like us to take away today that you do not think you have covered well enough in your submission and your oral evidence today?

**Hon DARREN WEST:** As soon as you get up, you will think of it!

**Mrs McTaggart:** I think I would just like to reiterate one point and that is the change in season variability and rainfall that we have been experiencing, especially in the last 10 years. The

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Gascoyne catchment is a shrub land. A lot of the desirable shrubs that the department of ag and those sorts of people are interested in assessing are desirable shrubs, and they are chenopods basically and they are the bluebushes and saltbushes and those sorts of things. I know there are people in this room who know a lot more about this than I do, but my understanding is that the recruitment rate for those sorts of plants occurs in the winter rain and there is a 12-month period of opportunity for that plant seed to germinate and recruit. If we have not had a winter rain for 10 years, we are not going to see the recruitment of those desirable species. Do we put that down to increased stocking rates or do we also have to consider the change in climate that we have been experiencing, which I do not think is something that the department of ag has been considering as much as we believe they should be?

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you very much for coming today. I have certainly found your evidence very useful and informative. I suppose, as a comment, I fail to see why they are not listening to the people who are actually on the ground living this day in, day out. It seems to me that there might be some issues there that obviously could be worked through a little better from a bureaucratic point of view, which perhaps might be the best way to put it. Thank you very much for coming along today.

**Hon NIGEL HALLETT:** It was fantastic to see someone so young and so enthusiastic about their industry; it is great.

**Mrs McTaggart:** Thank you.

**The CHAIRMAN:** It has been very interesting evidence. Thank you.

**Hearing concluded at 12.10 pm**

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