

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
AND FINANCE**

LAND INQUIRY

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN
AT DANDARAGAN
WEDNESDAY, 2 OCTOBER 2002**

SESSION 2

Members

**Hon Barry House (Chairman
Hon Ed Dermer (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Murray Criddle
Hon John Fischer
Hon Dee Margetts
Hon Ken Travers
Hon Sue Ellery**

[10.24 am]

FERGUSON, MR JIM
Environmental Consultant, Ferguson,
Kenneison and Associates,
examined:

UNDERWOOD, MR CRAIG
Director, Oblivion Pty Ltd,
examined:

UNDERWOOD, MRS JANE,
Secretary, Oblivion Pty Ltd,
examined:

The CHAIRMAN: Welcome ladies and gentlemen. You will 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 you refer to during the course of this hearing. 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 the committee grants your request, any public and media in attendance will be excluded from the hearing. Please note that until such time as the transcript of your public evidence is finalised, it should not be made public. I advise you that premature publication or disclosure of public evidence may constitute a contempt of Parliament and may mean that the material published or disclosed is not subject to parliamentary privilege. Although this is a formal hearing, we like to conduct it in a relatively informal way. Would you like to make an opening statement to the committee?

Mr Underwood: In 1993 my wife and I made an offer to purchase Victoria location 10598 Cockleshell Gully Road, Jurien Bay, with a settlement date in February 1994. The property was 28 per cent developed with the remaining 72 per cent being remnant vegetation. The property had a valid clearing permit. It is in a safe, secure area for farming and the other activities we wanted to develop. It has sufficient rainfall, ideal soil types and is drought-proof, as is evident from this year. We thought that there would be very little commercial risk in what we were about to attempt, and we had a healthy cash reserve to carry out the work. The problem occurred when the Soil and Land Conservation Council or the Department of Agriculture would not recognise the validity of the clearing permit because the property had changed hands. My argument was that a permit is issued by the location number not the person and that, regardless of who owns the property, it should stay with the property. The Act does not say that the department can do that. The permit stays with the property. Nothing on the permit says that it can be revoked, and no notification was given to any permit holder of that period that any existing permit could be revoked. The sale went ahead on those grounds. The upshot is that, after five years, we were still trying to develop our land. It has been a long, lengthy, drawn-out, expensive, ridiculous process that should never have been allowed to happen. There should have been early intervention and perhaps access to ministers or whatever. It has cost us dearly. We are unable to carry on. That is the land-clearing problem. We started with 4 200 acres. At the end of the process, we ended up with 3 500 acres and a heap of conditions.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Was that 4 200 acres the whole area or the area that you wanted to clear?

Mr Underwood: That is the entire location area.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Did you want to clear the whole property?

Mr Underwood: No, it was not the whole property. We wanted to develop 1 000 hectares. There were 1 702 hectares and we wanted develop a further 1 000 hectares. In the end we could not reach agreement with any of the agencies because they were hell-bent on not allowing us to do anything, as I will prove to you later. By the end of that long, drawn-out period, I was despondent about the whole thing and under extreme duress so we reached agreement with the then Minister for the Environment to conserve 700 acres, or 330 hectares. The deal was that we could develop if we reserved that area. The reasons for reserving it were its biodiversity values and its position alongside Lesueur and Drover's Cave National Parks. Although the revegetation on our land was well represented in the national parks - there was no declared rare flora or anything like that - the main reasons for not allowing clearing were its biodiversity values and the public benefit. I firmly believe that where there is a public benefit to be gained, the public should pay. We have 700 acres of land that we cannot use. It is very expensive to replace that 700 acres of land, so we have had to write it off. It is on its own location. That was part of the agreement. It took one year and 11 months to have that land subdivided from the main property. That process involved two reconsiderations and one appeal. Yet, it was a ministerial agreement. The Western Australian Planning Commission did not take much notice of the agreements. It rejected them the whole way. We eventually got the subdivision through. Again, it was a totally unnecessary, lengthy and expensive process. We have permission to use 18 hectares in the corner of that property as a camping and transitional park for tourists. That was to be a later exercise for us - after we developed the main property.

I have some evidence that was obtained through the Freedom of Information Act. The commission will note that the Soil and Land Conservation Council had no objection to us clearing 820 hectares. The relevant document is dated 18 March 1994, approximately one month after we took over the property. We were never notified about that.

The CHAIRMAN: When did you find that out?

Mr Underwood: We obtained that document under FOI two years ago.

The CHAIRMAN: It was six years after you bought the property.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Did you say that when you bought the property, there was a permit to clear it?

Mr Underwood: That is right. The department said it would not honour that permit.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Were you aware when you bought the property that the department was not going to honour the permit.?

Mr Underwood: No.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: How much did that permit allow you to clear?

Mr Underwood: It was for 500 hectares.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Right.

Mr Underwood: We did not know that the Soil and Land Conservation Council had no objections to us developing the property. The committee will notice that on the second page of that document, the Department of Environmental Protection says -

. . . it seems there is nothing to prevent the land owner undertaking clearing, albeit without approval . . .

Why were we not notified of that? I think the department has acted totally out of order, deceitfully and dishonestly and has been biased in the way it handled this issue. It was the department's duty to inform us of this situation. We would not be sitting here today discussing this if I had been informed of our situation in this process. We would have fully developed our land and be doing quite nicely. The problems go back to the beginning. We were forced into a consultative environmental review by the DEP. We did everything that was asked within that - all the botanical studies, the hydrology studies - and the DEP decided that it was not good enough and requested another one. I cannot understand that, although I think prolonging the process was a way of wearing us down and forcing us to use all our reserves until we were sick of it and either gave up, dropped dead or went away. It was a total abuse of the process, the Act under which the officers operate and the public sector standards under which they should operate. I do not even know if the department has a code of ethics, but everything its officers did was unethical. They took five years to assess what I consider to be a simple thing: whether it is national park land or farmland. It was ridiculous to put Jane, me and my family through five years of environmental review after environmental review and all the studies, ongoing consultancy and work that was a consequence of the shifting goalposts. It was a very effective tool for the department to say, after we had done one thing it asked, that it wanted us to do something else. By their own admission, the officers put the proposal to sleep. I do not know for how long. I was given various excuses, such as long service leave and holidays. Someone cannot be on long service or holidays for up to five years. The Soil and Land Conservation Council initially told me that the process would be finished by the end of the first year; that is, it would run from February 1994 to December 1994. That was as long as it was supposed to take. We have the deliberately misleading reports submitted by Department of Agriculture hydrologists. They were later proved to be blatantly wrong. I think they were designed to jeopardise the proposal. To the departmental officers, they were legitimate tools. Once we realised how these people were going to play the game, it was a matter of hanging on for the long ride. There was no rationality or commonsense in the way this thing was assessed.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: What was the motivation?

Mr Underwood: I think the officers wanted to add my remnant vegetation to the national park estate, but they were not prepared to pay for it. They thought they could regulate or legislate to get it off us. They have been successful in doing that for 700 acres. I also feel it was part of the culture or the personal wish list of the people involved in the agencies. They were openly hostile on a number of occasions. It became perfectly clear that that was what they wanted and they did not care how they got it. There has been no natural justice or procedural fairness in the way they have operated. They completely ignored the rules of natural justice. They acted in a prejudicial manner right the way through. They made up their mind about the outcome and we could not do anything to stop it. I believe that that is not the original intent of the Acts these people operate under. They were running their own agenda and the relevant ministers had very little control over them. They had a free rein to do what they liked.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: The minister might not have been able to have control over them if the officers have authority under the Act to act independently.

Mr Underwood: I understand the role of the only Environmental Protection Authority is to provide advice to the minister. The various agencies that provide advice to the authority come firmly under various ministerial portfolios. However, I do not believe the ministers knew what was going on. It was very hard. I was told that I could not approach the minister while a consultative environmental review was under way or after the appeal process had started. I had to wait until the process had finished before I was able to approach the minister. Our hands were tied. No matter which angle we tried to take or whatever we tried to do, we were stalled or shoved aside. It has probably cost us close to \$2 million in loss of earnings and opportunity. When we bought the property, we owned all the machinery and infrastructure and had a healthy cash reserve of \$300 000 to finish the project. That property should have been running a thousand adult cattle now. We have

probably got one-tenth of that. We wanted to develop two small horticulture projects and a small agricultural project. The property has a lot of water and ideal soil types. The whole thing has been one enormous loss to us. Our house is fully mortgaged. If we cannot sell or liquidate something very shortly and get some financial strength back, the bank will move on the house. In fact, just last week it asked us for a review. We owned the house outright before this. We have gone from a \$300 000 cash reserve to a \$590 000 deficit. That is totally unacceptable.

I do not want to confuse the issue; however, after the review that began in 1994 and finished five years later when we reached agreement in December 1999, and after the two years it took to subdivide our land and start our project, which involved the clearing of land as per the permit, we now find ourselves the subject of the attention of the Water and Rivers Commission and the Water Corporation, which want to supply Jurien Bay with a public water supply. They will not have their modelling or requirements finished until 2004. We have effectively stopped all works because we will not invest good money in something we may not be able to carry out. We have to wait two and a half years for those agencies to make up their minds. In the meantime, the quality of our title has been badly affected. The tradeability of our title is non-existent. Three people were seriously interested in purchasing our property or one of the locations, but as the conditions of sale involve approval from the Water and Rivers Commission, the Water Corporation and the DEP, they did not want to know about it. It comes down to waiting for two and a half years for the Water Corporation to decide whether it needs an asset to supply water. I see that as asking me to transfer all the equity I have in my land and business to the Water Corporation to sell water at a massive profit. I think it is the third-largest revenue earner for the State. It has been suggested that the most likely zoning we will have will be priority 2. I am sure the bank would not like the restrictions associated with that. It would know that we could not meet our repayments if we tried to farm under those conditions. Tradeability is one thing, but I very much doubt whether anybody in his right mind would buy land with those restrictions placed on it, even though it has a horticultural rating. People could buy similar land elsewhere. Everything has stopped again. We find ourselves in a position in which we cannot sell our land and are not going to use it. It would be commercially stupid to develop the land until we get a clear run from the Water and Rivers Commission. The DEP put a farm management plan on the property, which states what crops I can grow; when I can grow them; what fertilisers, insecticides and herbicides I can use; and how much I can have on each hectare. I will not accept any of those conditions.

Here we are, nearly nine years down the track, and we have done very little. We have gone backwards and lost in excess of \$2 million in opportunities.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you want to add anything, Mrs Underwood?

Mrs Underwood: What I have to say will not need any input from the committee. I would prefer to say what I want to say after the committee has questioned Craig or Jim has spoken.

The CHAIRMAN: Fine. Mr Ferguson, do you want to say anything by way of opening?

Mr Ferguson: This case has been a travesty of justice throughout. The major, unlawful mistake was the failure of officers of the Soil and Land Conservation Council to notify Mr Underwood that there were no land degradation issues with his property. That is the major failure. He should have been notified. Instead, the commission notified the DEP and the next thing, Mr Underwood's property was subject to a consultative environmental review. It went from bad to worse. That is the main problem. I go back to what Mr Kenneison and I have always said: they disregard the laws of natural justice and procedural fairness and exhibit bias.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: At the beginning of this process, was there a clear indication that there was a permit to allow clearing to go ahead?

Mr Ferguson: Colorado Holdings Pty Ltd had that.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: Is it your view that, according to the law, the permit should have remained with the land?

Mr Ferguson: It is a good chance that it should have remained with the land.

The CHAIRMAN: Was Colorado Holdings the previous owner?

Mr Underwood: Yes.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: I think it is critical that we understand that point of view. I have already indicated to other people that that is the process in which I am interested, and will see how it travels from there.

Mr Ferguson: An agency wrote to the DEP and said that clearing on the land was okay and that there would be no land degradation issues on the 820 or 830 hectares about which the DEP was hoping to negotiate an agreement to preserve. Mr Underwood had no idea that that was going on. The processes of natural justice and procedural fairness broke down straight away. Under the Act, the Underwoods should have been immediately notified that there were no land degradation issues. The conservation issues do not come under the Soil and Land Conservation Act, as we have discussed before. The Environmental Defenders Office has been quite clear about that.

The second thing that should not have happened relates to the botanical trail. The DEP could not get Mr Underwood on salinity, which is the great one to catch people out on. If the department can identify salinity or a problem with water, the person is tied up, and finds it very difficult to get out of. There was no salinity problem. It was an argument for a while after Russell Speed, the hydrologist from Geraldton with a propensity for making mistakes - it was not the first time - said there might be salinity issues. Phil Commander from the Water and Rivers Commission said in no uncertain terms that salinity would not result from any clearing. I come back to the botanical trail, which is a sad story. When Mr Underwood was in a corner, so to speak, and had to do the CER, he got Mr Alan Peggs to conduct it. Mr Underwood was advised to get Bill Evans to do the botanical study.

Mr Underwood: That was my choice. I thought a botanist from the Department of Conservation and Land Management would be a good authority.

Mr Ferguson: Bill Evans did a small study on the botanical trail. He visited the site and compiled a report that was a couple of pages long. The report said that there was nothing in the area that Mr Underwood wanted to clear that was not well represented in the national park. That was not taken too kindly. On the strength of that, the Environmental Protection Authority recommended in bulletin 832 that clearing take place. After appeals, bulletin 894 was issued this year, a couple of years after the initial bulletin. Ray Hart and Associates were called in to do a botanical study. When Ray Hart and Associates backed up what Evans said, even though it was a much more expensive study - about \$8 000 - that was funded by government, the EPA turned around and got Mr Ted Griffin to do another study. He did not go onto the property, but his knowledge of the area is fairly good. That took more time. That was a determination to pick up something on the botanical side. At the end of the day Mr Bill Evans' report was basically as good as the other two. It showed that except for the bog iron, there was nothing in the area that was not well represented in Lesueur National Park. That area would have been left anyway. That is an indication of the problems in that area. In 1997, the Appeals Convener, Mr Derek Carew-Hopkins, queried why a CALM officer was used to do a study of that property and whether there was a conflict of interest. Syd Shea signed a document that said that CALM was made aware of the notice of intent to clear. CALM's Moora district office manager was contacted by Mr Underwood. Mr Underwood will state that he was advised by the DEP to contact CALM as that agency would be able to assist him.

The CHAIRMAN: If we have all that documentation about that, let us go to a few questions.

Hon DEE MARGETTS: Has there been any change in land use on the property? What did the original approval to clear relate to? What particular kind of land use was proposed then, and has there been any change in land use that caused the referral to the EPA?

Mr Underwood: No specific land use was mentioned in the original permit to clear.

Hon DEE MARGETTS: At that stage, was there much in the way of irrigation projects in the area?

Mr Underwood: There is a fairly large irrigation project further north, but I believe that does not come from the same aquifer from which my property gets water.

Hon DEE MARGETTS: What kind of horticulture were you proposing?

Mr Underwood: A variety of horticulture was proposed. Some was in the form of irrigated trees - olives in particular. Sweet potato was the main project, and there was to be seed potato for the Asian export market. The seed potato venture was developed because of interest from a south west grower who initially wanted to go into it as a joint venture.

Hon DEE MARGETTS: Okay. Roughly what percentage was to be olives?

Mr Underwood: The trees would have taken up less than 100 hectares for a start. The potatoes would have taken up a similar area as a trial, with an ability to expand to 400 hectares in rotation.

Hon DEE MARGETTS: Were you assured of any kind of water licence to do this?

Mr Underwood: I have in place an exploratory licence for water from the Water and Rivers Commission office in Geraldton.

Hon DEE MARGETTS: If I recall from the Environmental Protection Authority bulletin, there was a requirement that a flora study be done on the limestone ridge areas. Am I talking about the right bulletin?

Mr Underwood: No, I do not think so. The only ridge area that was mentioned in both bulletins - 894 and 832 - was a laterite ridge at the very north of the property, which has the soil type in which declared rare flora can occur; however, none was found.

Hon DEE MARGETTS: Given the diversity of this kind of land, what percentage of it was banksia bushland?

Mr Underwood: There were various types of banksia over most of the property. It is scattered throughout the entire region. Two or three different types of banksia are commonly found on the coastal plain from Geraldton to Esperance.

Hon DEE MARGETTS: My point is that banksia bushland typically grows in poor soil, in terms of nutrients. You mentioned that the soil was ideal for horticulture. How does that work? I am sure that this would have been considered during the approval process; that is, that an enormous amount of nutrients and other things would have been required to prepare the soil for horticulture, and that this would have a potential impact.

Mr Underwood: There are two issues; one is the soil types and the other is the nutrient requirement. The soil types are actually ideal. It is soft, yellow sand plain. Some of it is rich, yellow sand plain, but mostly it is medium, soft, yellow sand plain; that is the generic description of it. The advantage is that it takes water readily, and potato tubers can expand without damage to or discolouring of the skins. It is also easier to harvest potatoes from that soil. The nutrient requirement is directly related to the amount of crop per hectare, so if you have 10 000 plants per hectare, the nutrient requirements are regulated to the plants.

Hon DEE MARGETTS: Was the \$8 000 study the longest floristic study that took place?

Mr Underwood: They were both lengthy.

Hon DEE MARGETTS: How long?

Mr Underwood: Each of the botanists were on the property for between two and four days, but it took them up to six weeks to put all the information together.

Hon DEE MARGETTS: Two to four days?

Mr Underwood: To my knowledge, they were on the property for two to four days. They may have revisited the property without notifying me, because that has occurred.

Hon DEE MARGETTS: Were no fauna studies undertaken whatsoever?

Mr Underwood: I believe that occurred at the same time.

Hon DEE MARGETTS: Sorry, a fauna study was undertaken in two to four days? You must be kidding!

Mr Underwood: I am not a botanist.

Hon DEE MARGETTS: I am talking about animals.

Mr Underwood: Yes.

Hon DEE MARGETTS: I can imagine why the EPA was a bit concerned that not enough work had been done. Are you surrounded by a beekeepers reserve?

Mr Underwood: No, the beekeepers reserve is probably 15 kilometres north. Between the reserve and the property is the Lesueur National Park and farmland. The beekeepers reserve runs from the coastal, western end of the Lesueur National Park and around farmland.

Hon DEE MARGETTS: Does Mt Lesueur border your property?

Mr Underwood: The Lesueur National Park does on the northern side.

Hon DEE MARGETTS: So you could conceivably have an interest in that, because any activities on your property might impact on the values of the national park.

Mr Underwood: Impact on the values of the park. Comments that have been made to me were in a regional context or from a purely visual aspect. When a person is up on Mt Lesueur and looks across the national park, he would notice farmland to the south.

Hon DEE MARGETTS: I was recently told by local people at a herbarium day that in order to find out what is on a property in terms of priority 1, 2 and 3 rare flora, as a community group they would go out at least one weekend a month over a 12-month period. This is a relatively small property. However, there is no way that the nature of the species in an area such as this could be identified or located without regular visits, because, for identification purposes, the flowers, buds and seeds etc of a plant are needed by the herbarium. Did it not occur to you that two to four days would not be enough?

Mr Underwood: I see. The CALM bloke, Bill Evans, has been in the area for many years and knows that land very well. He has known for many years exactly what was on, in and around it. Ray Hart of Ray Hart and Associates was also very familiar with the area and had done many studies of that area. My land actually had a history of grazing, so the bush was not completely intact anyway. There had been cattle and, before me, sheep running through that bush. It had all been grazed. I imagine that it was not perfectly intact, unlike the bushland in the Lesueur National Park, which has had no stock encroachment whatsoever. Also, the land was cleared 30 years ago. It has taken that long to regrow. However, that land had been grazed over a 30-year period, so it was not entirely intact. Both reports mention the fact that the property has had a history of grazing. That may account for the lack of any of the stuff that may be found in the Lesueur National Park or along the road verges.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Was the land grazed or cleared 30 years earlier?

Mr Underwood: Cleared and grazed.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: So it had been completely cleared farmland?

Mr Underwood: Yes.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: It has continually been grazed?

Mr Underwood: Yes.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: The land has revegetated over that time?

Mr Underwood: Yes.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I am just trying to get my head around the figures. We are jumping between hectares and acres. Could you go through and provide us with the size of the property - I do not care whether it is in hectares or acres - what the permits were when you bought the property and what has eventually been approved?

Mr Underwood: The property covers 1 702 hectares, which equates to approximately 4 200 acres. We currently have 700 acres or 303 hectares under an agreement to reserve. We have permission to develop 870 hectares, and the original part has been developed.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: That is only 1 100 or almost 1 200 hectares.

Mr Underwood: Yes; 525 hectares have already been developed.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Right. That has clarified it for me now.

Mr Underwood: Bear in mind that the Department of Environmental Protection was technically in control of my land for five years. Every time I tried to talk to people from the Department of Environmental Protection, another season came and went. I told them that we had to be able to get on with this project and asked them to make up their minds. On many occasions I tried to tell them about the damage the time delays were causing. It did not matter to these people. Their pay packets and superannuation ticked over very nicely every second Thursday, while our asset base was being rapidly eroded. They had no consideration for us. I believe that, under the Act, they cannot take personal financial considerations into account. They proudly told me about that. In my view, it was a deliberate tactic to weaken us, so that we would eventually give up or walk off the property. We hold them in utter contempt for the tactics they used. It is totally unacceptable. It has had a dramatic effect on us.

The CHAIRMAN: Are there any other quick questions? Mrs Underwood, did you want to say something at this stage?

Mrs Underwood: Over the nine years that we have been going through all of this, I have stayed in the background and have not had much to say; I have not been to many of the meetings with Craig, but have left it to Craig and Jim. I have been there to keep things fairly stable. However, one night last week I decided that I would like to put something together for this meeting, so that I could possibly make you realise what it has been about. Craig and I and our two daughters have been totally devastated over the past nine years, both emotionally and financially, by bureaucratic groups. Our lives have been turned upside down by these people, but they have had no concern for us at all. Nine years ago we owned our home and we purchased this farm. We had exciting plans, which would involve lots of hard work. We had money in the bank and we were all enjoying a happy life. The work on the farm for Craig in the first two years was huge and rewarding, but eventually these bureaucratic parties became involved. Without any moral or human feelings, they have played with our lives and continue to do so. I hold them responsible for the turmoil they have caused us. I feel as if we are fleas on a dog's back; fleas can be flicked off and they will go away, or they can be squashed and killed. The health of my husband has suffered to the point of losing his hair in 1995 - as you can see, it grew back - and heart problems that relate to stress. He is currently on medication. Craig is a hardworking, honest, reliable, determined man who loves his family deeply. I hold all those persons responsible for hindering our quest to farm our land totally. For the past six years Craig has worked off farm cutting everybody else's tagasaste. This is contract work, which

takes him away from home. There is a pathetic number of cattle on our farm, and the farm is not profitable. We have no money left, and the farm is on the market. I work full-time. Our two daughters become very teary when talking about our plight. We struggle with stress, and worry most days about our future. It is only because of Craig's inner strength and determination to fight for our property rights that we are strong enough to see this through. You ask how this could happen. Our quality of life has been taken away from us. We are hardworking, honest Australian citizens. Would any people here today sit idle and let this happen to them or their loved ones? I can only say that none of you would want it to. The majority of the population would not have the strength, determination, fortitude or pure zest for life in them to stand up and fight for what they believe in.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mrs Underwood. Mr Underwood, is there anything further you would like to say?

Mr Underwood: I would like to put this issue in perspective as far as property rights are concerned. Most of us know that property rights are held dearly and strongly by anybody who owns property, whether it is the corner deli or a million-acre station in the Kimberley. The first point is the ability to earn an income. Most years you can earn an income from your land. However, you cannot budget for bureaucracy. I can budget for seasonal variations or price fluctuations, and I can work around droughts and floods, but I cannot budget for bureaucrats. There is no way that you can commercially have bureaucratic input in your business. Once that happens, there is no way of backing out, and you are pretty much dead meat.

Also, for most farmers, their land is their superannuation. We do not have fancy superannuation policies that we contribute to on a monthly or weekly basis. Our land is our superannuation. Any of the bureaucrats involved in this situation would not allow 20 or 30 per cent of their superannuation to be taken away from them. It is unacceptable. I do not know why we should accept that either.

The property is also a family legacy. We had plans for our children to be involved in this business, but that will not happen now. The land and business are part of the family legacy. I would like to leave something to my children or use this property as an asset base from which to help them with a business, further studies or something professional.

A person's property is also his identity. Again, everyone knows that the butcher shop down the street is run by Joe the butcher, or that there goes Bill, who manages that farm. Australians put a strong emphasis on who they are and what they do. I believe that all these qualities are totally lost in the bureaucracies, unless one happens to work in one and is the chief executive officer, the senior manager or this or that. That is one's identity. That is the only way that there is any commonality between the people who are dealing with these things and what we believe in.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Mr and Mrs Underwood. You have given us a good understanding of an issue that has been around for quite a few years and which many of us have been involved in in some way or another over the past few years. It is very helpful for our committee to hear that. Thank you very much.

The WITNESSES: Thank you.