

PUBLIC

THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY SELECT COMMITTEE ON COMMONWEALTH DECISIONS ON AGRICULTURAL LAND MET IN SCOTTSDALE MECHANIC'S INSTITUTE, SCOTTSDALE ON WEDNESDAY 21 OCTOBER 2026.

The Committee met at 10.17 a.m.

TasFarmers

CHAIR (Mr Ferguson) - Welcome everybody, to today's hearing of the House of Assembly Select Committee on Commonwealth Decisions on Agricultural Land. I thank our witnesses for their attendance, and we thank members of the public for their attendance as well. I welcome TasFarmers to the table. I'll, first of all, introduce ourselves to you. I'm Michael Ferguson, Chair of the Committee and member for Bass. To my left is Dr Shane Broad, he's Deputy Chair of the Committee and member for Braddon. To my right, Mr Di Falco, member for Lyons, and to my further right, Cecily Rosol, a member for Bass. I'd like to invite you, please, to state your names and the capacity in which you're appearing before the Committee.

Mr CALMAN - I'm Nathan Calman, I'm the CEO of TasFarmers.

Mr GROSE - Neil Grose, I'm the Chief Operating Officer of TasFarmers.

CHAIR - Thank you. So, gentlemen, this hearing is covered by parliamentary privilege, allowing individuals to speak with freedom without fear of being sued or questioned in any court or place out of Parliament. This protection is not accorded to you, if statements that may be defamatory are repeated, or referred to, by you outside the parliamentary proceedings. This hearing is public. The public and media may be present. Should you wish aspects of your evidence to be heard in private, you must make this request to the Committee at that time. Gentlemen, please, one at a time, take the statutory declaration.

Mr NATHAN CALMAN, Chief Executive Officer, AND **Mr NEIL GROSE**, Chief Operating Officer, TASFARMERS WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

CHAIR - Thank you. We've received your submission. Members have had time to read that, and we intend to discuss it with you. I invite you to make a short opening statement. You can speak to your submission or make any other points you may care to make.

Mr CALMAN - Maybe just in opening, I think the issue of Rushy Lagoon's sale and the circumstances in which that occurred has probably, it would be fair to say, been one of the single biggest issues for this community that TasFarmers has ever supported, but, you know, probably, in recent history, one of the most significant and ongoing issues that we've had to support the agricultural industry in Tasmania with representation around. Our interest and questioning around what may or may not have been happening probably went back to around the middle of 2025, when we were consistently hearing reports from members of the north-east community that Rushy Lagoon's sale looked like it was going to have some sort of federal involvement.

At that time, we began asking many questions through letters, phone calls and other correspondence of the federal Agricultural Minister what, if any, involvement the federal government was going to play. We were repeatedly told that the federal government had no

role to play at that point in time. I think we even met with the Minister, Julie Collins, in Canberra in October last year, where we again raised this and raised the further concern that I think we'd heard that the CEFC were, in fact, the government body that would be potentially becoming engaged and asked for further input and, again, were told at that point in time that the federal government really had no engagement and the government couldn't say any more about any sort of sale that was going on.

As things then progressed into the new year, it became more and more aware, that the federal government did have a role to play and, as the details of that have come to light, it's that deep market distorting behaviour of the federal government that I think most people in this district have major issues with. There definitely were local purchasers that had an interest in purchasing Rushy Lagoon. We organised meetings for them with federal members just to make sure that it was known that they were credible and that, due to the size of the property, it had actually taken them some years to secure the finance that was needed to buy a property outright without it needing to be broken up.

I guess, in addition to that market distorting element, our other concerns really relate to the lack of transparency up until the decision-making process. So there's a number of things that the Foreign Investment Review Board could have done to consult whether this was in the national interest or would have a regional impact, or whether it was supported by the regional community. For instance, talking to a state body like TasFarmers, talking to the local government or talking to the local community, none of that occurred. As a result of that, we actually conducted a survey of the local community and provided those results to FIRB, the Treasurer, the Minister, to make them aware, I suppose, of the sentiment and concerns regarding, at that stage, the project that was being spoken about. I think there's definitely some shortcomings there.

Similarly, I think there's some significant shortcomings around the carbon farming initiative act, which, when the Minister is, as they're required to do, consider a project for the generation of ACCUs, consider the impact that it will have on food security and agricultural production within a region, and from the information we received under right to information, it was clear that those tasks weren't completed adequately, and that's of deep concern to us.

Then, I think, finally, the further \$8.8 million in grants for forestry, I think are a great thing that the federal government are doing. TasFarmers is not anti-forestry in any way, but those grants were definitely awarded to Gresham House as the proponent, well ahead of them being in control of the land, which did not align to the requirements at the time that they applied for the grant, nor the time that they were announced as being successful in receiving the grant. All of those things stacked on top of each other is really what creates concerns for this community.

CHAIR - Thank you. I think we'll pick up a number of the themes that you've raised. Before I moved to my colleagues, I just ask you to speak to the central question: do you see - from your members' feedback and the organisation's own analysis - do you see this as primarily about foreign investment or do you see this as primarily around carbon farming initiatives and the financial mechanisms that lead to what you've called a distortion of the market?

Mr CALMAN - I think it's a combination of all three. At the highest level, I don't think that the playing field was level for local buyers to be able to compete for the market. That subsidy, if you want to call it that, or support from the federal government for an equity stake

in the project wasn't available to traditional users of the land, or that may wish to continue the traditional uses of the land, so that is of grave concern, I think.

I think, also how the government and how the CEFC and how FIRB have managed conflict through this whole process is quite difficult to actually understand. In all of our inquiries, commercial-in-confidence has been the primary reason for questions not being answered, but when the government's going to become a 48-per-cent shareholder in an investment, it's difficult to see how they've separated their own interests in determining whether this was in the best interest of the region.

Similarly, the chair of the Clean Energy Finance Corporation was also a board member of FIRB, that was then making a decision about whether this was in the national interest and making a recommendation to the federal Treasurer. It's unclear how that conflict was managed. And even the grant around forestry, the project was the biggest recipient of grant funds in that round, despite not being eligible and the federal government was actually a primary shareholder in the body that would be receiving the funds which, from our read of the eligibility, would also have deemed them not to be eligible, yet they still received the funds.

I think this is a complex web. If it was in a business world, it would be called a corporate governance failing, but within a governance world people completely seem to be missing the key points in many ways.

CHAIR - All right, let's pass it around.

Dr BROAD - One of your central tenets is, and you've repeated it as well, is about a market distortion. How much do you think the property was actually worth?

Mr CALMAN - We think in the current market, a fair price probably would have been anywhere from \$80 million to probably \$110 million.

Dr BROAD - How much are properties generally worth in this district, per hectare?

Mr CALMAN - That varies based on a range of factors. For instance, whether there's irrigation entitlements attached to the property, whether there's dairying infrastructure attached to the property, whether there's things like continued land use operations which enable activities to continue on the property. For example, the growing of perennial ryegrasses and different things like that.

Dr BROAD - We've got evidence from the Dorset Council that properties in the district are worth at or around \$19,000 per hectare. This property was sold for \$6000 a hectare and you're arguing that it was actually worth considerably less than \$6000 a hectare. If the property was worth \$80 million then it would have been equivalent to \$3500 per hectare. That seems like a significant undervaluation.

Mr GROSE - Can you clarify what you mean by the district?

Dr BROAD - Well, that's the evidence from –

Mr GROSE - But where from the district?

PUBLIC

Dr BROAD - Well, that's the evidence from Dorset.

Mr GROSE - If the district is Dorset, then you've got so many different types of soil. You've got deep red volcanic soils at Ringarooma, which might be worth \$30,000 a hectare.

Dr BROAD - Or \$100,000.

Mr GROSE - Or \$100,000 a hectare? Probably not that much. We're not on the north-west coast. Then you've got that dry sandy loam country down through the Waterhouse, which would be worth significantly less. To pin it down to a district, I think you need to be a little bit more specific on what that district is, because if it's the whole of Dorset, it's a huge agricultural area, and it's got so many different soil types through it, and you would understand that they all have different - average it out, I don't think that's an accurate assessment of what somewhere like Rushy Lagoon -

Dr BROAD - But \$6000 a hectare seems cheap, and \$3500 a hectare seems extraordinarily cheap, which is the valuation that you're talking about.

Mr CALMAN - Is that based on the 22,000 hectare size of the property or the agriculture?

Dr BROAD - Yes.

Mr CALMAN - I think it's very important to also understand that roughly half of the property isn't agricultural land at all. There's a Ramsar wetlands site. There are other areas that have been allowed to return to nature and have been that way for over 15 years. Under EPBC act protections, you probably wouldn't be able to convert that land back to agricultural use, so in evaluating the value of a property, I think you do have to also consider its distance to the next element of the supply chain, transport links, all of those different things.

Dr BROAD - Absolutely. But at \$80 million, let's say, then that is still \$7000 a hectare just for half the property that is currently under agricultural production. That still seems like it's very cheap considering that I'm not aware of any recent sale of any property of scale that is \$7000 a hectare.

You're arguing market distortion, and it seems like on the valuation that you're arguing is substantially under where the market is at the moment.

Mr CALMAN - At the end of the day, in a free market economy, the value of the property is what other people are willing to pay.

Dr BROAD - \$142 million.

Mr CALMAN - No, the property was not sold for \$142 million. The property, we believe, was sold for \$103 million and then the gap to 143 was the cost of establishing pines, less the cost of all the things that were removed from the property. The total investment, including the purchase of the land, was \$143 million. Our understanding is that the purchase price was \$103 million, and I'm aware of at least one offer that was made this year for \$100 million from a local buyer.

Dr BROAD - We've got evidence, as well, from the purchaser that they had a bankable valuation at the price they paid.

Mr CALMAN - Okay. I'm not privy to that information.

Dr BROAD - That doesn't indicate that they over-bid the market. That indicates they paid the market price. And their evidence is also that they paid less than what the vendor wanted.

Mr CALMAN - Yes, potentially, but at the end of the day, the market is what the market is willing to offer, and I think the last time the property was, you know, it was on and off on the market for probably a 10-year period. I think prior to COVID, we were aware that there were offers being made in the \$70 to \$80 million range for the property. You know, markets go up and down.

CHAIR - As a going concern?

Mr CALMAN - Yes, as a going concern.

Dr BROAD - But that's also - part of your evidence is that the Tasmanian buyers didn't get a fair chance to purchase the property. Now you're saying that there were a number of offers made over a series of years that weren't completed. So, where's the issue that the locals didn't have a fair go. It seems like they weren't willing to pay what the vendor wanted.

Mr CALMAN - No. Well, I mean, I'm aware, like I say, of an offer that was made this year. It couldn't even be put to the vendor under exclusivity arrangements that Gresham House had included in their contract of sale. You know, I think from a Foreign Investment Review Board perspective, most of the requirements around meeting the national interest test are that, you know, the property was advertised and available for sale, I think for a 28-day window. But I think there has to be recognition that the greater the size and value of a property, the greater time probably needs to be made available to local buyers to come up with finance to actually purchase a property of that scale and value.

Dr BROAD - But you've just said that there were a number of attempts over a number of years to come up with a deal, and then the last time it was advertised there was 28 days. What we've also had evidence of - there was a contract put in place in 2025. Now, I imagine if I've got a contract on a property, and I imagine there would've been a clause, something along the lines, and I can't speak for them, but I imagine there was a FIRB approval required as part of the contract. Are you saying that if I have a contract on a property that other potential buyers should be able to present offers that should be considered?

Mr CALMAN - Yes.

Dr BROAD - So, for example, if you were selling me your property, and I had a contract, and then you were receiving other offers and you accepted the other offers, do you think that we'd end up in court or there would be some sort of dispute?

Mr CALMAN - I think when you're considering whether something is in the national interest, you need to consider whether that creates a level playing field or not, to be honest.

Dr BROAD - So, if you were selling me Rushy Lagoon and I had a contract, and you decided to accept another offer during that period where I had a contract, that we wouldn't end up in court?

Mr CALMAN - No, not necessarily, because I mean, separate to this contract of sale, the Foreign Investment Review Board has a role to play in establishing whether that sale is in the national interest. Part of that is determining whether local buyers have had equal opportunity to put offers forward, and if those contract terms have precluded that, I think that that would be something that the Foreign Investment Review Board should take consideration around.

Dr BROAD - But you've just given us evidence there were a number of attempts to purchase the property over a number of years, and then there was a contract put in place last year. So, despite the number of attempts over a number of years, when there's a contract on the property, then anybody else should have still been able to put in an offer and that to be accepted by the vendor. Or, you imagine that you are the Foreign investment Review Board, that you are reviewing a contract of sale and, knowing that there's been a number of attempts over a number of years to sell that property - as you've given evidence of - that FIRB should also be mindful of any other attempt by any other individual while they consider a better offer from, or even a different offer, from a domestic buyer in the intervening timeframe?

Mr CALMAN - Yes, and purely on one ground, and that's that when that offer was made, while FIRB was considering the offer that Gresham had in place from 2025, the property was still listed as for sale on the agent's website. It was still listed for sale while that period of exclusivity was preventing offers being put to the vendor, so, you know, in many ways -

Dr BROAD - Sorry, but that may not have been an issue of FIRB. That might have been an administrative issue from the people who manage the website.

Mr CALMAN - If I'm looking to sell you Rushy Lagoon and you're interested in buying it and it's advertised as being for sale, I would say that it's for sale.

CHAIR - I just want to add some questions, and if my colleagues have any, please signal. It goes back to my earlier question: if the issue is about distortion of the market, which you've made that strong point, to what extent should we be focused on the FIRB process at all? If an equivalent Australian investment, private investment, an Australian equivalent of Gresham House, wanted to buy the property and use the carbon farming initiative and the ACCUs in exactly the same way, then FIRB wouldn't have been an issue, but we'd still have the same challenge in the regional economy, wouldn't we?

So, my question is around: are we spending too much time? Should we focus on the FIRB process or should we be focused on the policy goals of the Australian Government and the CFC's ambitions, which have led to a scenario where the Commonwealth is directly investing, with equity, with two other financial partners to buy a large property, Tasmania's largest farm, to convert its use away from agriculture?

My question is, should we focus on FIRB and foreign investment and that process, or the climate policy?

Mr CALMAN - I think the foreign investment policy should definitely be something that you'd look at. The bigger concern that I think we have around the carbon farming initiative is that the Coalition, when they established the act, had safeguards in place which should have enabled the Minister to review any proposal and deem a project ineligible if it was going to have a negative impact on a region's agricultural production. There are some pretty strong guidelines there around how that process should be followed. Like I said earlier, I think the Right to Information that was presented demonstrated that that process wasn't rigorous or followed.

CHAIR - Could you please articulate? I wrote down you said that that process wasn't completed adequately. In what way would you argue that and what's your evidence for that position? In what way was it not completed adequately?

Mr CALMAN - The guidelines require a proponent to put forward five years of actual agricultural data from the property demonstrating what was produced. It only provided an estimate based on the last year of operation on the property: what the property had produced, not what it was capable of producing, not whether it had been well run. Even at those reduced estimates - which really gave one number, not five years' worth of data - it was going to reduce the milk pool from the Bridport-Scottsdale area by 5 per cent and it was going to reduce the red meat output from the area by 5 per cent.

Looking back at information we'd been able to find on the property's productivity, the herd that they quoted for both dairy and beef was less than half what the property had historically run when all three dairies were in operation, probably when the irrigation infrastructure was being manned properly, when fertiliser was actually being applied in the region. And I think if all of those things were also taken into account, it probably would've shown that the impact on agricultural production in this region would have reduced by over 10 per cent as a result of the change. I think that that is more than significant, because it actually then has flow-on impacts to whether a milk run from a major processor is viable out along Waterhouse Road to that dairy, which was the very end dairy on the run. We spoke to a stock agent who, you know, owned a truck, and a second driver, and their sole job was carting stock off of that property almost year-round to the weekly store sales. There was essentially a satellite agricultural store on the property constantly being maintained by an agent. So, it's all of those different flow-on impacts to a region that should've been considered as part of that land-use change in considering whether that is a good thing for the region or not.

CHAIR - Are you asserting that the guidelines are deficient and should be improved or are you asserting that the guidelines for 20B were not followed?

Mr CALMAN - My read is that the guidelines weren't followed because there wasn't five years' worth of data supplied, nor was the data that was supplied scrutinised to see whether it was reflective of what the property could produce. Furthermore -

CHAIR - Sorry to interrupt, who should have done that?

Mr CALMAN - The Minister or the delegate?

CHAIR - Not ABARES.

PUBLIC

Mr CALMAN - No, the Minister or the delegate could have compared that data with ABARES' data for the region. That's what they ultimately look at in determining what the reduction will be. For example, we could have looked what the average production for beef and dairy is on that quantity of land based on the ABARES' data and just used regional averages, as well.

CHAIR - They will have a right of reply to this, but thank you for the answer to that question.

Mr Di FALCO - Certainly it seems like there's a restriction on the amount of land that's available for primary production, especially now Forest Practices Authority seems to be not allowing more tree cover to be moved. I'm thinking, in the long term, that's going to negatively impact on primary production. Surely, you certainly can't increase productivity because of encroaching tree cover.

Mr CALMAN - I think that's definitely something that we heard loud and clear in a community meeting in this hall in response to the sale, was that this community has taken multiple hits over the last 20-plus-year period and that agriculture at the moment is essentially the main employer within the region that's keeping the region alive, and they saw the conversion of Rushy as something that would take permanent residents out of the area. During peak periods of planting and harvesting, yes, there will be a transient workforce that comes in, but during other periods the opposite is true.

I think the lack of consultation with the state government, the local government and industry organisations also failed to allow the federal government to consider the state's goals of growing agriculture. If we are parking land out of agriculture for 30-plus-year periods, it actually is counterproductive to state strategies around growing farmgate value and national food security.

Mr GROSE - Further to your question around what it means for the region and that greater supply-chain economy, so it's not just that agricultural production land there, that works with all the other land there to create that supply chain, so that there is an economy of scale so that they can get serviced by irrigators and agronomists and all that sort of things.

The other point was made is that it's just another hit to this region, and Chair, you would well remember 2003 when this area lost Simplot Manufacturing, it lost three sawmills, the native forest output was reduced to about one third of what it was prior to that and it has never recovered. The future of the north-east is in agriculture. The answer to the economic future of the north-east is beneath our feet. To take such a significant land mass out of agricultural production is a big hit, not just to the regional economy of the north-east, but also to the community of the north-east and to the community's wellbeing.

Dr BROAD - Where do you draw the line, I suppose, is what I'm getting at? On the drive here, there was a property at Nunamara, 350 hectares. If I wanted to buy that and put it in with pine trees, would you have a problem with that?

Mr GROSE - Well, I guess the answer to that is probably not, but it's a case of who's supporting growing. If it is one private enterprise buying another piece of land to grow pine trees, and the north-east is full of pine trees - I've worked in the bush up through here when I was a young person - my father is one of the pioneers of logging in the north-east, so I know

how the forest industry works. But the key issue around Rushy is that no other private investment has had that federal support that others will get to for the conversion of pine trees, so if you go and buy that 350 acres alongside the St Patrick's River at Nunamara, are you going to also get federal government support through the Clean Energy Finance Corporation to do that? I would probably suspect no, but that's the issue.

Dr BROAD - What happens if I did? What I'm trying to get at, is the issue the conversion or the issue is the support?

Mr GROSE - The issue is the process.

Dr BROAD - Let's pretend I'm just going to put in an offer today for those 350 hectares at Nunamara, and then I'm going to be reliant on the ACCUs or I'm going to tap the federal government on the shoulder. I'm just trying to tease apart the actual issue. Is it the fact that there's conversion going on or is it, trying to narrow it down, that there was federal government equity involved?

CHAIR - Okay. I'm just going to invite all of us to listen to the question and then I'm going to invite all of us to listen to the answer. This isn't a discussion, it's a question and answer time. Over to you.

Mr CALMAN - The critical thing, I think, in the Paris climate agreement, which was then drove our carbon farming initiative rules was that action on climate shouldn't come at the consequence of agricultural food security for a nation. I think in considering those guidelines for the carbon farming initiative, what the federal government should be doing under the act and under the guidelines is considering the magnitude of change within a region within a given period of time. If it's one large property like Rushy Lagoon completely been converted from one land use to another, of course it's going to have a significant impact and the impact of that should be considered against the needs of the region and food security.

I think, also, in our submission we made the point very clearly that when the Government or the Minister or their delegate makes that determination, they should also be considering any other carbon farming applications that have been made within that time horizon because multiple small properties stacked on top of each other - which is what's happening in a lot of areas up and down the eastern seaboard at the moment with companies like Woodside buying out productive dairies, planting them out completely for pines and carbon credits and walking away for 30 years - that has the very real potential to have an equivalent to the MIS schemes of the '90s and 2000s on regions, if there isn't an intention at the end of that period to harvest that fibre and actually do something productive with it.

Dr BROAD - The area of plantations is declining. It's not increasing; it's declining.

Mr CALMAN - Yes, I made this point very strongly to the Minister during this process, that if this is about fibre today, we have many members at the moment with mature pine plantations on their property that cannot get access to the only remaining mill in the state at Timberlink. There is a surplus of pine available for building houses today, and if the government was seriously interested in providing more local fibre to the market to build more houses, maybe financial support for another pine mill in this region may have been money better spent than a subsidy to basically convert more land and lock it up for the next 30 years.

Dr BROAD - It wasn't a subsidy; it was equity.

Mr CALMAN - Well, unless we can actually see the commercial return for the government which has refused to be released, it could be a subsidy, and we just won't know about it for another 30 years.

Ms ROSOL - I'm just trying to understand and get my head around the Rushy Lagoon property and the agricultural land value of it, because my understanding is that it's classed as a 5 to 7 in a classification system. I'm trying to understand where you see the line would be for where it's okay for that to become plantation, where the value from plantation is greater than the value from agricultural production.

I understand that what you're talking about - a lot of this is about the financial decision-making, but I'm just keen to understand about the land production value. To me, what I'm hearing is it's not that valuable land out there in terms of agricultural production. Can you comment on that?

Mr CALMAN - Yes, the vast majority of agricultural land in Tasmania is Class 5 and 6. The single biggest thing that's held it back over time has been the availability of water. Water is what makes even the lowest grades of productive land highly productive. And that's probably what made Rushy such a high potential property, I think, under the right management strategy; there's huge amounts of irrigation water available for that land. So, purely looking at a class system that was established probably well before many irrigation schemes across the state were even in place is probably misleading, I think, to a decision-maker - or confusing is probably the right word.

Ms ROSOL - You're saying it's a loss of potential agricultural production capacity, not a loss of actual agricultural production?

Mr CALMAN - Yes.

Dr BROAD - Just on this, how much irrigation water do you think is available on Rushy Lagoon? Is it 16,000 megalitres? Is that the figure in your mind?

Mr CALMAN - I'd have to take that on notice. I think the quoted number in the sales pack was around 1200 megalitres.

Dr BROAD - I think it's more than that. Isn't it?

Mr GROSE - I can't remember the exact number.

CHAIR - You can take that on notice.

Mr CALMAN - I'll take that on notice.

Dr BROAD - Because there is a calculator. There's not enough water to irrigate 9000 hectares on Rushy Lagoon. There's enough to irrigate the dairies and a little bit more, which is still going to be maintained in agricultural production. So, if - unless there's -

SPEAKER - Is it?

Dr BROAD - Well, that's the evidence of Gresham House and their partners - is they're going to maintain agricultural production on the former dairy platforms, and I think there's potatoes going in this year, for example, and there's a contract out for grazing on the former beef properties. There wasn't enough water to irrigate 9000 hectares, so are you saying that there's a potential irrigation scheme to, I don't know, to irrigate the whole lot? Like I'm trying to get your rationale because I can actually look up how much -

Mr CALMAN - No, I'm definitely not saying that. What I would point out, though, is I think the assertion that the property will remain in any way in agriculture once planting is completed is probably something that the Committee should try to examine because the pamphlet provided by Gresham House clearly says that agriculture will maintain on the property with the dairy blocks being planted last. During that period, yes there are potatoes being grown out there this year and, yes, there is grazing still going on, but in five years' time when their planting cycle is concluded, my understanding is that there will not be agricultural production continuing to occur on that property at all, and that's what their glossy pamphlet that they gave out at the community drop-in session said and the map showed.

Dr BROAD - Their evidence is they'll plant 9000 hectares. So, that leaves a chunk remaining for agriculture, even taking into account the parts of the property that are not currently in agricultural production. But, I think, there's -

CHAIR - Dr Broad, I'm just going to ask you to have one more question and then I'm going to pass it on.

Mr GROSE - Because there's probably a couple more points on that question.

Dr BROAD - Let's just say there's 12,000 megalitres. Now, out there, production for grass would be what, four or five megs per hectare? Would you argue four or five for a hectare of grass or potatoes, potatoes would probably be a little bit more.

Mr CALMAN - Potatoes would be a lot more. I'm not sure what you're asking.

Dr BROAD - Let's say what do you want to use, say four? So, there's 3000 hectares worth of irrigation available, if it was going to be a dairy or maybe a little less even, so out of the 22,000 hectares, there is about 3000 hectares available to irrigation. You were talking about the productivity and the potential to increase production on Rushy Lagoon. How would that occur? Where would the extra water come from?

Mr CALMAN - It's not just water, Dr Broad. I think it's also investment in fencing to keep wildlife off the property. It's investment in pasture and fertiliser, which, from our understanding, hasn't occurred in recent years. That can double or quadruple, through correct management practices, the amount of pasture that is available and what isn't lost to wildlife. And that maintains a very important part, I suppose, of the fattening role in the property, like dry land fattening, particularly at this time of year when you are growing lots of pasture. It could be part of what a well-run property is actually established to do.

Dr BROAD - I absolutely agree. I'm just getting back to the Class 5 or 6, okay. The argument against it being classified as Class 5 and 6 is there's potential for irrigation, but it seems like there's only potential to irrigate 3000 hectares, not the 12,000 or whatever that's

currently in agriculture production. So, where is your argument that it has greater capacity than Class 5 and 6, given that there is actually a limit on the amount of irrigation available for the entire property?

Mr GROSE - As Nathan's already said, agricultural productivity is not exclusively influenced by irrigation. It's by land management. If you look at some of the good beef properties of similar land types, all the way from Rushy Lagoon through to Bridport, through Waterhouse and through there, some of Tasmania's best beef stock is grown on that area, it's not irrigated, but it's managed as dry land.

Dr BROAD - I'm talking Class 5 and 6 though.

Mr GROSE - Yeah, it's all Class 5 and 6 and 7.

Mr CALMAN - And it's connected to the Winnaleah irrigation scheme, so any potential purchaser could look to negotiate and purchase additional water for that land if they wished.

Mr Di FALCO - Just a quick one: at the end of the day, they are saying they'll have sawmillable pine at the end of it. We've heard at the meeting here, the previous meeting, I think one of the locals said, underneath there's a hard pan called native concrete - good description. But if the trees are growing on that kind of soil, the potential for that to be successful is pretty slim, isn't it?

Mr CALMAN - I think that was the resounding community sentiment. There was a lot of knowledge of where pines will grow in the north-east and where they won't. There are pockets on that property where pines will probably grow into millable timber, but it's very much in the minority.

The general conversation, as well, out there that the deep ripping of the ground that would be required to plant pines on that property would also cause probably irreparable damage to the soil profile. One of the other concerns that we've heard recently, for example, is that that property is one of the few in Tasmania which has an abundant population of the New Holland field mouse, which is a critically endangered species. Farmers, as land managers in this region, are aware that it's there and that it exists quite well with the existing agricultural use. But, the deep ripping of the soil out there would create irreparable damage, mixing that native cement with the arable topsoil but would also, potentially, put under pressure this critically threatened species that has survived there for decades.

Mr GROSE - Just further to the land use and the clearing: in historical context, most of Rushy Lagoon was cleared by two men, my dad, Murray Grose, and Ewart Tucker; two HD-10 bulldozers and a chain and a log. You couldn't do it these days, but he has that extensive knowledge of what it looks like underneath there and probably has more knowledge about forestry and forestry management in the north-east than most. His view is that it would be extraordinarily hard to grow viable pine trees there to millable standard. But, is it the growing of pine trees to millable standard or is it just the accumulation of carbon credits? That's the key.

CHAIR - The next extension of that position, if it's true, is of course that it won't yield the pine output and it won't sequester the carbon that is being discussed; 3.2 million ACCUs. If that were the case, that would obviously be a commercial problem for the landowner - the farm owner.

Because we're running closer to the clock now, I want to ask you about the proposed recommendation that you put forward in the submission around moving to something like the New Zealand approach around what I would call a New Zealand-style or legislative limit on carbon-driven conversion. I'd really like to explore that with you. I'm sure others will feel the same way. What particular elements of the New Zealand model could be attractive in not just our state but in our country, given the nature of this inquiry is around Commonwealth decisions, and how would it protect ordinary farm forestry if we would go down that path?

Mr CALMAN - I think the New Zealand scenario is very different to the Australian scenario. I actually think the legislation federally almost gets the balance right in that if it's properly actioned, it gives the Minister the ability to step in if a region's food production is going to be impacted.

CHAIR - That would be the Ag Minister?

Mr CALMAN - Yes. I think the failing in this case, again with the series of conflicts that I raised, is that again, the Ag Minister is also the Minister for Forestry, so in making a determination they're making a decision about a project that they had a 48 per cent equity stake in which seems to have just allowed the project to be waved through from the outside. And that's probably what's most concerning.

I don't think that the 30 per cent cap is necessarily the solution within this context, because forestry is incredibly important to the state's economy as well. But I guess what we need to do is make sure, for example, that we don't have another MIS scheme where you have market distortion, either through credits or through equity investment from government that in 20 or 30 years' time creates market failures in regions and in the meantime all the jobs and prosperity disappears.

CHAIR - Then to cut to the chase on that point, can you be very specific? The Committee could be making a recommendation in this space. What would you like to see the Committee recommending to the Commonwealth, regardless of whether it will be followed or not, but what would be a healthy recommendation in respect of improving, enhancing or making that process more rigorous? Can you please be specific?

Mr CALMAN - At Agfest this year, Minister Collins made the specific comment on the *Country Hour* that this was a state planning or land-use failure. I'd argue that it's not. I'd argue that it's actually a failing of the federal government not doing what the guidelines require.

However, based on the federal Minister's view, I think maybe there does need to be a further safeguard mechanism at a state or local government level through the planning scheme, whereby if the federal government isn't acting within a region's interest, the state government or local government has some mechanism to step in when they have been listening to the local community and hearing what the community has said loud and clear, because I don't think that that's happened from Canberra through this entire process.

Dr BROAD - Just on that, are you saying there should be another level of approval for a property sale if it involves the federal government, as opposed to if it was a local buyer who wanted to do exactly the same thing?

Mr CALMAN - I don't know whether it directly relates to the federal government being an equity partner in a purchase, but I think it should relate to the protection of a region's interests when a federal government isn't taking those interests into account as part of its decision-making.

Dr BROAD - They have their framework, from what I understand. They looked at the land classification and the land classification on the mapping said 5, 6 and parts of it 7, and that meant that it wasn't prime agricultural land according to the Tasmanian land classification system. Therefore, they could proceed to the next step. Are you saying that there should be another level added? If so, what would that actually look like in practical terms?

Mr CALMAN - I think the current land-use classifications were designed at a time when irrigation in the state wasn't a prominent part of agriculture. I think that's probably one of the single biggest things that's changed over the last 20 years. Previously, the classification structure probably would have looked more than anything at soil profile and rainfall for a region, than the other elements that might make that ground productive. I do think that the potential for a review at a state level is there, but I still think where the federal government fails to do the right thing by a region, or even ask their opinion, the state government or local government should have a mechanism to step in and provide protection to that region if it's in the state or region's interest. And the Minister called out the fact that the current scheme didn't provide any opportunity for the state government or local government to do that and therefore the project should just be able to sail on through.

Dr BROAD - You're arguing, though, that there should be some form of veto on that. Who should have that veto?

Mr CALMAN - Either the state or local government.

Dr BROAD - If I wanted to buy Rushy Lagoon and purchase that property and convert it to pine, then the Dorset Council would be able to say yes or no to that project?

Mr CALMAN - In a free market, where there was no distortion and no support from the federal government, somebody should be able to do with their land whatever they wish. But where there's subsidies stacked on top of subsidy, or distortion stacked on top of distortion, I think that here is a genuine need for the state and local government to be able to step in.

Dr BROAD - If that Nunamara case that I was saying, if I wanted to purchase 350 hectares and convert it to pine, then I should have to get some form of approval from the council to be able to do that?

Mr CALMAN - If you're doing that with your own money, you should be able to do whatever you need to do.

Ms ROSOL - But how does that fit with the bigger picture of agricultural land use? You're saying we need a big picture looking at the whole state and what's happening everywhere and the state should be able to veto, but then you're saying a local owner should be able to do what they want, as if the big picture doesn't matter in that case. There's a contradiction there.

Mr CALMAN - No, but within the context of that impact on regional food security. It's arguable that Rushy Lagoon, that if the property was purely being planted with trees for fibre without being able to generate ACCUs, that the business case would not stand up. My calculation said that that was going to provide \$125 million in return just in carbon credits.

CHAIR - Isn't that really the point that that's what I would have imagined that you might focus on. It's really not about the source of the equity of the new purchaser, whether it's a globally significant overseas investment firm or a local purchaser, like Dr Broad, who's interested in a property at Nunamara. Isn't it really about the way in which federal policies and we're not going to argue about the merits of climate change and climate change policy, but isn't it really about the extent to which climate policy is driving a market for ACCUs that can lead to significant regional economic change? I would have thought, even though you're proposing a state-based layer which you've said would be used when the Commonwealth have failed in their duties, wouldn't it be better to focus on improving the model at the Commonwealth level so that those failures don't happen again in the future, which is why I brought up the New Zealand question?

Mr CALMAN - Absolutely. In a perfect world, I think the system that we have federally in Canberra would have provided protection, but it didn't because there's, similar to FIRB's processes, there are a number of things that the Minister may have done, not what they must do. Similar to FIRB may have consulted with the local community but didn't have to.

CHAIR - If I may interrupt, would you be proposing a review or a tighter update to section 20B to make it more rigorous and stronger?

Mr CALMAN - Yes.

Dr BROAD - I'm just trying to rewind a little bit. In this example where I'm going to go and buy the property at Nunamara like I've just won Lotto or whatever, are you saying that if I purchased that property and part of the business model in planting it out with pine trees was using ACCUs, then you'd have a problem with that? Is the ability to get carbon credits the big issue for TasFarmers, or is it that there's investment from the federal government? Because you've seemed to have said just a few minutes ago that you'd have a problem if ACCUs is part of the business model rather than just planting it for fibre?

Mr CALMAN - It's not just about ACCUs; it's about whole-of-region change to agricultural production. It's about regional food security. That's what the federal act should be trying to protect against. But I think throughout this whole sale, it's been the stacked supports from the federal government which make people really uncomfortable because you have potential distortion around the equity stake in the purchase of the property and what was able to be offered and the terms that that occurred under. You've then got further money to help you buy the trees, which the proponents shouldn't have been eligible for. And then you've got an ACCU application that doesn't look to have been assessed with the rigour that should have been applied. And I think it's those stacking of failings that causes the concern that I mentioned at the start.

Dr BROAD - To be clear, you don't have a problem with ACCUs or you do have a problem with people getting carbon credits?

PUBLIC

Mr CALMAN - I agree with the principle of the Paris climate agreement, which is our response to climate change shouldn't come at the detriment of regional food security.

Dr BROAD - Okay, so let's talk about food security, then. How do you actually define it? You're talking about food security. Tasmania can feed something like four million people. What do you actually mean by food security?

Mr CALMAN - Within those guidelines, it talks about significant changes to regional production. Again, significant isn't defined within the 20B of the carbon farming rules. I think that could be a recommendation. But likewise, I think the rigour around the fact that the process around analysing five years' worth of data actually wasn't followed.

Dr BROAD - What do you see as food security? That's the question. Not the process. Tasmania's got like a million head of cattle, and we're knocking 7000 to 8000 out of production, out of a million. I'm trying to get what do you actually mean by food security?

Mr CALMAN - Like I said, the Act is specific in that you have to consider the region. This property's conversion, in my mind, will change the regional production of dairy and beef by over 10 per cent, that's significant.

Dr BROAD - What do you mean by food security? Literally what do you mean? Do you mean the ability for us to feed ourselves? That's what it sounds like when you say food security. What do you actually mean by food security?

Mr CALMAN - I'm referring to what the Act references, which is regional farmgate output. That's important for jobs within a region; it's important for economies within a region, and it's important for feeding other regions in the state, globally and nationally as our climate changes.

CHAIR - Is there any other questions from my other colleagues? My closing question would be: I'd like to ask you to take on board and perhaps take on notice proposal around some reform of section 20B. Would you be willing to do that?

Mr CALMAN - Sure.

CHAIR - Can you take on notice to provide the Committee with any evidence that you have around what you believe to be the sale price of \$103 million? Would you take on notice the question Dr Broad asked, I think you already have, about water entitlement.

Dr BROAD - I think it's 12,500 megalitres.

CHAIR - Before we close, did you have anything that you felt you needed to add?

Mr CALMAN - No, probably the only other item that I touched on was about regional employment.

CHAIR - Can I invite you to do that and to be brief, then? Thank you.

Mr CALMAN - Sure. Purely the claims around this project generating 190 jobs is very misleading. When pressed, that was 190 jobs over the life of the project and equated to only

PUBLIC

five full-time jobs, which I think is very low compared to what traditional agriculture would provide out through that region.

CHAIR - You may wish to add that to your material that you supply to us to provide some evidence for that.

Thank you for your appearance. What you've said to us today is protected by parliamentary privilege. Once you leave the table, you need to be aware that privilege does not attach to comments that you may make to anyone, including the media, even if you're just repeating what you had said to us. Do you understand that? Thank you for attendance today.

WITNESSES - Yes.

The Committee suspended at 11.16 a.m. to 11.22 a.m.

Ian Sauer

CHAIR - Mr Sauer, welcome to the hearing today and thank you for your attendance. Michael Ferguson is my name. I'm the Chair of the Committee. Dr Broad is the Deputy Chair of the Committee. Mr Di Falco, member for Lyons, and Ms Rosol, member for Bass.

If you would please state your name and the capacity in which you're appearing before the Committee.

Mr SAUER - Ian Sauer, farmer at Pipers Brook.

CHAIR - Thank you. Can I confirm you've received and read the guide sent to you by the secretary?

Mr SAUER - I have, thank you.

CHAIR - The hearing is covered by parliamentary privilege, allowing individuals to speak with freedom without fear of being sued or questioned in any court or place out of Parliament. The protection is not accorded to you if statements that may be defamatory or repeated are referred to by you outside the parliamentary proceedings. Today's hearing is public. The public and media may be present. Should you wish aspects of your evidence to be heard in private, you must make this request to the Committee at the time.

Mr IAN SAUER, WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR - Thank you. You have the opportunity to make a short opening statement.

Mr SAUER - Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the Committee members for the opportunity. First off, if I could say that I support fully farm forestry and farmers' rights to do with their land what they want to do. I'm also a past president of TasFarmers, but I stress I appear here today as a private individual and a farmer. I've been a farmer in the Pipers Brook region in the north-east of Tasmania for 45 years. In that time, I've been involved in agriculture

advocacy, natural resource management, rural education at both the state, the local and national level, so, I think I come with some degree of credibility.

However, the Australian Government's decision to subsidise the sale of Rushy Lagoon is one of the worst agricultural policy decisions I've seen. It will deliver negative economic, social and environmental outcomes and distort the agricultural land prices in Tasmania, particularly in the north-east. We've seen this before with the managed investment schemes in the '90s. I don't know what we haven't learned. The sale is flawed in both process and outcome, driven by ideology and with complete disregard to the community for research and foresights. The community and industry looks to their elected representatives to stand up for them, hold their back and deliver what they need and want.

Ninety-eight per cent of respondents to a TasFarmers survey opposed the sale. Consultation was non-existent. As president of TasFarmers, I wrote to Minister Julie Collins and the Treasurer offering a briefing and received no response whatsoever. And I know others have written since and before, and have been offered no response at all. Also, Senator Polley supported the sale with dubious claims about forestry. I'll talk about that later on. Dr Broad, you've supported the sale on social media and have been spruiking at one-sided argument. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition in Tasmania, Janie Finlay, who is the opposition spokesperson for agriculture and a member for Bass, has been silent and absent in this issue. Silence or absence is not neutrality. The community have been let down. So has agriculture.

For the sale of Tasmania's largest farm, you would expect elected members, Treasury, FIRB and the Clean Energy Finance Corporation to engage with the local community, local government and industry to test the case that Gresham House has put forward. This is called due diligence, and a private sector buyer would undertake this without a shadow of a doubt. Why does the federal government do that with taxpayers' money? So, the Committee - you - should ask in the first instance, why did Gresham House have the confidence to commit significant funds up to six months before the sale? Why was there a common director on FIRB and the Clean Energy Finance Corporation? And why is it so difficult now to obtain information through Freedom of Information, which I've been trying for four months and getting blocked?

I said at the start of this that I smell a rat. I still smell a rat. As you guys would know, as legislators and politicians, on most planning debates, science, industry and community normally hold divergent views when you're working land management issues. On this issue, all three are in lockstep. Absolutely three are in lockstep. The science that should underpin everything, ABARES have said - an Australian government organisation, that there's enough structural timber around until 2050. They also say that finding carbon sequestration depends on landholder choice and on farms combining agriculture with carbon, rather than replacing it. We've also had research done by Farley et al, who established that a forest in grassland cuts catchment water yields by about 40 per cent. This could have - you may not know, but there is a Ramsar-listed wetland that's had thousands and thousands spent on it over the years. It could well be infected.

Industry: I won't talk about that because you've heard from TasFarmers. The community: you've been told about the community surveys, the public meetings. There have only been two people in the community that support the sale of Rushy Lagoon - one was here and one fellow lives at Bridport - out of everyone.

Local government: local government have expressed concerns in the media, and you'll be hearing from them today. The state government also realise there are issues and sent letters to the Australian Government asking for it to be returned.

What, in fact, we've got here is the Commonwealth was on one side of this contest and absent from scrutiny of it. It financed and granted \$77.8 million to one bidder, approved that bidder's acquisition without releasing conditions or reasons, left the only statutory test, the regional agricultural impact, to the department that funded the project, and heard from the affected community nine days after the decision was made.

On the evidence, this conversion delivers fewer jobs, less than half the wealth, no housing timber before 2050, a 40 per cent reduction in catchment runoff, and the loss of 2.2 per cent of Tasmania's dairy herd in a single act. That's getting close to 5 per cent within the north-east. The impact will be felt.

My last comment is to look for the silver lining. It's not the time to now play politics. You, as leaders and legislators, have an opportunity to use this as a case study for significant reform where we see rigour, science, accountability and transparency to be applied when dealing with agricultural land issues like Rushy, keeping food security in the spotlight. And a starting point would be the legislative changes they're making in New Zealand. Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you, Mr Sauer. I'll open up with a question. Your comparison put the agricultural case, that is a modernised agricultural case, at approximately \$763 million versus forestry at \$335 million. So, you're making the case in your submission, I think, or at least the evidence that you've relied upon, that it's a far lesser economic outcome for the region with this particular model being adopted. We've just heard from TasFarmers, who didn't use those numbers, but they made a similar case about comparing a rundown farm that had had higher input in previous years with an optimised plantation. They were concerned about the way in which the economic productivity of the property in the section 20B test of the Carbon Farming Initiative, which requires the Commonwealth Agriculture Minister to carefully look at any potential regional impact. I'd like you to speak to that, because if this Committee can do anything useful, it might be around proposing sensible reforms that any level of government could implement so that we do ensure that carbon credits aren't used to replace our food security.

Mr SAUER - Thank you, Chair. I'll try and answer the best I can. On the practical level, on the applied level, there's a range of farmers who are from Bridport to Cape Portland. A couple of those farmers have actually done consultancy works on Rushy Lagoon for different buyers over the last 15 years, so they're well versed, and understand Rushy Lagoon. They will all tell you that the productivity of Rushy Lagoon is down by 60 per cent, and that's not just by increasing the area with irrigation; it's all about fertiliser, pastures, pasture utilisation, fencing - all the stuff that modern, more innovative farms do. So, there is the opportunity to put 60 per cent uplift in that property.

The next thing you can do is you can have a look and go and jump on Google Maps and just have a look at what's happening between Bridport and Rushy Lagoon, and the diversity of agricultural enterprises that's up that Waterhouse Road. Rushy Lagoon has predominantly, in the past, been cattle and sheep, and then there's been a conversion to dairy, and that's worked quite well - and some potatoes. There is enormous uplift there, huge uplift. What I outlined in my submission was that the wealth generation through employment and product is well down

by putting that into trees. I think that Gresham House are being cute by saying that there were 90 jobs. Well, that 90 jobs, basically that's on the tree side, is only for the 35 years.

CHAIR - I think Gresham are saying 190.

Mr SAUER - They've probably brought that up because they're now - which I don't know, so they may have included that with the beef cattle that they're going to be running for some time, so that part might be there. However, if you weren't having the trees, and the property was being run with dairy, some cropping and some beef cattle, et cetera, then the wealth generated would be enormous. What I'm suggesting is, at the moment, without any great increase in productivity, Rushy Lagoon would generate about, you know, \$763 million over 35 years, against \$335 million for pine. And it's only \$264 if you take out the ACCUs. So, the wealth generation is just enormous. There are no new innovative jobs in forestry there. I mean, it's not terribly difficult to plant pine trees. We do it in Tasmania very, very well. You plant the trees. It's a high degree of activity. You've got a bit of activity for the next three to five years with spraying, weed control, monitoring, replanting and keeping browsing animals down, but then the rest of the time, it just sits there.

CHAIR - Before I pass to a colleague, can I just ask you, please, Mr Sauer, are you able to share with us any of the background evidence that you've referred to in your submission around the economic impact of each model?

Mr SAUER - It's referenced, and if it's not referenced, I will get those references to you. I thought I had it referenced.

Mr Di FALCO - You've mentioned the area's phosphorus-poor coastal sands, and you've also got the challenge of Bass Strait winds, so the prospect of this ever being a success is fairly minimal, isn't it?

Mr SAUER - Look, there will be parts of Rushy Lagoon where you can plant trees very successfully, whether they be more native trees or whether they be pine trees or whatever. There will be areas that you can do that. There will be other areas there where - not Ian Sauer says, but foresters are telling me, well, it's just not going to happen. And if it does happen - I mean, pine trees are very, very resilient trees. They can jam their taproots down and they will grow. But when you've got those salty winds and very, very poor, phosphorus-deficient soils, they are going to struggle. It's just not a matter of growing a tree - you've actually got to get that tree to grow fast and straight and all the rest of it. Otherwise, your production per hectare goes down. And the name of the game, whether you're growing cow's milk or whatever, it's production per hectare, over time. I've been told by the foresters that this is not very good pine-growing country. In some areas they'll grow; in other areas they're going to struggle.

Ms ROSOL - You've talked about the potential and the opportunity for greater agricultural production on the Rushy Lagoon land, and that's come up with previous witnesses as well. The assessment was based on current production. Obviously, it's been assessed on the evidence that's available with what's happening at the moment. How should it, in your opinion, have been assessed? How do you capture that potential, given it's been on the market for a long time, there haven't been other viable offers, people don't seem to be rushing to come and invest in it. So, this is just a potential opportunity. How do you assess for that?

Mr SAUER - Rushy Lagoon, I think everyone would agree, has been neglected for the last 10 or 15 years, and there's been a concentration of production, you know, with the dairies and a little bit of other stuff. And just gauging the performance of Rushy Lagoon by today's figures is a little bit erroneous. And the reason why Rushy Lagoon hasn't been sold is that you need to have a buyer and a seller, and if the seller has got the price up very, very high, then the buyer, without getting subsidisation or financial help, is going to be left out of that market because they know what the value of that property is. Real estate people and farmers who are involved in the corporate farming world would say to me that Rushy Lagoon is probably worth \$120, and to get Rushy Lagoon up to speed, you would probably spend \$50 mil over the next five or six years to get that coming up. That's the ballpark figure. That's what different real estate agents were saying. However, some buyers will want to spend more. My understanding was that there were other people interested, and I don't know who they were, but I was assured that there were other buyers. But the price that was being asked wasn't there.

Coming back to the question is that the federal government in this case - because Rushy Lagoon was so big and the impact on the agricultural sector and the community in the north-east and Tasmania, it will be felt. There'll be fewer sales of cattle at Powranna because Rushy Lagoon's finished, so there will be a flow-on effect.

There was no due diligence done. Everyone believed what Gresham House said without fear or favour. I can tell you now that when I was president, we asked Gresham House to give us a briefing. I was gobsmacked at some of the stuff they were saying. It was nearly fanciful. I'm only assuming that some of what they were telling us has been told to other people. If the federal government is investing our money at that level, they should have done due diligence. They could have just come down to Tasmania and picked up a consultant and said, 'We want you to go out to Rushy Lagoon and tell us what can happen, what's the value, we want to know'. The Australian Government have actually taken an equity stake in it. In the private sector, if I was buying it, I would have had consultants there. Gresham House did have consultants there, but they were looking at the environmental values. They weren't looking at the productive values.

What people don't understand is that there are some really significant environmental values on Rushy Lagoon as a Ramsar-listed wetland. There's a whole heap of stuff of really threatened species around the sand-dune areas. They need to be looked at. But Gresham House had no interest in the productive side of Rushy Lagoon. Anyone else would have done that. That's what they should have done. Any buyer would do due diligence on the property. Whether it's looking at how much they pay for rates, whether it's looking at soil tests, whether it's going out digging their own soil holes, whether it's getting consultants looking at what the previous production has been, whether it's getting agronomists to come out to look at how they can increase the productivity through new pastures and utilisation of fences, or whatever. It wasn't done.

Dr BROAD - You're arguing that they didn't do any due diligence, but Gresham House have given evidence that they got an independent valuation.

Mr SAUER - Yep.

Dr BROAD - They got an independent valuation of the price of the property and then that's what they bought the property for.

Mr SAUER - You've got to have a buyer and a seller, but that's all right. But we're talking about the future production. For Gresham House - and this is one of the issues that I think, as legislators and leaders in the agricultural sector in Australia, have to be thinking very, very strongly about the issue of food security.

Dr BROAD - Sorry, I was talking about the valuation and the due diligence.

Mr SAUER - Yep, yep. So, we need to make sure that we have got the ability to feed the community. The valuation of the land is only one part of due diligence. Getting a valuation of what the property is worth is fine. The due diligence that I'm talking about is the future productive value and worth of that property, just finding out the value. I mean, if I'm buying a farm, of course, I'll get the valuation done. I'll find out what the value of the farm is. I'm sure you've done that with the block at Nunamara.

Dr BROAD - That's only just a scenario. Actually, I'm not in the market, for the record.

Mr SAUER - All right, for the record you're not in the market. However, if you were buying the block at Nunamara, of course, you would get a valuation to make sure you're not getting ripped off. But the second part of that would be, if you were going to plant trees, is that you would be talking to forestry people to make sure, 'What's it going to cost me per hectare to get it ready? What's it going to cost me per hectare to plant? What's it going to return? Ongoing costs, and when would I get a return on that', so you can work out -

Dr BROAD - Are you arguing that they haven't done that?

Mr SAUER - Absolutely.

Dr BROAD - Well, they have.

Mr SAUER - No, they haven't.

Dr BROAD - Why do you say they haven't?

Mr SAUER - Because everyone's told me that it hasn't happened. And what they've done is a whole heap of -

Dr BROAD - Who's everyone?

CHAIR - Hang on, let's listen to the question and then we'll listen to the answer.

Mr SAUER - My understanding is, and I can be corrected, is that the bulk of their work by consultancies on that property was done looking at the environmental issues. There has been some stuff done with the farming. But they've sold the cows; they've gone to Gippsland.

Dr BROAD - They didn't sell.

Mr SAUER - They've sold the dairy cows.

Dr BROAD - That was the previous owner, sorry. It wasn't Gresham that sold.

Mr SAUER - That's right. The dairy cows have gone, the dairies have been knocked down, and they've been selling a heap of infrastructure, because I know someone that bought a whole heap of water troughs there. So, they will be slowly reducing the amount of agricultural land that's going to be used for agriculture.

Dr BROAD - In your submission, you talked about the farm as sold being four dairies. Why did you say there were four dairies?

Mr SAUER - Pardon, the four dairies?

Dr BROAD - Yeah.

Mr SAUER - There are two main dairies, but there's been others on there.

Dr BROAD - There's only ever been three dairies. So why did you say four?

Mr SAUER - Well, if I did say four, it was wrong.

Dr BROAD - I'm just trying to get to the bottom of that particular issue because that has been repeated a number of times by other people, too.

Mr SAUER - If it's wrong, I take it as wrong. In my research that I did, it was four, and I asked people about the dairies, and there have been four.

Dr BROAD - There's only been three.

Mr SAUER - And my understanding is that in really recent times there were two.

CHAIR - It is open to you to check and come back to the Committee.

Mr SAUER - Which I will.

Dr BROAD - Part of your discussion that we're having here is the idea of distorting of the price of Rushy Lagoon. You're saying that it is worth, in your estimate, \$120 million. That works out to be about \$5500 a hectare. Do you think that that is a good regional average, because it seems like in the current market that was actually quite cheap?

Mr SAUER - Well, that would be my thinking, but I'm not an expert in real estate prices whatsoever. What I gauged my figures on were talking to real estate agents and people in the corporate farming business who had either looked at Rushy Lagoon at some stage or had bought property. Again, it's not necessarily Ian Sauer, but I took advice from people who you would class as experts within the field.

Dr BROAD - We've also heard evidence today from TasFarmers who put the price at between \$80 million and \$100 million, which is significantly less than \$120.

Mr SAUER - It is, I heard that.

Dr BROAD - The other evidence that we've received from Gresham House and their partners is that they had an independent valuation for the property, and that's what they paid, and that it was actually less than the vendor had in mind.

Mr SAUER - I don't know because all of those discussions are confidential. All I know is I was told there were two other credible people that were looking very, very seriously and one was ready to sign a contract. However, keep in mind that Gresham House at that stage were at a significant advantage to any other buyer because they were going to be getting money through the Clean Energy Finance Corporation.

Dr BROAD - We've also heard evidence from TasFarmers that over a number of years there were a number of offers made that the Pye family didn't accept, and other evidence that a contract was put in place in late 2005. These people that you're talking about, when were they seeking to put those offers in? Were they the ones who tried earlier and failed, or were they ones that tried to make another offer after there was already a contract on the property?

Mr SAUER - No, not in 2005. The people that I have been informed in the last couple of years during this process of sale.

Dr BROAD - This is actually quite important, the timing. Was the timing subsequent to, I think, October or November last year? Or was it during the process when FIRB was considering the sale of the property?

Mr SAUER - It would be both because it was around that October, September, October, November, where I was informed, and very confidently, that there were other buyers. Keep in mind that the Pye family were looking for the maximum amount of money, and so they should. This isn't rocket science, but they're not going to take a lesser offer for whatever reason; so, they knew that that's what Gresham House were going to buy the property for with their partners. Gresham House had a high degree of confidence because of the Clean Energy Finance Corporation money and other stuff. Of course, the Pye family would wait for that process to run out, and so they should.

CHAIR - Mr Sauer, you're meeting with us today in a personal capacity, but you have all of this experience as the former president or chair of TasFarmers, TFGA. I want to express an interest in the work that you did to seek to be involved and to be consulted. I have a particular interest in what's known as the section 20B. And, when I say that, I'm referring to the *Carbon Credits (Carbon Farming Initiative) Rules*, so that's the rule, section 20B, which requires the Agriculture Minister to be assured that the application of ACCUs isn't going to have an adverse impact on the region. I'd like to ask you about what you tried to do to get yourself involved, be consulted or to make sure that the Ag Minister had the best possible information before making any determinations.

Mr SAUER - For me as president, it was one of the most disappointing times when we had a farming community and a rural community in the north-east that was seriously concerned. The analysis at the time was that this wasn't right on economic, social and environmental issues. It just wasn't right having that type of land - a parcel of land that size, being subsidised by the Australian Government. We were quite convinced that the federal Minister, Julie Collins, and the Treasurer and others were only getting one side of the story, and that was from Gresham House, or whoever they were employing or whatever, and they needed to hear the other side

because we were convinced, and our facts and figures showed, that there would be a significant impact in the north-east. They would not engage, just wouldn't, full stop.

CHAIR - How did that appear? I mean, in what way would they not engage? Were they -

Mr SAUER - We wrote, we rang, we asked for appointments.

CHAIR - Were they acknowledging an email?

Mr SAUER - Nope.

CHAIR - You tell us what happened.

Mr SAUER - I'm telling you. If we take Julie Collins, the federal Minister, I know that I wrote at least one letter, and there may be two, but at least one letter. I know at the time that Nathan Calman spoke to their office to organise a meeting so that we could give them a briefing and more understanding of what was happening. Nothing was going to happen. We also tried to get a meeting with the Treasurer, or the Treasurer's staff, up in Canberra, and we were going to bring a delegation there. My thought was, get some local people that knew the industry really well, get some credible people. We didn't want people going up there ranting and raving, but credible people, take a delegation and say, 'These are the fact as we see them'. It never happened, we were just completely ignored.

CHAIR - There were no meetings?

Mr SAUER - No, there were no meetings. It was as if - that's why I said in the media at the start, 'I smell a rat'. I mean, there is a rat there because they wouldn't -

CHAIR - But you're the president of TasFarmers seeking a meeting with the Commonwealth Agriculture Minister and you couldn't get a meeting at all or just a meeting on this subject?

Mr SAUER - No, we've had meetings before with the federal Minister on other issues. But on this issue, no. In fact, the office wouldn't even acknowledge. I know that Nathan - I got Nathan to ring a couple of times and send emails, but nothing would happen. And then the same with Treasurer Chalmers.

What's happened with Rushy Lagoon is significant on economic, social and environmental issues. I mean, it is a huge slab of land with enormous potential, and the process was wrong. I don't care. Dr Broad can buy Rushy Lagoon, I don't care and he can paint it pink. It's your land, do what you want with it. However, when taxpayers' money goes into it, you should have a say and the community should have a say, industry should have a say, local government should have a say. It's not the Australian Government's money to chuck around in a frivolous way, and it is a frivolous way because they did no due diligence, none, nor did they talk to anyone, none.

Dr BROAD - Just to be clear, if somebody else bought Rushy Lagoon and wanted to do exactly the same project, you wouldn't have a problem, if it was an Australian buyer?

Mr SAUER - It could be a foreign buyer. Don't care.

Dr BROAD - So, the bit that you -

CHAIR - No, let's be careful. I don't want to interfere in the question here, but I didn't think that's what the answer was.

Mr SAUER - Well, my principle is that if you are the landowner, you should be able to do with it what you want. That's it. There's a whole heap of planning laws and stuff and rules and regulations which would stop you from doing silly things and, at the moment, there is the opportunity to get ACCUs. So, if you, as an individual farmer, want to do that as an income stream, by putting trees in, that's fine. They're a crop. It's just, up there, it's a 35-year rotation. A crop of barley takes you eight or nine months. However, where I draw the line, and I think everyone else in the community draws the line, is when taxpayers' money goes in there to buy half the farm, to change the conversion completely, then no. There's got to be some checks and balances in that.

Dr BROAD - So, to be clear, planting the pine trees on 9000 hectares of Rushy Lagoon isn't the issue in your mind; it is the fact that it's half-owned now by the Clean Energy Finance Corporation?

Mr SAUER - Yes. They're putting in taxpayers' money to buy that. And I would suggest, Dr Broad, that - when I've spoken, as I said before, this is not Ian talking about it, but when I've spoken to foresters about that, the 9000 hectares, if it was the private sector, would never go into pines. It would be a mix and match. It would be a certain percentage of pines, a certain per cent dairy, certain per cent irrigation and a certain per cent dry-land farming. That's what would happen. But, at the moment, I think that what we've got is because we've got Clean Energy Finance Corporation money, we've got ACCUs, we've got a whole heap of stuff there, which is getting people there.

And, all part of this net zero stuff is that the Paris Agreement makes it very, very clear, you cannot upset agriculture. I forget the technical words on it, but you can't go meeting net zero to the detriment of agriculture. And if that's this is not the detriment to agriculture, well, I'll go [inaudible 11.55.03]. And I know people talk about the different land classes, they're fairly old, but even on Class 5 land, all the way through Waterhouse, they're growing potatoes, they're growing dairies, they've lifted the production up to 14 DSEs to the hectare. I mean, this is now, with modern technology, becoming really good. You've seen it all, you're an ag scientist, you know what happens up in the north-west coast, you know what happens everywhere. Production per hectare is going up. The difficult part is keeping the cost down, but it's happening. And this is what's happened all the way up that Waterhouse Road, and it's what could happen at Rushy Lagoon. But that opportunity's now been lost for the next 35 years.

CHAIR - If I may attempt to reinterpret some of what you're saying, Mr Sauer, which is that it's not really about whether it's a foreign owner or a domestic owner, and I think you're also adding that it's not really about the intended land use of an owner; it's the process by which a wholesale land conversion can occur with the push of the Commonwealth government through its various mechanisms, including the ACCUs, which is driven by carbon credits, but leading to a big change in a regional economy in a negative way. Is that what you're saying?

Mr SAUER - It is what I'm saying.

CHAIR - Are they your own words?

Mr SAUER - Yes.

CHAIR - Because I think that we need to be clear on that.

Mr SAUER - You've been listening very well, Mr Chair.

CHAIR - I think that there are questions around the way in which the FIRB process took place, the 14 extensions and the way in which the decision was eventually announced. But, for me, as an MP, I feel that the same outcome could have occurred if it was a domestic buyer, an Australian version of a Gresham House, and we might still be having the same tension, the same difficulties today with a big farm conversion from agriculture to forestry, a pine plantation, and I would want us to be looking to the policy improvements to safeguard the community from that wholesale change which, arguably, impacts food security and importantly regional jobs. So, what policy changes should the Commonwealth be looking at that our Committee could potentially recommend that make those protections, regardless of whether it's a foreign or a domestic buyer?

Mr SAUER - Well, I think I've put a series of recommendations. I think I did. I put a series of recommendations at the end, and so I won't go through them. And whether they're all right, wrong or indifferent, it doesn't concern me. But I think for this Committee, as I said at the very start, and I said at the end, that there's a real opportunity to make substantive change and to use the sale of Rushy Lagoon which, in process and outcomes, are dubious, that we need - you should look at those recommendations. You should also look at what's happening in New Zealand. But I think there's an opportunity here for this Committee, for Tasmania, to lead a national debate and say, 'What happened to Rushy Lagoon probably wasn't the best and we need to be thinking -', because the thing that we need to be thinking about and I know that you're quizzing Mr Calman a little bit, in 10 years' time the discussion topic with parliaments and legislators is going to be how we manage food security in Australia, (1), to feed ourselves, but, secondly, to be able to have exports and feed the rest of the world when we've got a growing population, more disposable income and then, when you've got follies like what's happening there, less land.

CHAIR - We're running out of time, Mr Sauer. Yes, I'm personally quite interested in New Zealand, which you've reflected in one of your suggested recommendations, where New Zealand has a 25 per cent cap on conversion of good farmland where they're pursuing carbon forestry.

Mr SAUER - Yes.

CHAIR - So, I'll take that on board. Are there any other questions before we run out of time? I'll just look at my right first. Dr Broad, Mr Di Falco?

Mr Di FALCO - Just a quick one. We've already heard that the land's not all suitable for growing trees, so how is that going to affect the carbon credits? At the end of the day, they're going to come up short.

Mr SAUER - Well, they might do, but that'll be for the Australian Government, who managed the ACCUs, and that'll be up to Gresham House to manage that. But, you know, all

the advice I've been given is that in some areas, they'll grow well, there's no doubt about it, but there are many, many other areas where those trees will struggle.

CHAIR - How would we know in which areas they would struggle? How can we find out?

Mr SAUER - I don't know. Oh, well, you know, go out there and get an agronomist out there to have a gander, or a forester to go and have a look, and they'll tell you the areas pretty well. They'd probably nearly be able to do it off Google Maps anyway. Well, they don't use Google, but they use other mapping programs, so they'll be able to tell you.

CHAIR - But how could the Committee determine what areas would do well with pine and others may not do so well?

Mr SAUER - I don't really know, Mr Chair. You would probably have to ask around and just find someone that's got a reasonably intimate knowledge of Rushy Lagoon and has the right knowledge and expertise to be able to give that.

Dr BROAD - Gresham House has a forester with experience in Tasmania planting pines, planting eucalypts, and his evidence to me, on a personal capacity, was, it won't grow pines like you can on the north-west coast, but you can grow pines there. And he's a forester. But we'll, no doubt, quiz Gresham House when they provide their evidence.

Mr SAUER - And that's what I've heard too, Dr Broad. I mean, there are areas that they'll grow well, but there are certainly other areas they're going to struggle, really struggle, so there's no difference. It's what you and I are hearing. It's an echo.

CHAIR - Do you have any opinions about how section 20B should be examined in the future? Should it be left alone?

Mr SAUER - No, I can't give advice on that, sorry.

CHAIR - Very good.

Dr BROAD - I have another question but we've run out of time.

CHAIR - You do have time.

Dr BROAD - You seem to be indicating that there should be some sort of new veto power of a community, like a government, perhaps, or even an organisation like TasFarmers when it comes to a sale process like this. How would you actually see that working, or is that an extra layer of red tape, I suppose? How would that be done in a sensible way? You've made the allegation that Gresham House hasn't done their due diligence or, indeed, that the process wasn't made available of all the appropriate information. How would you actually see this playing out from an administrative point of view?

Mr SAUER - What I'm not suggesting is that we put another layer of red tape over these processes but, certainly, if you're going to have - and we just a minute ago spoke about food security and the issue that that's going to be, the issue being is that if you are going to have a

PUBLIC

detrimental impact upon agricultural production or that regional community, then it needs to be put under the microscope.

Dr BROAD - How do you do that?

Mr SAUER - I can tell you how: because the Minister, Julie Collins, has the power to veto the ACCUs if it could be demonstrated that there's a detrimental impact to agriculture.

CHAIR - Which you may not be aware, that section 20B governs that.

Mr SAUER - There are checks and balances there. I mean, the last thing I want to do is to restrict land use in agriculture or change it, but the problem that we have now is that the rules and regulations in this case, is doing just that. But the federal Minister, if she puts the check on, "Will this hurt agricultural production in the region?" and it's just agricultural production, the answer is yes. 2.2 per cent of the state's herd and nearly 5 per cent of the dairy herd are going. That is significant in anyone's language.

CHAIR - We're going to close there. Thank you, Mr Sauer, for your appearance. You've taken some questions on notice, and the secretary will write to you about that. What you've said to us today is protected by parliamentary privilege. Once you leave the table, you need to be aware that privilege is not attached to comments that you may make to anyone, including the media, even if you're just repeating what you had said to us. Do you understand that?

Mr SAUER - No.

CHAIR - I'll read it to you again.

Mr SAUER - Just give it to me in plain language.

CHAIR - I need you to understand that your evidence before us today, you are safe to have given that evidence without fear of being sued. It is covered by parliamentary privilege. But that privilege will end when you leave the Committee and you should be aware the privilege will not attach to any comments that you make outside this Committee.

Mr SAUER - I understand that.

CHAIR - Even if you're just repeating what you have said to us.

Mr SAUER - I understand.

CHAIR - Thank you.

The witness withdrew.

The Committee suspended from 12.05 p.m. to 12.16 p.m.

Dorset Council - Mayor Rhys Beattie

PUBLIC

CHAIR - Mr Beattie, it's wonderful to be in your community for our public hearings. Welcome to everybody present to today's hearing of the House of Assembly Select Committee on Commonwealth Decisions on Agricultural Land. Thank you for your attendance. I'm Michael Ferguson, Chair of the Committee, member for Bass. To my left is Dr Shane Broad, Deputy Chair of the Committee, member for Braddon. To my right, Mr Carlo Di Falco, member for Lyons, and Ms Cecily Rosol, member for Bass. We're supported by our Committee secretary and Hansard today.

Mr Mayor, can I confirm that you've received and read the guide sent to you by the Committee secretary?

Mr BEATTIE - I have.

CHAIR - Could you please state your name and capacity in which you're appearing before the Committee?

Mr BEATTIE - Rhys Joshua Beattie, Mayor of Dorset Council.

CHAIR - Thank you. This hearing is covered by parliamentary privilege, allowing individuals like yourself to speak with freedom, without fear of being sued or questioned in any court or place out of Parliament. This protection is not accorded to you if statements that may be defamatory are repeated or referred to by you outside the parliamentary proceedings. Today's hearing is public. The public and media may be present. Should you wish aspects of your evidence to be heard in private, you must make this request to the Committee at the time.

Mr RHYS JOSHUA BEATTIE, MAYOR, DORSET COUNCIL WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR - Thank you, and I invite you to make an opening statement.

Mr BEATTIE - Thank you for giving me the opportunity to present. This sale of the property, and the, I suppose, governance around the sale has been a very topical thing in our community. There are still concerns in the community of what the change is going to bring about. We've outlined where we think changes could be made, more focusing on going forward with other large land-use changes affecting agricultural land is where we want to look. We understand that Rushy Lagoon has sold and that process has happened. We weren't happy with a lot of parts of that process, but now we want to focus on how we can put some stronger governance in to prevent or just make sure that big changes to agricultural land are well considered going forward.

CHAIR - Thank you. I'm sure the Committee would like to discuss with you the submission and your recommendations. For me, I'd like to, in an opening question, just invite you to reflect on council's view, and your own informed view, about the sale outcome in terms of its impact on your local economy in the jobs and economic output of the Dorset community.

Mr BEATTIE - As we've said in our report, we understand that there will probably be an increase in employment initially with the plantation being established, but what we feel will happen after that initial flurry of jobs is that there will be a reduction. And without a continued workload there, we will get a lot of potential fly-in, fly-out type working structures where you've got a boom-and-bust cycle. So, looking to the future, especially in a community out that

way that is very remote anyway, once you start diminishing even a small amount of jobs in that area, you start to struggle with other service providings. Because it's isolated, maybe there's not as many people out there, so the roads don't require as much looking after, but then there's a flow-on effect, and potentially other vital services could be diminished because there's not as many people to give it that - what's the word I'm looking for? - the economies of scale, basically.

CHAIR - The Committee's received other evidence where the proponents are stating publicly 190 jobs over the life of the rotation. Does council, or do you, have any knowledge of what that would look like year by year? It is obvious that in a planting and establishment phase there'll be more employment, more contracting perhaps, and much less so, of course, during the growth phase. Has council been provided with any kind of information from the proponent about immediate changes and what the number of jobs would be at each year of those 30 years?

Mr BEATTIE - No, we've only been quoted with those overall numbers, not a distribution as such.

CHAIR - Would council have asked for that kind of information, or might it ask in the future for more information around economic change? Because I think all of us at the table have a great interest in understanding what would be the losses, what will be the reductions in economic activity or jobs, whether they're direct or indirect. We're happy to hear evidence about what the increases may be. It's an open question about whether it's a net positive or a net loss. We'll leave that for another day. But would council have an ongoing role with the proponent in seeking those answers or seeking to maximise the job numbers?

Mr BEATTIE - Definitely. I think once it became apparent that there was no means of changing the outcome of the ground, we have engaged to support them in making sure that jobs stay here, and anything else we can do. We haven't specifically asked the question around where those jobs are going to be and when they're going to be. But, going forward, we definitely have to, especially with our strategic planning. If they do manage to produce this timber asset they're talking, then we need to start thinking about, strategically, roads, infrastructure, where they're going. And we need to start thinking strategically now with that. I think it would be a very good pathway for us to follow to start understanding if it's serious that they're going to process them here. I know it's a long way away, but strategically we need to start thinking of that.

CHAIR - Your submission deals with the issues around transparency and being able to be consulted while these decisions were being made, not just the Foreign Investment Review Board process and the Treasurer's process, but also on the agriculture policy side of things, where the Commonwealth Agriculture Minister has a role. What's your own reflection for the Committee today about the experience that council and the community have had, maybe any things that you've been pleased with or frustrated with, and what would be better ways that those things could be managed in the future?

Mr BEATTIE - I suppose the biggest frustration with that whole process is we were getting whispers and hearsay that there was Commonwealth money involved. The proponent came to us early on, once it hit the media that there was a conversion happening, and explained their intentions, which was really good of them. As for government involvement, we heard it was happening. We tried to confirm, we made multiple attempts at understanding if any government money was going to be involved. Frankly, I thought that it was a joke when someone said that there was going to be government money involved in helping buy this farm.

Until it came out, we didn't know. There was no consultation on that, on the government input of it.

CHAIR - Maybe we might come to the recommendations later. Let me go to my colleagues who would like to ask a follow-up question.

Dr BROAD - Have you been out to the property and had a tour with Gresham House?

Mr BEATTIE - I have been out there in a non-mayoral capacity, yes.

Dr BROAD - And what was your impression of the property?

Mr BEATTIE - I was saddened by the paddocks that I was in. I was saddened by thinking that they're going to be in pine trees.

Dr BROAD - In your evidence submitted, you talked about - 'you' being the council, you observed an anticipated influence on the acquisition, ownership and land use. You've talked about:

Dorset Council's view is that Commonwealth-supported investment has the potential to increase land values beyond levels achievable through conventional agricultural returns. This may reduce opportunities for farming enterprises seeking to expand production -

And so on. But then you've gone on:

The 2025 Bendigo Bank report, *Australian Land Values*, indicates that the northern Tasmanian region saw an overall increase in Tasmania's regions in 2024, recording a 7.5 per cent increase to \$19,647 per hectare.

The property at Rushy Lagoon sold for approximately \$6000 a hectare, which is substantially less than that. What do you think the property is actually worth? Your evidence is that the Commonwealth-supported investment has the potential to increase land values, and yet average land values in the district seem to be substantially higher than the price paid.

Mr BEATTIE - Well, I suppose the quick maths is there's 12,000 productive hectares on Rushy Lagoon. The rest is remnant scrub and sand dune country. So, if you do the quick maths -

Dr BROAD - That's \$12,000 a hectare.

Mr BEATTIE - It's about \$12,000 a hectare.

Dr BROAD - Which is substantially less than -

Mr BEATTIE - It is. When you've got a regional property, access is harder, so it reduces the value. Then you've got other factors, like, obviously, to run that farm at a high capacity, you've got to have a level of expertise which is higher than our lovely red soils around here. You've got to know what you're doing, basically. All those things take away. And we're talking averages here, so averages in northern Tasmania, and that is not as good as our lovely red soil,

PUBLIC

I suppose, is the way I'll put it. So, it's an average, and that's below the average because it's not as good as some.

Dr BROAD - But do you believe that Gresham House paid more than the land was worth?

Mr BEATTIE - I don't know the final figure on what was paid for it, but I understand that it was inflated from what it was worth. In my opinion, yes.

Dr BROAD - What do you think it was worth, then? You could do it as a dollar-per-hectare value or as a bucket of money.

Mr BEATTIE - I think you could, with a substantial investment to make it hum, I'm thinking about that \$85-90 million was where it should've been.

Dr BROAD - \$85-90 million?

Mr BEATTIE - That's my non-mayoral opinion.

Dr BROAD - That's your non-mayoral opinion. Yeah, okay.

CHAIR - We actually don't know the sale price of the property. We're seeking to find that out.

Mr Di FALCO - I suppose the problem is the change of use, changing it from pasture to forestry, and along with that amount of trees, you're going to cut down the amount of runoff. From a council's point of view, would you consider the effect that that would have on the Ramsar site in the area?

Mr BEATTIE - I suppose it's probably a bit out of our lane as council to consider the ecological effects, but the environmental concerns with such a monoculture happening is definitely something that we want to - we've got one of the best places to work, live and play in Tasmania and we want to keep it that way, so that is definitely a consideration.

Dr BROAD - I'm just trying to get clear in my mind the issue that the council has. Is it that there is going to be a conversion to pine? You talked about a monoculture a minute ago. Is that the concern? Or is the overriding concern that there is Commonwealth investment in the property and that process?

Mr BEATTIE - The process, with the Commonwealth involvement. I'm not going to say I'm against Commonwealth involvement in investments because there could be a place - there probably is a place - for helping stimulate certain industries. So, the process, I'm not happy with the process, especially the accountability.

And as for pine trees, yes, I am concerned with the change of use. I think there needs to be more levels of review, not just for pine trees. As I've said, and as we'll go through, I'm sure, with the recommendations, for large changes in significant agricultural land - not just trees, I'm talking solar panels, I'm talking everything - there is not enough red tape to make sure that it's done properly. We need to have a better regulatory process so that we're not losing this finite resource.

CHAIR - Mayor, are you concerned about food security in the context of this change in conversion, or job and social impacts, or both? How would you prioritise the hierarchy of your concerns, as mayor and representing your council, about what you see as the big negatives here? In what order are they concerning you?

Mr BEATTIE - Definitely job and economic security is the number one for our region, especially up there. We've seen evidence, when the same thing happened over at Evercreech, it was just an economic desert was created once the trees were in, and that's what we're mainly concerned around. That's our number one.

CHAIR - So, year-on-year jobs and direct and indirect employment in the district?

Mr BEATTIE - Year-on-year jobs, yeah and that follow-on, because if it was going on into traditional farming practices, you have such a multiplier effect in the community with agricultural suppliers and livestock and abattoirs. That's the other concern, is that it's going to have effect and reduce the jobs to such a broad area, not just to Rushy Lagoon.

Dr BROAD - Just on that, you mentioned Evercreech and I think maybe there are some similarities. Evercreech was on the market for a long period of time before it was purchased and converted to a plantation. I'm not sure where it's at the moment, whether it's been re-cleared or whether it's still under trees. Rushy Lagoon was for sale for a long period of time. We've heard evidence from TasFarmers that there were a number of offers made over the years and yet the sale process didn't go through. Do you think if a proponent can sell that property after a period of time, but that involves a conversion, that they shouldn't be allowed to do that? Or there should be restrictions on conversion to plantations?

Mr BEATTIE - I think there needs to be adequate checks and balances, in some instance, restrictions to putting plantations in. But that needs to be a very clear legislated process so that potential investors know the process. I don't care whose money's buying farms, to tell you the truth, but we need to have a process that everyone understands, that's very clear, so that it takes the argument out of it that, 'Oh, it didn't sell, we'll just put it in for trees'. If you had this clear pathway and it doesn't sell, well, you've got to reduce your price to meet the market. If it's not selling, you need to reduce your price to meet the market. If we had those checks and balances so that an investor said, 'Right, if I can get to tick all these boxes, I'll be able to buy it and put trees in; and if it doesn't tick all these boxes, then I can't put trees in it, so I'm not interested'.

Dr BROAD - But what happens if they can achieve a price, but it involves their conversion?

Mr BEATTIE - If it ticks all the boxes on a regulatory process, which we don't have at the moment; we only have protection of Class 1, 2 and 3 land under the agricultural protection policy. If we can create a process where we have checks and balances, as I've got in my recommendations - there are some examples in my recommendations, then everyone would know what they have to do to convert to trees or solar panels. They know the process and then they can get pre-approval on that process potentially. But what I'm saying is that I don't think the argument that, 'Oh, it's not been sold. Well then, we can go and buy it for trees', is an adequate argument because if it's not been sold at that price, then you've got to reduce your price. It's a simple market in my eyes.

Ms ROSOL - Can I just clarify: are you saying that part of the regulation should be that they have to reduce their price rather than sell it to convert the land use?

Mr BEATTIE -No, I'm saying that there needs to be a regulation process. I'll give an example. The recommendation, in a crux, is that as for a lot of planning applications, you've got a list of criteria you have to meet before that can happen. I'm saying that we need a check. Here I've got such criteria would be like an agricultural land and capability and productivity assessment; the property scale, so understanding what effects, especially with a huge property, how it affects the community; irrigation access and water. For an example, at Rushy Lagoon, they've got a 14,000 megalitre water licence. The government and farmers just spent \$200 million on a 23,000 megalitre water licence in the Midlands, and we've got 14,000 megs up there, some of it is transferable, but not much of it, so that's going to go to waste.

What I'm talking is, is that there are potential assessment criteria that should be taken into account for conversion of agricultural land, not just for trees, but other things, just for example solar panels, so it's clear to any investor what they'd have to go through to potentially plant trees. I'm not talking about - that could reduce the price of the land, but the intention is to make sure that everyone knows what they'd have to do to do that or the criteria. Some properties wouldn't meet this criteria and we need to be able to identify where and when these sorts of land uses are suitable.

Ms ROSOL - So, there would be two separate processes then, aren't there: the criteria process and the land [inaudible 12.37.18]?

Mr BEATTIE - I'm not clear on the process. It was just a recommendation that we need a process like the planning process where there's criteria that need to be met so that you can convert. If you don't meet this criteria, then you can't convert. I know it's a difficult thing to get right because my opinion is very different to someone else's opinion, so whose opinion do you take? But you'd need - if you've got clear rules to put a level of protection on this finite resource, I think that if it affected land values then that would just be part of it. Like, you'd never want to affect land values, but yeah. I hope I answered your question.

Dr BROAD - Just on this, you're saying that the 14,000 megalitres - I'm not exactly sure what the water licence is, but Gresham House have discussed that they are going to continue to use that water to irrigate the more productive areas where there's already pivot irrigation and so on. Would that change your view? They seem committed to continuing agricultural production, not as a dairy, but with some cropping and beef.

Mr BEATTIE - I suppose you do the simple maths. They're saying that they want to put 9000 hectares of trees in -

Dr BROAD - 9000 hectares?

Mr BEATTIE - 9000 hectares of trees in. You've got 12,000 hectares of productive land -

Dr BROAD - So, 3000 hectares of irrigation is about right.

Mr BEATTIE - Yeah, you've got to put a buffer on it because around the trees you've got non-plant areas, so I reckon you've probably got 1500 hectares of non-plant around the

PUBLIC

trees that you can't irrigate, practically. So, if they kept 1000 hectares, 1500 hectares of pivot country to water, you're talking 5 meg to the hectare, so there's 5500 meg, potentially, to be used.

Dr BROAD - I think we'll get clarification, but my understanding is they're going to retain more of the property for irrigation and agriculture.

Mr BEATTIE - That'd be a really good outcome.

Dr BROAD - We will seek confirmation from Gresham themselves.

CHAIR - Speaking for myself, I have a great concern about the combination of federal policies that have led to this situation. I don't just see it personally as just another landowner that's decided to change the purpose and the land use in order to maximise their commercial advantage. I see it much more as a combination and timing of factors and decisions at the Commonwealth level, particularly around, first of all, the equity investment that was made by the Australian Government. TasFarmers and others have made the point that that distorts the market. I'd invite you to tell the Committee if you have a view on that.

Secondly, there's the carbon credits which are a big push factor on a different investment, which is pushing agriculture out in favour of trees on farms for carbon abatement. And, of course, thirdly, there's the \$8.8 million grant to establish a plantation. I think I've put it to you that that combination of factors has contrived a situation where if you weren't interested in planting trees, you're going to be priced out of buying that property. They're my opinions. I just wonder to what extent they align with your own observations or opinions and council's, and how we can make a recommendation to improve the situation going forward?

Mr BEATTIE - I think that the process is, from the outside looking in, you've got a process where you've got people looking for loopholes, and all these loopholes seem to align that you can get funding for trees when you don't even own the property yet and just happen to get the funding applications in the week before it's due. There are way too many things that don't pass the pub test in this instant. I'm not saying that another landholder couldn't have gone through all the same loopholes. I suppose it's just a matter of having a level of grunt in your business to pay people to go and do all this. I think that those processes, if you had the right team, as a business, to work with government, they could have worked all these things out. But the biggest thorn in the side is that they're doing it with foreign money. I'm not against foreign investment at all, but I'm against the Australian government teaming up with a foreign company.

Dr BROAD - Just on that \$8.8 million grant, are you aware that you get the money after you've planted the trees, not before?

Mr BEATTIE - Yes, I am.

Dr BROAD - And they may not actually be able to plant the trees.

Mr BEATTIE - I understand they've got two years to plant the trees.

Dr BROAD - But the trees are already growing, and they might lose them all. That's something to take into consideration, as well. No doubt we'll hear evidence from Gresham about that as well.

There's also been about another \$4 million of projects from that same fund. My understanding is that there was a bucket of money and the people who are qualified were given the grants until the money ran out. So, other farmers, it was available to everybody who qualified. Are you arguing that you don't believe they did qualify?

Mr BEATTIE - No, I'm arguing that, obviously, the policy was wrong. Giving foreign companies Australian government money is just wrong in so many ways. I'm not saying that the application - I know farmers that have got money out of that same fund.

Dr BROAD - There are foreign-owned properties that, I understand, also got the grant, some in the north-east, I think. Are you saying, then, that that grant shouldn't have been available to foreign-owned property?

Mr BEATTIE - I don't think it should have, no.

CHAIR - Do you take the view that the transactions that the Commonwealth and the overseas buyer engaged in are distorting the market for agricultural land in Dorset?

Mr BEATTIE - Yes, I think they have distorted the market.

CHAIR - Do you have an opinion about what that distortion looks like in practice? Does it price somebody else out of the opportunity to expand their farm, or does it push prices up of neighbouring properties because they might see the same opportunity? Does it lead to a potential situation where you are having less and less agricultural production as perhaps more farms are converted, using the same model? How do you describe the market distortion?

Mr BEATTIE - At the moment, it's going to be distorting large farms more than the neighbour effect, I suppose. If you get a big parcel of land in the north-east, usually you'd see a farming family or a corporate come in and spend a lot of money to develop it into a fantastic resource, a high employer. I think that this sort of thing is pricing even other foreign traditional farming bodies out of the market, which they usually stimulate the economy incredibly. I think that it's more that it will push out large amounts of capital coming in for agricultural expansion. It'll outcompete that because they can produce an asset that, once it's established, they can set and forget with limited management needed. It's a different business model, but at the moment it is outcompeting those other entities, I feel.

CHAIR - Do you have a sense that other large land holdings might go the same way? And are you concerned about that from the district's point of view of the economic and agricultural capability of Dorset?

Mr BEATTIE - Yes. I think Australia-wide we're seeing a lot of these large areas of land going this way, and definitely concerned about it in Dorset because good intentions only go so far. At the end of the day, farmers will take the top dollar because the way agricultural economies is, you don't really make any money out of farming until you can realise your capital gain, and so farmers are going to make the most of their capital gain at the time and, as a farmer, I'd probably do the same thing.

CHAIR - So, if that was taken to its logical conclusion, Mr Mayor, and let's say in 15 years' time there had been more conversions, what does that mean for a community like

yours here in Dorset? What does it mean for your council budget? What does it mean for your maintenance regime? What does it mean for your livability for families?

Mr BEATTIE - I think, livability-wise, you would see a reduction in the amount of people. As I touched on earlier, services would reduce, as they do in small communities, and even potential wage reductions with less of those downstream jobs around. There'd be an average wage reduction. You'd hope that, financially, we'd differentiate the rate for forestry, so we can rate a bit higher on forestry properties, which would help with council sustainability. But if you start reducing the livability and the job factors, you could potentially reduce other land values or houses is a potential, which would be a concern.

On top of that, if we went into a phase of a lot more forestry, as I touched on earlier as well, you'd have to get very strategic in planning for future roads because of the damage to our assets, our bridges and roads going forward. Once there is an asset, a forestry asset to use would be phenomenal. So, that would be a big financial risk to council that we'd have to counter.

CHAIR - Are you making that point that, with a reduction in ongoing jobs on a year by year, that you're just going to have less people being in the community? So, a population impact, which leads to an impact on the school, for example? Are you making those points?

Mr BEATTIE - That's my biggest concern, would be a population decrease and then your viabilities of schools, your viabilities of hospitals. All those sort of things just start to naturally decrease because of lack of need.

Dr BROAD - At the time of the sale, from what I understand there were six employees. So, the dairies had been decommissioned at the point of sale. It seems like there had been decisions made by the previous owner to basically move out of intensive job-creating industries such as dairy. Is there some sort of compulsion? Like, the landowner has made a choice to move out of the dairy industry. There weren't 90 employees or 50 employees. There were six. So, what's your comment on that?

Mr BEATTIE - I suppose, from the outside looking in, that property's been land-banked for a long time. There hasn't been adequate inputs put into it for a long time. I suppose, where I'm coming at is more the opportunity. Like, if you had been running that, if you could have been milking - well, you could milk 15,000 to 20,000 cows there quite comfortably.

Dr BROAD - How? They've got 14,000 megalitres; how could you milk that number of cows? They simply don't have the irrigation capacity.

Mr BEATTIE - But there's potential for more dam sites and more irrigation investment.

Dr BROAD - Where on the property?

Mr BEATTIE - There's several big dam locations on that property.

CHAIR - We might have to ask to see them.

Dr BROAD - We might have to ask. From what I understand, Gresham actually attempted to sell the dairies before the sale was completed. Why do you think that the dairies

didn't sell? Or do you have anybody who potentially was interested, or any sort of discussion of that matter?

Mr BEATTIE - Not in my mayoral capacity, there was no discussion. I do understand there was a lot of people looking at them, but I understand it all came down to dollars and cents. I think there were offers made, but I don't think the value was enough for Gresham.

Dr BROAD - Have you got any sort of ballpark figure that people were offering?

Mr BEATTIE - No, not off the top of my head, I don't have that figure.

Dr BROAD - Do you have a sense of whether they were a reasonable purchase price or were people lowballing, or?

Mr BEATTIE - No, some of the prices I heard were reasonable. There were some lowballers, but I did hear a reasonable price. Whether or not it was just hearsay - like this whole process, it's been hearsay and 'he said, she said'.

CHAIR - I'm fascinated by your observation of what the carrying capacity of the property could be, with a greater emphasis in dairy. Would you be good enough to take that on notice and come back to the Committee later with some of your own thoughts on what that could be?

In fairness to you, I wouldn't expect that you've had time to read the submission from Gresham House, but they have provided a submission and we'll speak to them about that another day. Reading from their submission, amongst other things, they deal with the dairy operations and there's a sentence that's I think useful for you to know about:

The TNAT investor -

That is the National Asset Trust:

- group ran a concurrent process to sell the three dairies. Ultimately, there were no conforming bids, and TNAT decided to acquire the full property and permanently close the dairies as part of the final investment plan.

I think that's to give you some more context at least of what Gresham House's position is on that. I don't know what 'conforming bids' means, but what I do know is that there were dairies there. One had been closed and there were others that were continuing and, I would argue, could have continued to grow and, with some investment, potentially lead to a lot more economic outcome, more jobs, more indirect jobs in the community. That's something that we'll be following up with them. I'm fascinated by what you've had to say about that, because for those of us who are concerned about carbon credits driving agriculture out of the district, it's that kind of information that I find very compelling and important.

Dr BROAD - I've got a question related to that. If this extraordinary dairy capacity was possible, then why didn't somebody buy the property between 2018 and this sale process?

Mr BEATTIE - I suppose to realise these big carrying capacities, you've got a massive, massive investment involved. Once again, it is a remote area. Workforce at that scale is going

to take a lot of managing. I feel that people probably didn't think it was the time to go that hard at Rushy Lagoon.

Dr BROAD - Isn't that also the experience at Evercreech, for example, so the dairy there: remote, they sold it for trees. You've taken a massive hit in the productive capacity because maybe the dairy wasn't profitable. Could that also be the case for Rushy Lagoon, given the distance from market, given the issues that I know they had getting staff and retaining staff, that it's simply a distance to market productivity issue, like it was at Evercreech?

Mr BEATTIE - I'm sure there were those some of those issues. And I understand the dairies did, or would require significant investment to get them up to modern standards. I suppose then you've got to look to the future with robotics and other forms of labour-reducing technology to bring those sort of areas to life so you can potentially have more targeted labour to make them really work. I think using from how the dairies were run in the past is not an adequate way of assessing potential, I suppose is where I'm trying to get to.

Dr BROAD - But isn't also the market a way of assessing the potential?

Mr BEATTIE - It is a way of setting potential. That's a prime example of how trees have outcompeted other traditional agricultural enterprises to buy a farm.

Dr BROAD - I mean, despite this potential, though.

Mr BEATTIE - Pardon?

Dr BROAD - I'm just trying to tease out your evidence, sorry. You're discussing that there's this enormous potential in Rushy Lagoon, given significant investments. Obviously the amount of money you put in on top of your purchase price determines your profit in the long term. They tried to sell the dairies and there were no conforming bids, so people have had a look at it with a mind to how much money they can make, how much money needs to be invested, and the deal couldn't be made. But yet a low-value use, which is forestry, outcompeted everybody, and the property was sold for something like \$6000 a hectare, not \$19,000 a hectare. I'm just trying to tease out your evidence a bit.

Mr BEATTIE - I suppose I'll go back to what you said around forestry being a low-value enterprise. That probably makes the sale price sound unrealistic, and it shows why it needed government support. Where I'm getting at with this is that because of it having to be propped up, it has outcompeted other people that wanted that potential to develop further into that dairy region. I'm not arguing that it won't come with its challenges. It would come with its challenges. Hence why the productive areas aren't worth the same as the average area of farmland in the north, because it has got its challenges, and you might not reach that perceived potential. But somewhere close to it was definitely achievable with the right investment. Obviously, that investment wasn't here right now, but it doesn't mean it should be just planted to trees and forgotten about. I think there'll be potential for that investment going forward.

CHAIR - I've got a couple of questions on the recommendations that your council have put forward. I was impressed by the quality and the depth of the submission, so thank you to you and your team for the wonderful effort that you put into that. I wonder if you could speak to recommendation 2, which deals with - well, I'll read it:

Require the Foreign Investment Review Board, the Clean Energy Finance Corporation and other relevant Commonwealth agencies to publicly notify proposed investments or acquisitions involving strategically significant agricultural land, and provide opportunities for stakeholder and community submissions.

Could you just speak to where that's come from? What's the basis upon your disappointment that would lead to a recommendation like that? What did you experience?

Mr BEATTIE - The main reason that that recommendation has come from is, basically, if I hadn't have acted on the word on the street of what was happening and got it in the media, we wouldn't have known that the sale of Rushy Lagoon was going to a company that wanted to convert it into trees until it was already past the Foreign Investment Review Board. So, if we hadn't have heard about it - and I think this is the case in other places around Australia, it's already done and dusted by the time anyone knows about it. I don't know what the process is, but there needs to be a consultation process. I understand there'd be all sorts of confidentiality issues when you're talking sale prices and stuff. But I think the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, for instance, should be at least giving the public an intent that they want to invest in forestry operations in a capital sense, not just a finance sense. Like, it needs to be explained to us better.

CHAIR - Thank you. Are there any other questions on that recommendation 2?

Dr BROAD - How do you define 'strategically significant agricultural land'?

Mr BEATTIE - I would say something that - it would have to be assessed by contribution to the state's, or potential contribution, to the state's economy. So, I'm talking large carrying capacities, large holdings, or something like Rushy Lagoon, which is a massive employer in one area. I think that would be a rough way of saying 'strategically important'.

Dr BROAD - I think the TasFarmers use that language too, 'strategically significant agricultural land'. I haven't heard that before. Does your council have a policy on what constitutes strategically significant agricultural land?

Mr BEATTIE - No, we don't have a policy on that.

Dr BROAD - Because this is based around decisions relating to strategically significant agricultural land, but there's no definition. So, if I was to buy another property in your district and convert to plantation, how would I know that it was strategically significant agricultural land that may trigger another process?

Mr BEATTIE - I suppose that's where - what I was talking to before in my recommendations, at the end, around what criteria would be for such a thing like strategically important agricultural land, I don't know the process, because my view could be different to yours. So, you would need to have a check box of some description saying, right, it's this scale, it has this availability to water, it has this land classification, and there would have to be some form of assessment criteria before it checked that box. I don't know what that assessment criteria is because I've got a view but it's different to everyone else and we live in a democracy, so it'd have to be worked out.

Dr BROAD - That's sort of a forward-looking approach, whereas what we're actually investigating here, too, is like the rear-view mirror. Isn't it potentially unfair to put another criteria on this purchase process, to talk about 'strategically significant agricultural land' as part of a process that's already occurred, when that process wasn't in place when all this happened? It seems like a new concept, I suppose.

Mr BEATTIE - I suppose it is a new concept because I'm very concerned of what's happened. There weren't any checks and balances. I think, as a country, we need to try and find ways to make sure that all land, for any land use, is done in a practical sense. Like, if you were going to go and put solar panels on agricultural land in a region where there's a brand-new irrigation scheme, wouldn't you go and put them on northerly facing slopes where it captures more sun and doesn't affect other agricultural production? That would be a smart choice, in my view. But at the moment there's applications to put them on agricultural land that's got access to a brand-new irrigation scheme. There is not any checks and balances at the moment, so my recommendations are looking forward to finding ways that we can, unfortunately, put more red tape on land-use changes.

Dr BROAD - It's probably before your time, but did your council discuss these issues when Evercreech was purchased and converted from dairy to plantation?

Mr BEATTIE - It's not in our council area.

Dr BROAD - Oh, sorry.

Mr BEATTIE - It's in Break O'Day.

CHAIR - Mayor, I wouldn't expect you to be across this, but I'll just let you know that we have, at the Commonwealth level, a rule that the Commonwealth are telling us that they have followed. TasFarmers believe they have not followed it correctly. I call it rule 20B, because it's section 20B of the *Carbon Credits (Carbon Farming Initiative) Rules 2015*. Effectively, what it does is it, in fact, requires the Australian Government Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Agriculture Minister has a role to assess whether the proposed projects would lead to 'an undesirable impact on agricultural production in the region where the project would be located'. An opportunity for the Ag Minister to say that the proposal will lead to an undesirable impact on agricultural production in the region. This is in the context of carbon credits only. It's not about the CEFC's equity investment; it's about carbon credits.

It is the position of TasFarmers that that process wasn't properly followed because, they argue, that they looked at recent information only, not the true capability of Rushy Lagoon as a working farm. A number of us, certainly myself, are interested in pursuing this. Even though the deal is now done, how do we ensure that that rule is followed and honoured, and truly followed, if there was a future application for another large farm anywhere in the country but particularly in Tasmania. I wonder if you've had an opportunity to consider that and whether - I look at your recommendation 4, where you're asking for formal consultation. I wonder if, for example, the Agriculture Minister had had an opportunity to hear from your council before deciding not to participate in that veto, would that have potentially given the Agriculture Minister a more informed basis to decide whether or not to get involved because the Minister has an opportunity?

Mr BEATTIE - Yes, that's the precise level that I would like to see more formal consultation. Once again, you'd get a mixed opinion on especially the capacity of the property, but I think on a bigger scale, the whole carbon scheme needs to have better real-time measurements of actual captured carbon. And then released carbon, once projects are finished, needs to be measured as well. And the technology is there; it's just ignored at the moment.

CHAIR - Where I'm coming from is about jobs and agricultural output, not forestry, so I won't labour the point. But the Agriculture Minister has an opportunity, and only gets one when there's an application for carbon credits which are going to be used to inflate the price of properties in communities like ours. The Agriculture Minister, if he or she was concerned that there will be a lead to an adverse impact on agricultural production, he or she can say no. There's an open question about whether the process was properly followed and, indeed, truly followed to the spirit of it. I think what your recommendation 4 is getting at is, 'Let us have a say. Let us help you understand the impact locally'. Is that where you're coming from?

Mr BEATTIE - Yes, that's definitely where the recommendation's coming from. We need to have an opportunity before the deal is done as such to explain and express our community's views, because in my short time as mayor, this would have taken up, probably 80 per cent of my phone calls have been in regards to this sale, so it's very topical. And yeah, I think -

CHAIR - What efforts did you go to as mayor to try to get some of these concerns raised with the relevant ministers?

Mr BEATTIE - I started the process with Julie Collins where she was in a meeting with us, and then continued through our federal member, who actually did quite a good job championing for me. But then, at a point, she realised that she wasn't getting anywhere, so then I went to state ministers to see what support I could get there with just getting the message out there because I wasn't getting anywhere with any federal - they weren't give me any answers that I wanted to know.

Dr BROAD - When was this occurring, when did you start advocating or seeking information? Do you recall the month or -

Mr BEATTIE - Yes, it would have been - I'd probably take the exact date on notice, but it was about nine months before the sale, or 10 months before the sale.

Dr BROAD - Last year?

Mr BEATTIE - Yes, last year, so it would have been in March. I'd have to check my calendar but I'm assuming it had been April/May.

Dr BROAD - Last year?

Mr BEATTIE - Last year.

Ms ROSOL - You said that you went to state ministers about that. Are you saying you went to state ministers in April/May last year?

Dr BROAD - So, 2025?

Mr BEATTIE - Yes, it was probably a few months after that. I was trying to follow the process of the federal guys getting back to me and seeing what they could find out, and then I enrolled the help of, just some guidance more than anything, from, 'What can we do? Can we do anything?'. I thought there might have been a planning process. And then I was put onto the protection of ag land policy, which only protected Class 1, 2 and 3 land. I thought there might have been an avenue to change that. I got some good help but didn't get the outcome that I was chasing.

Ms ROSOL - Do you know roughly when you were speaking to the state ministers or engaging with the state ministers?

Mr BEATTIE - Once again, I'd have to check my calendar, but it would have been, say, three months after I engaged with the federal Minister.

Ms ROSOL - Still last year?

Mr BEATTIE - Yes.

Dr BROAD - Chair, on your indulgence, could we seek that information? We don't need to know exactly where you were meeting, but just like a series of dates and time or dates from your from your diary, when you sought particular meetings so that we've got a bit of a timeline.

CHAIR - I'd support that, if you'd be happy to take it on notice. The secretary will write to you.

Mr BEATTIE - Yes, that's good, I haven't got a pen.

CHAIR - What the Committee's asking you is if you can identify what attempts you've made at different levels of government to contact various ministers, and that would be helpful.

Dr BROAD - And the dates.

Mr BEATTIE - Yes, yes, because it's been going on for a long time, that we knew something was going on.

CHAIR - We've got time for a couple more questions. Ms Rosol.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you, Chair. There's been a lot of talk about the theoretical potential of Rushy Lagoon and what could happen if other people had been able to buy it, but the reality is that it had been on the market for a very long time and hadn't been purchased by anybody else. It had degraded, it had six people employed there in the dairies. In your opinion, what's better, the property as it was degraded, no one buying it, minimal employment and what we have now, with it having been bought by Gresham and having investment put into it? What's better for Dorset?

Mr BEATTIE - What's better for Dorset -

Ms ROSOL - Not the theoretical, but the actual reality.

PUBLIC

Mr BEATTIE - Yes, I understand the question. I always did get a bee in my bonnet when I went out there and saw the potential in it not being realised. So, right now, and especially if Gresham are potentially going to keep more land for intensive agricultural purposes, I think that right now that would be the better option, once again, not taking into account the potential.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you.

CHAIR - Well, do you have anything you'd like to add that's come to mind that you wish that you'd said? This is your chance.

Mr BEATTIE - No, I think we've covered off pretty well. I suppose number 6 of the recommended reforms was probably my main thing, around some form of a planning process that gives us a say/assesses. I don't know exactly what it is, but that was the crux of my proposal and thanks for letting me have the opportunity.

CHAIR - Well, I appreciate what you've done and although I've taken indulgence now to let the Committee know and any of the public gallery know that the first person that has raised this issue with any politicians is you and it's to your credit. So, thank you for your efforts. Thank you for your appearance. What you've said to us here today is protected by parliamentary privilege. Once you leave the table, you need to be aware that privilege does not attach to comments you may make to anyone, including the media, even if you're just repeating what you have said to us. Do you understand that?

Mr BEATTIE - I do.

CHAIR - Alright, thank you. I will just take a short break for two minutes while we prepare for Mr Cameron.

The Committee suspended from 1.15 p.m. to 1.18 p.m.

Melaythenner Teeackana Warrana Aboriginal Corporation

CHAIR - Good afternoon, Mr Cameron, thank you very much for attending. Welcome to the hearing of the House of Assembly Select Committee on Commonwealth Decisions on Agricultural Land. Thank you for your attendance. My name is Michael Ferguson; I'm the Chair of the Committee and member for Bass. Dr Shane Broad is the Deputy Chair and member for Braddon. Mr Carlo Di Falco is a member for Lyons and Ms Cecily Rosol is a member for Bass. Would you please state your name and capacity in which you're appearing today?

Mr CAMERON - Nicholas Joseph Cameron, I'm the Chair of Melaythenner Teeackana Warrana Aboriginal Corporation and also chair of TRACA.

CHAIR - Thank you. Can I confirm you've received and read the guide sent to you by the Committee secretary?

Mr CAMERON - Yes, I have.

CHAIR - The hearing is covered by parliamentary privilege, allowing individuals to speak with freedom without fear of being sued or questioned in any court or place out of

PUBLIC

Parliament. This protection is not accorded to you if statements that may be defamatory are repeated or referred to by you outside the parliamentary proceedings. The hearing is public. The public and the media may be present. Should you wish aspects of your evidence to be heard in private, you must make this request to the Committee at the time. Mr Cameron, could you please take the statutory declaration?

Mr NICK CAMERON, CHAIR, MELAYTHENNER TEEACKANA WARRANA ABORIGINAL CORPORATION WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR - Thank you, and an opportunity for you to make a short opening statement.

Mr CAMERON - First of all, thank you for inviting me to attend today. I am a Trawlwoolway/Pairrebeene man. The country we're currently meeting on today and the country that Rushy Lagoon is on, Cape Portland, is my ancestral homelands, and as an Aboriginal corporation most of our activity is based on the north-east of Cape Portland. We have a fully operational Aboriginal ranger program that's based at the Woolnorth wind farm, and we employ 12 Aboriginal rangers that are working across that country and also across other country including Flinders Island.

Cape Portland is extremely important to Aboriginal people in Tasmania because it is our traditional homelands. The majority of Aboriginal people trace their ancestry to the Coastal Plains Nations, we call it now, and people like myself, who are from the Trawlwoolway/Pairrebeene clans, Cape Portland is our actual home country.

Why it's important to us is that it is more than agricultural land. Whilst I don't discount the importance of agricultural land to this Committee and to Tasmania, it's important to reflect on the importance of traditional land to Aboriginal people, and it's important to remember that there was a promise made to our people through our ancestral grandfather Mannalargenna. We know when it was made. We know who made it, we know who was witness to it, and we know it was on behalf of the colonial government. And that promise was on the basis that, if Mannalargenna helped George Augustus Robinson and the colonial government remove our people into exile onto Flinders Island to stop the war that was being undertaken in Tasmania, he would be able to return to his homelands and live under the protection of a white man. We all know that promise was broken and Mannalargenna died on Flinders Island, when he last went into exile four weeks afterwards.

For us, there are a couple of important parts about what occurred with the sale of Rushy Lagoon. First, the missed opportunity for us as traditional owners of the country because the land was never ceded. There was never any sale of our homelands. There was never any agreement-making. In fact, there was the opposite. There was an agreement that we'd be able to return to them. As Aboriginal people we consider the lands were stolen. We consider ourselves still to be the traditional owners of that land, even despite the fact that they are under the ownership of other people. We can't change that, but what we should try to change is the opportunity for Aboriginal people to be able to not only access those lands but to gain ownership in real terms into the future. Why? Because it does a number of things. It gives us a connection back to our homelands. It also gives us the opportunity as Aboriginal people, especially our young ones, to have a stronger future economically and also in health - and also to make sure that we get that promise that was broken to some point in place into the future. That's pretty important to Tasmanian Aboriginal people, and hence why I say that as an

Aboriginal person and as an Aboriginal community, we see that land as far more than just pastoral property. It's a cultural landscape and whilst there are fences and whilst there are cattle grazing on it, there are still an enormous number of cultural values right through that property. The idea of it being turned into forestry is extremely distressing because those cultural values will change and be impacted forever. That's an important part of it.

The other second part of it was that MTWAC looked very, very closely at the opportunity to purchase that property - those farms ourselves. We put a fair bit of work into speaking to philanthropic supporters. We talked to the Indigenous Land and Sea Council, who do provide funding for Aboriginal communities to purchase land. We looked at those opportunities. We felt there was an opportunity once, probably potentially, in a lifetime to buy that land back on their behalf of the Aboriginal community. Unfortunately, the sale price far outweighed what we could actually achieve, so in the end it became an opportunity we couldn't achieve, but we looked at it very, very seriously for those reasons of not only getting access to that land, but also the opportunity, potentially, to run the farms ourselves as Aboriginal people. We felt that was an important opportunity.

What disappointed us, as I said in our submission, was there was no consultation with us as the traditional owner group, the organisation that actually operates out of the north-east; there was no consultation through the process after the sale had been announced. When it went through that process of the sale being confirmed and then also the process of the Treasurer making his decision, no-one spoke, no-one reached out to us as the local community organisation who works there, but also as the traditional owners to actually ask us how we felt about the process, how we felt about the project, the impacts of the project potentially on the cultural values of that site. That's what extremely disappointed us under the prior informed consent that the government should be undertaking and it didn't do that. It was extremely disappointing on our side. I think that's enough for now, I'm happy to move on.

CHAIR - If you are happy to take some question, thank you for your overview. I have a few. I think we all will. I might begin with, if you could - in your submission you did say that that the organisation met briefly with representatives of Gresham House early in 2026 and I recognise that that's not the government meeting with you to discuss the Foreign Investment Review Board process or the Agriculture Minister's role in this. I get that. Gresham House engaged with you. Was that a healthy thing that they did at least make that approach or was that not considered by you to have been enough or sufficient?

Mr CAMERON - I think it was important because at least they reached out to us as the traditional owners and they wanted to have a conversation. It was a brief conversation. It was very much a conversation in regard to what their plans were, but they didn't discuss the Foreign Investment Board decision-making. It didn't discuss at all that the energy finance corporation was involved. That was a surprise. It really just focused on getting to know who we were as the traditional owner group. So, in one way, that was good; at least they actually made the effort to reach out to us because that doesn't normally happen sometimes and the conversations were very limited to potentially what their project would be in regard to the forestry operations.

We talked to them about the importance of undertaking a cultural values workshop, similar to what we've done with ACEN through their wind farm project on the same property. We discussed why we were doing that with them to help them understand the cultural values of that property and how that had helped them understand their project and how they needed to work within those cultural values. Then we also spoke to them very clearly about the heritage

that is on that property and also the fact that the Aboriginal Heritage Register is not accurate, by a far, far means. So, you can't just look at the register and think, 'Oh, there's nothing there.' There is stuff all over it, and we demonstrated that when we undertook that process with ACEN where we found stuff all over the place. So, it was a limited conversation to that sort of side of it. It was virtually just an introduction meeting, basically, but there was an agreement to continue to consultations or discussions post that meeting.

CHAIR - I have one more and then we'll go down the table, but I'd love to understand a little more about the cultural attachment to that particular property, as opposed to the broader region. Do you mind just explaining that a little further, and when you do, could you just help me understand how you would describe the cultural heritage on that property that would be destroyed by forestry?

Mr CAMERON - Yes, okay. So, when you read the diaries of George Augustus Robinson, and he was a diary maker every day - so he described his journey right through country every single day - and he describes very clearly walking through that country and describing it as open grass plains, which were the hunting grounds of our people, and he described the fact that there was recent burned activity, even despite the fact the war was on and Mamegin people were down to about 15 or 16 individuals, we were still burning the property because that's what we've been doing for 40,000 years and this is how we manage land in Tasmania. So, it wasn't bushland, it wasn't forestry, it was open grass plains. And he describes the kangaroo running through there. He describes, very clearly, the wetlands that existed right near where Rushy Lagoon township is, where the little kink is. And if you look over there now and drive there, you can see how the ground dips off and that was wetlands. He actually describes very clearly how his opinion was that if those wetlands were drained, they would make good pastoral grasslands, which is what happened. It's very interesting. This was in 1831 or 1830.

On the rise, on the left-hand side when you drive into Rushy Lagoon is where all the cultural material would have been sourced, where some forestry was. So, material for the bark huts, down on the waterfront, on the edge of Boobyalla was where some of the sea country activities would have occurred with women, for women's business. So, as an Aboriginal person, when I drive through Rushy Lagoon, I don't just see pastoral property, I see the fact that these were our hunting grounds. I see the fact that there would be smoke on the ridges of the valleys. I see that there had been bark huts where our people would have lived and danced and held ceremony. And then we've also got all the living sites that are still there. There are lots of living sites on that property all over the place which clearly show it was a well-used Aboriginal living place. We've just recently identified four hut depressions, which is extremely exciting, because they're generally only found on the West Coast, but we've found four hut depressions on that property on Cape Portland.

We found a quartz mine just recently which hadn't been discovered before. So, there's material, there are sites everywhere, and that tells us how important that place was to our people, and it's important that people understand why it's still important to us as Aboriginal people now.

Mr Di FALCO - Just quickly, is there any potential to protect those cultural values or are they just going to bulldoze the whole lot?

Mr CAMERON - Well, I think we have to, Carlo, because they are an important linkage for us, as people, to our ancestors. This is why we've developed our Aboriginal ranger program and why we're focused so much up there, to make sure that we have the opportunity to manage the land and manage to see country as Aboriginal people. What our aspirations are as an organisation is we're actually undertaking an Aboriginal Heritage Assessment of the whole of the cape. We're actually engaging an Aboriginal archaeologist in January, and she will be undertaking that in two or three stages. And we want to actually survey all of the cape as much as we can, including the private property, if we get permission to access it, including Rushy Lagoon. And we want to update the Aboriginal Register so it's accurate. We also want to get enough information to put an application in for that area to be considered to be an Aboriginal cultural living landscape. That would help us do a couple of things. It would help us gain more access to the protection of those resources and those sites. It would also allow us to have more say, once the new Aboriginal heritage laws hopefully get in place. Aboriginal heritage laws will incorporate living landscapes, they'll incorporate both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and that's important. Hopefully this process will allow us as an organisation to have more ability to protect those important cultural living sites so they exist and exist forever and they don't just disappear. Thank you.

Dr BROAD - Thank you, Nick. In your discussions with Gresham, did you also discuss the remediation that they're proposing on the property? From what I understand, they're seeking to re-establish Rushy Lagoon itself, as well as enhance or protect greater protections on the Ramsar sites there. Did they discuss that with you as well?

Mr CAMERON - We had brief conversations about their desire to allow the wetlands potentially to be re - what's the right word - re-vegetated or -

Dr BROAD - Reinstated, really.

Mr CAMERON - Reinstated, yeah. We did talk about the fact that they were not going to remove any further vegetation off the property, that they'll only be forestating the current grasslands or pastoral areas. We also talked about the fact that they were looking at the western edge of the property over the hill down near the beaches, where the sand mine is being proposed. They were talking about making sure there's no forestry put on there. Then potentially we also talked about would they be interested in expanding the reserve area of the Cape Portland reserve area that is owned by Hydro Tasmania, as part of Woolnorth Wind Farm, about expanding that through to that property or that part of the property. We did have discussions about that.

Dr BROAD - They were good discussions or they were positive or were wanting more information or more engagement?

Mr CAMERON - It was early discussions. We made it clear to them that we had a very strong interest in the area. We certainly made it clear to them that we wouldn't allow any level of damage or impact to our heritage due to forestry operations.

Dr BROAD - You discussed purchasing the property -

CHAIR - Can we just come to that later? Ms Rosol.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you for the information you've shared already. I've just got a question: are you aware of any other traditional owners having been consulted in the clean energy financing processes?

Mr CAMERON - Not that I'm aware. None of the tracker organisations - I'm aware of that - none of the tracker-aligned organisations were consulted. I'm not aware of any other Aboriginal corporations or groups that were consulted.

Ms ROSOL - And so that's for Rushy Lagoon sale. Are you aware of any other traditional owners being consulted anywhere in the country as part of the assessment process that might happen? Have you heard of that happening anywhere else?

Mr CAMERON - Certainly heard of other situations with the traditional owners, especially if there are native title considerations or Indigenous protected area considerations over the potential property or the sale of the property. Yes, that's a responsibility, so that definitely would have happened. I can't specifically name one specific one, but I'm certainly aware of the fact that that would have occurred in some places, in some jurisdictions.

Ms ROSOL - Yeah, I'm just trying to get a handle on the omission here and whether that happens frequently as part of the process. You've already shared quite a bit about the history and the importance and the meaning of the country to you and some of the cultural values there. If you had been consulted as part of the decision and assessment process, is there anything else that you would have shared that you haven't already told us about today?

Mr CAMERON - One of the things that that MTWAC is doing is it wants to have consultations with groups or projects about the opportunity for partnerships. We want to talk to groups about the potential for equity buy-in schemes. We're not a group that is completely anti-business or anti-development. There's always a level to it, and there's some parts of it we won't accept, like the sand mine, because of the impacts to it. But we want the opportunity, and ACEN is a good example how we are working with ACEN in goodwill to try and seek opportunities where social investment programs can be developed through their projects, and it's a \$40 billion project. There's a lot of potential there for potential social investment schemes to flow into the Aboriginal community.

So, we obviously missed that opportunity. When the sale was done and dusted, it's a bit hard afterwards to have those discussions, and we've had a couple of discussions with Gresham House since the sale was approved, and whilst they're receptive to some of our suggestions, it's hard work. At the end of the day, they're a business enterprise. They've got to make money. So, it's challenging for us to be able to have those discussions once the deal's done.

Ms ROSOL - You talked at the very beginning about looking for the potential for Tasmanian Aboriginal ownership of the land up there. How do you see that potentially happening? You talked about considering purchasing it yourself, but that wasn't an option. Do you have other things in mind for that?

Mr CAMERON - We dropped our eyes and looked at another property which was for sale at Musselroe. Circumstances were that we couldn't progress that at the time, but we certainly looked at other options which are a little bit lower cost. We've just employed a business development manager for MTWAC and that person's role will be to look at all opportunities, both business and property. We want to be able to expand our operations on the

north-east, because that's our traditional homelands. We want to be able to be in a position to purchase land. As I said about the economics of it, the ability to be able to have Tasmanian Aboriginal people actually owning land on our traditional lands is a huge step.

We've got some great partners, as an organisation, in philanthropic support. ILSC can fund purchases, to a reasonable extent, so we'll explore that and we'll continue to explore that. It's an important part of our business operations under our new strategic plan.

CHAIR - I think we do have some other questions on the alternative vision. Dr Broad was going there. I'd just like to open up that subject as well. Maybe if you could help all of us, and then we'll go to some other questions - just to understand what was the potential vision of your organisation, as a potential purchaser of the property when it was made available for sale? What was your experience and what were your plans?

Mr CAMERON - We would have taken it extremely seriously. We would have developed a business plan to look at how that property, or properties - because obviously four dairy farms were involved in Rushy Lagoon - I think it's four, or three dairy farms. We would have looked at the continuing operations of agriculture as a major part of that property and allowing us to run those operations. We would have also looked at other potential opportunities for that area. Now, a fair bit of it is still forested, and there's potential for honey marketing and development. We thought about that. There was a potential for planting pepperberry for the development and sale of pepperberry, which is quite economically strong. We also thought very strongly about cultural tourism. The north-east is a pretty untapped market when it comes to tourism. People drive from St Helens through Gladstone through to St Helens to George Town and back to Launceston. They drive through. There's no reason, really, to stay. There are a few things, but not much, and we felt, as an organisation, there is an opportunity through that property to develop some level of cultural tourism activity.

CHAIR - Can I just bring you to the point of, was your organisation interested as a buyer when it was being advertised for sale?

Mr CAMERON - Yes.

CHAIR - And you would have, if you don't mind, I'm not trying to put words in your mouth, but would your organisation have done the things that you've just outlined but largely continued the farm as a mixed dairy-beef -

Mr CAMERON - Certainly would've continued the farming as a major operation, and the other stuff would be bits on the outer edge, but the agricultural side it would've been something we would definitely have continued with. Absolutely.

CHAIR - I'm not asking you for the details on your sources of capital, but what would you have wanted to buy the property for?

Mr CAMERON - Ah, well,

CHAIR - I mean, did you have a price that you could have paid?

Mr CAMERON - No, it was far - when we when we were talking to the initial sales, they were talking \$100 million. That's far above what we could even get near.

CHAIR - It was too much.

Mr CAMERON - It's far too much.

CHAIR - Okay, yeah, understood. All right, let's go to questions on that.

Dr BROAD - So when did you actually start the process inquiring? Was it back when it first came - 2018? So, it was first for sale 2018 then it went off the market.

Mr CAMERON - It would have been when it came back on again the second time. It wasn't 2018. It would have been probably 12 months before Gresham House was announced. I think it would have been from memory - I can't remember exact dates.

Dr BROAD - Yeah. And did you approach, I mean, Allanfield on Bruny Island was purchased by the state government and then handed back to the traditional owners. Murrayfield. Sorry. Murrayfield on Bruny Island. Did you approach the Tasmanian government? You talked about alternative sources, benevolent funds and the like. Did you approach the state government?

Mr CAMERON - Not the state government directly, although I think I may have had conversations with DPAC, Aboriginal programs and DPAC. I maybe - I can't remember now exactly, but I think I did. But we mostly talked with our philanthropic supporters. We talked to some of the conservation groups to see if they would have some capacity to help us undertake the process. I think we talked to two or three of those. We talked to the ILSC to see what level of interest they would have, and their budget is nowhere near where we needed to get. We quickly realised, although we had really strong aspirations towards it, we realised pretty quickly that we didn't have the capital we needed to be able to go any further.

We were also concerned that the state government didn't have a lot of cash flowing around. Our thoughts were that it was unlikely the state government would be able to help us at that time. That's what we were thinking. But we certainly had lots of different discussions with different people, including the real estate agents who were selling the property.

CHAIR - Well, did you have anything further that you might like to add as a result of our questions and discussions, or something that you'd like to add?

Mr CAMERON - Look, I think, there's a couple of things. I think it's really important for the state to understand and appreciate how Aboriginal people see land. Not only Rushy Lagoon, but all land. It is still seen by us as being our land that was removed through difficult circumstances. And this is why the updating of the heritage act is such an important process. It needs to be approved.

The protection of our heritage, tangible and intangible, is extremely important to Aboriginal people. So, whilst we have lost the direct connection for having ownership and being able to access it all the time, we still have that important aspect of being able to protect our values and our heritage. I think it's important for the state government to realise or have an appreciation that we do see things differently. There's a different lens that we see. And it is more than just an agricultural land, in regard to an example like Rushy Lagoon. Okay? That's really important. I'd really like you to consider that.

I think the other thing, too: it would be nice for the state government to have consideration that when properties come up for sale like this, to have conversations with the Aboriginal community - whether it's MTWAC or other Aboriginal groups - to see what opportunities you can explore, to work in partnership with them to do something like Murrayfield. Because Murrayfield's a fantastic example of where, you know, Weetapoonna are running that farm extremely well and it's brought an enormous amount of pride and opportunity to that community organisation. And the same thing could happen to MTWAC up in the north-east; what we need is opportunity. Thank you.

CHAIR - Well, we're all very grateful to you for your submission and your evidence here today. So thank you.

Thank you for your appearance. What you've said to us here today is protected by parliamentary privilege. Once you leave the table you need to be aware that privilege does not attach to comments that you may make to anyone, including the media, even if you're just repeating what you'd said to us. Do you understand that?

Mr CAMERON - I do.

CHAIR - Thank you. Good afternoon.

Mr CAMERON - Thank you.

The witnesses withdrew.

The Committee adjourned at 1.49 p.m.