



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

SENATE

**RURAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS AND TRANSPORT REFERENCES
COMMITTEE**

Reference: Commercial utilisation of native wildlife

PERTH

Tuesday, 21 October 1997

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

CANBERRA

SENATE
RURAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS AND TRANSPORT REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Members:

Senator Woodley (Chair)

Senator Ferris (Deputy Chair)

Senator Calvert
Senator Forshaw

Senator Heffernan
Senator O'Brien

Participating members

Senator Abetz
Senator Bob Brown
Senator Brownhill
Senator Chapman
Senator Bob Collins
Senator Colston
Senator Conroy
Senator Cook

Senator Eggleston
Senator Gibbs
Senator Lundy
Senator Margetts
Senator Murphy
Senator Murray
Senator West

Matters referred for inquiry into and report on:

- (a) the potential impact which commercial utilisation of native wildlife might have on the Australian environment;
- (b) the current and future economic viability of these commercial activities; and
- (c) the adequacy of existing Federal Government regulations and controls to ensure biodiversity of any native species commercially utilised.

WITNESSES

**JOHNSON, Mr Peter George, Chief Executive Trustee, The African Gamebird
Research Education and Development Trust, Box 2301, Johannesburg,
South Africa 2000 1058**

SENATE
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Commercial utilisation of native wildlife

CANBERRA

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Present

Senator Woodley (Chair)

Senator Ferris

Senator O'Brien

Senator Heffernan

The committee met at 8.05 p.m.

Senator Woodley took the chair.

JOHNSON, Mr Peter George, Chief Executive Trustee, The African Gamebird Research Education and Development Trust, Box 2301, Johannesburg, South Africa 2000

CHAIR—As part of its inquiry into the commercial utilisation of Australian native wildlife, the committee this evening is holding a short public hearing to take evidence from visiting wildlife author and photographer Mr Peter Johnson. The committee is coming towards the end of the public phase of this inquiry, having held hearings and inspections throughout Australia over the last few months. A final public hearing will be held in Canberra on 7 November, and the committee is due to report back to the Senate in early March 1998.

Before we commence taking evidence, let me state that this is a public hearing and, as such, members of the public are welcome to attend. For the record, all witnesses are protected by parliamentary privilege with respect to the submissions made to the committee and evidence given before it. Parliamentary privilege means special rights and immunities attached to the parliament or its members and others necessary for the discharge of the functions of the parliament without obstruction and without fear of prosecution. Any act by any person which operates to the disadvantage of a witness on account of evidence given by him or her before the Senate, or any committee of the Senate, is treated as a breach of privilege.

I now welcome to the hearing, and to Canberra, Mr Peter Johnson. I now invite you to give us an opening statement. I am not suggesting it has to be what you said before the hearing started, but something along those lines would be very helpful to the committee.

Mr Johnson—The African Gamebird Research Education and Development Trust is a non-profit educational trust. There are some very basic concepts that are important to embody, certainly to consider, the moment one starts talking about the environment. I am using the word ‘environment’ in the context of the indigenous species of a land. I am not specifically extracting water pollution out of the context of the indigenous species. Of course, the environment is all about exhaust emissions and everything else, but my area of interest and my area of expertise is in terms of the indigenous species of a country.

These are the basic conceptual areas that are extremely important to recommend to your committee. First, the conservation of indigenous things is an offensive strategy, not a defensive strategy. It means that the land on which indigenous things are located is an expanding component of a country’s land mass, not a declining situation. You do not approach it by saying, ‘We will throw up fences around this thing in order to preserve the last one.’ What you really want to do is to never have a last one because it is better, pays better and is better that you make more. So conservation is an offensive strategy, not a defensive one.

The second thing is that a nation must decide for itself what it wishes to own in a governmental sense, what it wishes to accept responsibility for from the public, if you like, and own; and what a nation cannot own or does not wish to own, it should make available to somebody else to own and set the limits. The third thing is that the national identity of a nation is its environment. Let me immediately choose an exceptional example. Let us think right now of parts of Eastern Europe that are today no longer under a communist dictate; one of the things that one has seen in Poland and places like that has been the enormous pollution of inefficient industries and the effects on its people. My view of Poland today, or bits of what used to be Eastern Europe, is coloured totally by what I have seen on the television in the form of nuclear waste with children dying of coughing and all that stuff. A nation is its environment; a nation that is healthy and vigorous has a healthy and vigorous indigenous environment.

Finally, when we address the specifics of this committee inquiry concerning the commercial utilisation of native wildlife, which is the area that I have some expertise in, we need to bear in mind a statement from Thoreau, the American philosopher: that the utilisation of indigenous things—and we use the word ‘wildlife’ in a simplistic context because it is easy to get your mind round it—whether it is a tree, a fish, a rock or a river, the use of those indigenous things, is right when that use tends to conserve the integrity and beauty of that biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.

Simplistically, a person catching a fish with a fly—although that is not a particularly good example of an indigenous thing—is only going to influence a little bit of the total biotic community, by walking up the bank and by taking this fish out of the river. He is not using dynamite to do it and he is not tipping oil into the water, et cetera. So there is a very simple consumptive use which tends to preserve the beauty of the biotic community.

My interest in being here today is wrapped up to a very great extent in: what does ‘use’ mean; what does it imply; what are the rules? My present view of the Australian system and the Australia wealth—that is indigenous richness, environmental richness—is that it is as great as ours in Africa, and we are probably regarded as the leading team, and it is worth as much. It is time this continent saw that in the context of a hands-on, people-involved generation of renewable resource systems as opposed to its present system where most of them tend to be exhausting resources. I am fascinated to be here and I thank you that I am here—not for paying for me to be here, because I have done that—but for the opportunity.

CHAIR—Thank you, Peter. Over the last few months as we have gone right around Australia, we have been fascinated to hear this debate from the people who have appeared before us—probably half of whom would agree with you in one degree or another, and the other half of whom would oppose you so vehemently that they would actually see you as the devil in disguise. So we have been fascinated to see the two sides of this debate. It has been good that we have been able to get such a wide diversity of

witnesses before us, because it has meant that we have really been able to range over most of the debate, which, of course, is a global debate.

Senator O'BRIEN—What is the aim of the game bird research organisation that you are a part of?

Mr Johnson—It is to make the indigenous products of Africa compete with the exotic products of Africa. The exotic products of Africa are similar to those here: the grains, the agriculture, the cattle—those sorts of things. The job that my organisation identified was this, and I am afraid you are going to have to bear with me in this context because I always have to describe a parameter a bit broader than the question so that I can get to where we are.

The true worth of Africa is in its renewable resource systems and not its exhausting resource systems. In order to utilise and get into bed with renewable resources, things you can go on making again, you will find that you increasingly have to go to the indigenous, rather than the exotic, because the exotic requires other forms of support. So we said to ourselves a long time ago that our greatest opportunity for wildlife, which is our greatest product and worth the most money to our country, is to go where there is land that is ready to absorb, take up or produce wildlife.

Approximately eight per cent of our nation is state owned in various different ways, including the parks, and 82 per cent belongs to private enterprise, whether it is tribal systems or farmers. If you look at that simple thing, there is no room for conservation in a national park, because it is technically either preserved or conserved already. All there is room for is different management. But the moment you hit a farm, they have changed something. The consequence of that is that what was wildlife land, indigenous productive land, has gone to some extent or another: it could be 100 per cent gone, by removing it all for agriculture through ploughing; or it could be 100 per cent wildlife, because they have already realised that the ecotourist industry is a vast supply of limitless money. So they may already have lions, elephants and tigers there.

So our organisation said, 'The first thing to do is to identify where there is an opportunity, where there is potential and where we can make a business.' So we chose this 80 per cent for obvious reasons. It means that every farm in the whole of our nation and the rest of Africa offers us the potential to provoke, produce, provide and give the answers to the production of indigenous things to compete with the exotics because, at the end of the day, competition is the rule. If my hectare of land produces black rhinos that tourists want to see and are prepared to pay \$10,000 a minute to see them, then the mealie crop, the maize crop, the wheat crop or the cattle crop has had it because the rhino will cost less and produce more.

So we are in the business of agricultural competition. We are competing for land space. At the end of the day, the only thing that matters is habitat. The rest of it is just

perception. My organisation's job is to promote, provoke, do the research, provide the answers and educate farmers to farm indigenously rather than exotically.

Senator O'BRIEN—How successful has that been?

Mr Johnson—We are extremely successful because we are in a state of extreme need. We have the poorest people on earth—and some of the richest. We have this vast spread and we share, as in handshake, one extraordinary area of overlap in that my rural peasant who has got elephants on his land shakes hands with Kerry Packer in a hypothetical sense, because Mr Packer sees wilderness as an achievement of his great wealth. He wants a yacht to sail out on the ocean because it is not fun to be living next to people when you are rich. We have all got Jaguars, we have all got refrigerators. Perceptions of richness to us of the outside world—that is Australia and Europe—are literally things like refrigerators. We have not got them. Eighty per cent of our population does not even have water in the tap, but he has got an elephant and that elephant is worth serious bucks today.

So what we are doing is creating the handshake in an economic context, because that is the only one that matters, between me, ndhlovu—which is Zulu for an elephant—and you. The only problem that I have is that you are starting to dictate to me the conditions under which you will look at my elephant and pay me to come and see it, and that I cannot tolerate. To answer your question—yes, very successful.

Senator O'BRIEN—That is what would be termed a non-consumptive use. What about consumptive use?

Mr Johnson—No, it is as consumptive a use as a dead elephant, because the moment you come and you want to go and see that elephant, I have to find the transport to get you there. I have to provide meals. I have to go into the water supply. I have to go into every single thing.

Senator O'BRIEN—In the context of our inquiry, we have been talking about those uses in which the animal is used for food consumption. But I hear what you say that there is a form of consumption involved in every use, but if you could relate it back to consumptive use, whether it be ostrich for meat or whatever. What is the incidence of consumptive use and how does that relate to your rationalisation of the utilisation of the indigenous things being right when it tends to conserve the integrity and beauty of the biotic community?

Mr Johnson—The biotic community is, after all, just a factory. If you had a factory in Parramatta that was producing hats, your factory in Parramatta and its hats would be going out to a whole chain of different retail use systems. Some would go to large supermarkets, others would go directly to some yacht captain, et cetera. In other words, the moment you start producing things, you should not be sticking around trying to define how limited a market you can take for yourself.

If I produce elephants, they are as good dead as they are alive. They are good transferred—that is, caught alive and re-put somewhere else, or eaten, or used to restock other areas or just seen in situ by the visitor. So I do not see utilisation as anything more than a factory owner saying, ‘I have got X amount of things and I can use them every possible way that will generate profit, provided that it is sustainable.’ So if you want to go on at me about eating elephants, I can find you as many black people in Africa who will tell you that elephants are the ultimate sign of the worst form of poverty as you can find me people on a Sydney street who will say, ‘Don’t you dare touch an elephant. I’ll jail you if you do.’ Well, who is right?

Senator O’BRIEN—Neither.

Mr Johnson—All forms of use are correct provided that they are sustainable.

Senator O’BRIEN—What particular game birds do the Africans tend to use? The term ‘game bird’ might mean a different thing to you than it does to me. I am thinking of a game species to hunt perhaps. Is that where the term is from?

Mr Johnson—Yes. The neat situation is this: first, our trust is now capable of persuading somebody to take a piece of absolutely bare, wrecked land and start it on the recovery process to tropical rainforest. We have to be involved in recovery systems again. In Africa—and it is true here in Australia as well, by the way—if I take an absolutely bare piece of ground and I start to recover it indigenously, probably the first thing that is going to grow is a tuft of grass or certainly a base pioneer legume.

The moment the grass starts, the first insect comes; the moment the first insect comes, so comes the next thing; and so the tiers start to build up—sometimes quite rapidly. The very first creature to reinhabit what used to be bare earth after a year or two are our opportunistic pioneer birds—which happen to be the ground birds such as the larks, the guineafowls, the francolins, the quails—because all of them were evolved to utilise pioneer plants such as weeds. You have exactly the same thing here with ducks.

As I start this recovery process, what I am desperate for is to have something that pays this farmer for having taken this land out of production and further messing it up. I need a sale. Game birds have an international value, just like a lot of things. The moment the farmer gets that first tuft of grass back and the first insect, I know that the very first thing that is saleable, which is going to follow within a couple of years, is going to be a game bird. I then have a product that is already known both to him, the landowner, and to you who live out.

The guineafowl is probably the best known bird on earth. If I picked up a kid in Sydney, showed him a picture of one now and asked what it is, that kid will know what a guineafowl is—it is extraordinary. In the context of our indigenous people, our black people of Africa, all of them have been using guineafowl since time started and the

guineafowl has evolved with them.

I do not have a mind-set. If I say, 'You have to have black rhinos,' you have to wait 50 years before the darned thing has a baby and then you are going to get into other sorts of problems; whereas the guineafowl is instant hamburger. It does not matter whether you are Mr Muthungu on whose land I got the grass back or you are Peter Johnson who comes from London and who wants to have a quality-of-life afternoon, walking in the veldt, shooting two guineafowl and taking them home to eat them. What matters is the value. So it is a transference of value.

Senator O'BRIEN—Is that the connection or do you build through to larger bird species?

Mr Johnson—This is the joy of it. When you start an organisation like AGRED lots of people have done do-good things in their lives and started things—what matters is its survival. Perhaps our great bit of luck in the design is that once he has his first guineafowl and he has his first cash flow—whether in the form of eating it himself or in the form of selling it to me—the great advantage is that he can then go on to the next one. It is his free choice. I am not forcing him to do it. He is in the real world of own decision. He has now seen how easy it is, how cost effective it is, and how low-cost and quick.

If he carries on with getting more grass back, selling a few more guineafowl and getting some more grass back, next there is an acacia tree. The moment he has the acacia, the first kudu comes in. With the first kudu and the first acacia, he is half on the way to the first giraffe. In the end he is at elephants, lions, tigers—and whatever is there—and you have recovered the whole thing completely.

Obviously, this is a bit of a mind bend. Sitting here this evening in Canberra, how do you go from bare earth to elephants in the short space that I am describing it? You have to remember environmental things do not have time spheres. They may have time points at which you measure things, but our whole job is to encourage no longer planting maize and use of cows, because we cannot compete with you. We cannot compete with Argentina; we cannot compete with the Americans. You all have subsidies.

I can produce elephants and will and am better than you at it. Once he has started on the guineafowl I have hooked him. The revenue generation out of that can take him all the way through to having recovered the full spectrum of wildlife of Africa. That is what I am interested in in Australia. You can do exactly the same thing here.

CHAIR—Thank you very much.

Senator FERRIS—Mr Johnson, I would be interested if you could talk a little about any of the incentives that the government might give to these sorts of people to take

their property out of agricultural production and move into what we might call conservation farming, and whether there are any incentives in terms of government or in private enterprise and corporate sponsorship.

Mr Johnson—Can I say ‘Jeannie’ or do I have to say Senator Ferris?

Senator FERRIS—Jeannie.

Mr Johnson—I am not an Australian, so I should be able to say ‘Jeannie’. There are two answers. First of all, I suggest you look at Australia and what is happening with us. Can I answer it that way?

Senator FERRIS—Please.

Mr Johnson—I am not unaware of the Australian situation because I like this country and I have been here quite a lot. In Africa there never has been, nor will there ever be, one cent of—the word you use for helping farmers—subsidies. There will never be. The only subsidy system that ever existed in South Africa, and a little in Zimbabwe historically, was a bit of drought relief. If it was really bad, the government would dish out some money. Of course, a lot of that was based on politics. They wanted people to stay on the land so they had these vast non-city vote systems. It was politically motivated. It did not have anything to do with the environment really.

In the simple context, there are no incentives to go for wildlife from any government agency. The further up Africa you move and the further you move away from recognised Western economic systems, the less you are ever going to see it. They ain’t got the money to do it. There is nothing. What is it that makes a man do it for himself? We are sitting on top of the most valuable resource our continent has ever had. That is its wildlife, its environment, its indigenous things.

They can see that a tourist lodge, privately owned, with the full suite of lions and elephants, is today selling a bed for nearly £1,000 per person per day. That is all the incentive you need. They will do anything to have a lion again because lion equals wilderness.

I do not know what you have in the form of incentives to recover indigenous things in this country. It is beyond my knowledge level. I can say I think that you are so advanced in a First World context that you have to have some form of incentive, but probably in the form of tax off rather than other ways of doing it. I do not know.

I can quote you some examples from other countries where I see incentives operating in the agricultural sector ‘for wildlife’. With the English, for instance, if you replant hedgerows, which are the cornerstone of the environment, you get three quid per yard or something like that; there is an immediate factor. Secondly, the incentives in

English, European and EEC agriculture now are so extraordinary that large chunks of farming are calculated on the incentives that are available to you or the offs that are available to you before you even plant your first crop.

I suspect that these are things that are First World denominated components. They are not our components and they never will be. So it is complicated. I think you have to look at it in Australia. I do not think that you can do it just by saying that the supply of kangaroo tails to the market is enough to retain or to provoke the recovery of habitat for kangaroos. I may be wrong. I think you are going to have to look at an exciting and balanced equation that contains either tax off or incentive. Does that answer it so far?

Senator FERRIS—Yes.

Mr Johnson—May I digress for one second and give you what I regard as one of the ultimate wildlife conservation stories that I have ever come across? There is a place in California called the butte sink. It is where the Feather River flows into the Sacramento River and then goes southwards to come out in the bay. When God first made it it was probably one of the richest wilderness areas on earth—that was before man got there. When man got there, in the case of the original Indian peoples that populated north America, they utilised it in the way of the normal hunter gatherer: not over, not under—about right.

Then along came Kit Carson and his merry men, and he took one look at this place and found gold. It was alluvial gold, so the way to deal with this was to take a pump and some water, and blast it with this jet of water and sieve it out. By the time they had done that they had fixed the Feather River forever. By the way, the Feather River was called that because millions of ducks used to go there to moult—they needed a safe place—so the place was just a tidal wave of feathers. Well they virtually destroyed the lot of this aquatic environment—and it is the key to the Pacific flyway system which has nine million ducks that go up and down every year.

Kit Carson came and went. Fortunately, about 400 hectares of this place was left pristine by one of the miners who had made a lot of money and liked his duck hunting, so he kept this chunk and back in the 1850s, 1860s, 1870s and 1880s he went hunting there with his family. In fact, in those days they pretty well lived off ducks. What happened next was that with the affluence of society and the American dream—contact with the countryside—people went and shot duck there. By 1940 this place was now totally and utterly unique. It was also responsible for maintaining 80 per cent of the Pacific flyway, because there was no other indigenous habitat left—just this one patch of 400 or 500 hectares.

By now the land was so valuable that the original family had sold pieces of it off to like-minded people to have what they called duck clubs—that is, a duck hunting place—but it is maintained for duck production indigenously. At the same time they are all stuck with the same laws: you may shoot two a day, or whatever it may be, and you

can shoot just for 10 days or 20 days. The whole thing is brilliantly done.

To cut a long story short, the eye of the whole thing is a thing called the Wild Goose Club. The entry fee to be a member of the Wild Goose Club, when I last looked at it, was \$US400,000. That is just to be a member. Your annual subscription to this club was the cost of the maintenance of your thousand acres of wetland, or whatever it was, and that cost could be anything from \$30,000 to \$100,000 per member. So you not only put in your \$400,000 to get in; you now have this cost to maintain it.

They have done such a brilliant job with this that, five or six years ago, the US fish and wildlife service wanted to recognise outstanding contributions by private enterprise to the conservation of the indigenous things of North America and they came up with an extraordinary prize. The extraordinary prize was that if you had done one of these great jobs they would give you total tax freedom for the running and maintenance of that property. So, from that moment onwards, whatever was costed to be spent to maintain it, you could take off your tax bill. This is getting exciting. Now we are really talking incentive, especially to super-rich people.

What happened next was that one of the places that won this prize was the Wild Goose Club. The US fish and wildlife service went there in their big Cadillacs, the helicopters arrived, and the newspapers and television cameras, and they lionised these guys—20 businessmen from all over America—for what they had done: this brilliant, and brilliantly maintained, conserved place. Although they shot there, there were more species of butterfly, reed, tree, buck and other animals, fish and otters—the whole thing.

You cannot conserve habitat and only have one thing in it. The free loading species are the reason we do it; guineafowl provoke, provide, pay for, lizards and snakes. So they got to these guys and said, ‘You’re great; here is your ultimate prize, tax freedom.’ Do you know what these guys said? They said, ‘Thanks very much, it’s very nice to be recognised but you can keep it because the rule of this tax freedom is that if we ever abandon this property, this wildlife area, we cannot touch it. We cannot remove the indigenous wildlife system that has always been here.’ Let us explore this for one second. The problem is this: if the green system in America were to stop shooting, those guys have no vested interest left. They would have to sell it. They are not going to throw their money away. You cannot force a man to junk his money.

So they said, ‘You can keep your tax freedom because unless you write into this agreement that we will never ever be stopped from shooting here, you have not got a deal.’ The two parties separated. The property is still managed, maintained and looked after. They do not have tax freedom so they are still paying for it at full volume. If they take away that correct American right to carry a gun, and to hunt, within the law, whatever is sustainable, that place will be a rice bowl. So that is the other end. I am nowhere near that in Africa. Talking tax off to Chief Nondlawane is irrelevant. But here, I suspect, it is very important.

Senator FERRIS—What level of support do you get from the South African government?

Mr Johnson—We do not touch them.

Senator FERRIS—They do not have a framework for the management?

Mr Johnson—My answer still stands: we do not touch them. Let me go through that: we have a mega-problem with government in Africa. Lots of people have lots of problems with lots of governments all over the world but our problems are, firstly, accountability, which virtually does not exist; secondly, fiduciary integrity, which is extremely difficult to find; and, thirdly, an understanding that wildlife is a non-consumptive subject rather than just a consumptive subject. Remember that Africa still eats animals. It still eats birds. The mega-proportion of our population will catch anything that it can and eat it if it is still there.

So we have a problem with going to them and saying, 'Look, you can have one elephant a year to eat but the other 99 you must leave for the visitors to see.' So, in the context of your question, our problem with government is that it is now super-bureaucratic. There are large chunks of it that are corrupt and it has been for a long time. I am not pointing any fingers because it was just as corrupt, if not more corrupt, in the apartheid time. But we have a big problem there.

We have a mega-problem with resentment. What is this business of having land that could grow mealie stalk, an ear of maize, or a cow. Why should you give it to elephants? Wildlife is a developed First World perception; it is not an African perception. So we have problems in all of those areas. We have another problem and that is that they have no money to do these things in wildlife. Do you still have your fish and wildlife services in your different states?

Senator FERRIS—Yes, and Environment Australia.

Mr Johnson—You have a federal thing. Our problem there is that they have just chopped their budgets by 60 per cent. They cannot afford a pencil and they cannot even make telephone calls because it does not feature in their list of priorities against water in somebody's tap. Of course, if our very highly respected President were to ring me up and say, 'Peter, would you come and have a talk?', I am going to go; of course I respect him and all those things. In terms of reality, you are lucky. You have a viable government which, I presume, is accountable and, I presume, somebody can talk to at a level at which you both have even playing fields. We do not. I am not talking to them.

Senator FERRIS—Thinking about Australian species, let us talk about the platypus. As a committee, we visited the wildlife sanctuary of Dr John Walmsley in the Adelaide Hills. He has found a way to breed platypus in captivity and wanted to sell them

to a Japanese zoo. The Japanese in turn were prepared to not only pay cash for them but also finance Dr Walmsley's habitat here and construct a set of living arrangements for the newly imported platypus.

Under our current federal arrangements, that is not allowed. It is not possible for him to do that and he has not therefore been able to pursue that. Would you see that as being an acceptable operation for Australia to engage in, given that the platypus is pretty special? How would you see that being managed in a public policy sense?

Mr Johnson—May I ask a question in order to get to an answer? In the committee's view, is there anywhere else in Australia that still has platypuses over and above Dr Walmsley's production of them in captivity? Are they out there as well? Are there other places with platypuses?

Senator FERRIS—Yes, they still occur in the wild.

Mr Johnson—Are they safe in that wild place?

Senator FERRIS—Moderately safe, I would say.

Mr Johnson—Are they more safe at Jack Walmsley's sanctuary than they are in the wild?

Senator FERRIS—Yes, undoubtedly so.

Mr Johnson—Then the question is a self-answer. The concept is of producing these things sustainably. I do not believe that Jack Walmsley is selling his last platypus to the Japanese, no matter what the price is. Am I right? He was not selling his last one; he was selling one of X number?

Senator FERRIS—That was the plan.

Mr Johnson—Then to curtail that is seriously shooting yourself in the foot, because what you are effectively doing is removing any incentive for another Jack Walmsley to have another place where they are producing platypuses sustainably. You have just said that it is safer in Jack Walmsley's sanctuary than it is outside. That was your view.

Senator FERRIS—Yes.

Mr Johnson—So by not letting him pay for himself what he is doing is having to find the money from somewhere else. That means he has to get it from the public, or whatever, which gets harder and harder and harder. If you could go to the public and say, 'We are giving Jack Walmsley a permit for three and he is going to sell them for

\$500,000 each, and we will constantly report back to you through the press of him making another three to make up for those—and, by the way, at the same time, you Australians in national park X have got 16,' I do not think there is an argument any longer. But you are going to have to do that.

Senator FERRIS—We are going to have to get over the mental and public policy leap of this conservation versus preservation argument, because what John Walmsley argues, and you have probably heard him doing so quite passionately, is that he is into conservation management—the management of the dynamic, rather than the preservation of the static.

Mr Johnson—Excellently put.

Senator FERRIS—That is the question that this committee has been looking into and, I might say, we have seen some very interesting examples of some steps that have been taken. We visited a national park in Alice Springs which has very large bird aviaries with a range of different bird species living in as natural a state as possible. It was difficult to see the actual cage itself because it is so large.

We are starting to get closer to experiential wildlife management, but we still have not made the leap. As a result, we can see on the Internet, coming out of America, opportunities for Americans—or anybody else in the world, for that matter—to buy our wildlife species—our snakes—

Mr Johnson—Good heavens!

Senator FERRIS—and our birds, which have been smuggled out of Australia and have found their way for sale on a catalogue on the Internet, which we are not getting any revenue from, nor having any management of the species itself.

Mr Johnson—One of the things that I have interfaced with in my visits to Australia historically is vast clouds of corellas and other birds which have benefited from the agricultural systems. What may have been 20,000 years ago not a very common species—I do not know—exists now in millions and millions and millions. The concept of denying a form of sustainable utilisation of that bird to the benefit of everybody in Australia is one that defies my imagination. I simply cannot understand it. You can debate with me that the Australian system is so rich, so powerful and so good that you can afford to have millions of them just there, whereas my system would say that there is no such thing on earth as being able to afford that kind of stuff. You have got to face up to whatever.

If you are now telling me, which I believe you are, that people are pinching this stuff because of your laws and regulations—in other words, that they are going immediately underground with it, which is the classic symptom of laws that do not work

and cannot be policed or patrolled—out of 250 million Americans, why should one million people not have a corella in a cage, if they want one? The value of that to this country, sustainably, is mind-boggling. Instead, what you are saying is, ‘We don’t mind digging holes in the earth and ripping out a whole lot of iron ore to do X, Y and Z, when we know it is only going to last for five, 10 or 15 years. We know that a lot of that money is going to go offshore and we have exported one of Australia’s resources,’ but meanwhile you are looking at a bird of small size which is in tens of millions and worth \$X and which will, in its own way, continue its future better than if it had been pinched—

Senator FERRIS—There is certainly the welfare aspect.

Mr Johnson—I would have to implore you—even though it may take some extraordinary educational and information program, as I said when we were there—that it is time you went into the intrinsic education in schools about what the real rules of evolution are. The real rule of evolution is ‘Thou shalt survive.’ Secondly, you are going to have to go into convincing people and answering the public’s concern that these things are manageable and you can produce them. All they require, surely, is the undertaking and proof that you can maintain them, and not that you should or should not do things.

Senator FERRIS—One of the other quite contentious issues that the committee has already taken evidence on is the management and development of our national parks system which, as you would know, is currently government owned. We have heard a lot of criticism about very large and beautiful national parks which you can visit but where, in fact, you can only see what you might think is the way things were. Those national parks are actually a haven for all kinds of feral animals and exotic plants and animals, and they are no more the way they once were than if you had tried to design something and put two of everything in there.

There has been quite a long and ongoing debate about how we should better manage our national parks: whether we should increase the amount of money we spend on them, or look at privatising and corporatising some of them, or maybe selling shares in them, or else in some way looking at a different management system that more effectively raises revenue to more effectively manage them. Would you have any thoughts on that?

Mr Johnson—Madam, yes, I regret.

Senator FERRIS—I am not a madam!

Mr Johnson—I thought so. Firstly, we are back to week 1 in evolution, in the sense that we have to decide on certain parameters for the whole concept of national parks. I would suggest the time has come for you to quantify and actually do the environmental audit of your national parks. That audit will throw up the context of what is the most valuable thing such as that Froggie he was talking about in Western Australia somewhere—things that are absolutely priceless, whether they be rock formations or

whatever, although I do not give them 'priceless' tags, because the rocks do not fall down. As long as you do not build buildings on it, they are going to be there a long time. Do an environmental audit of the entire suite of national parks because I presume this committee cannot tell a state what to do unless it is a national park in that state. Am I simplistically right?

Senator FERRIS—Some of them are federal and some are state managed.

Mr Johnson—Okay. The first thing is to do an environmental audit and to work out the criteria by which you feel national parks, or Australia's living history, are preserved, conserved or represented. When you have done that environmental audit you are pretty soon going to find out that there are certain places where there is a huge and extremely important necessity.

The second part of that same process is going to identify for you whether you should own it or somebody else should. If it is the absolute bottom line to the aesthetics and evolution of this country, then that should get grade 1. But by the time you have gone down to grade 3 and 4 you probably can look at it very much more cost effectively. Stage 2 is if you do not need it and you do not want to own it and you do not feel that it is your job to own it, then you can consign the next lot to some other form of ownership.

When it comes to the species inside those parks you are probably going to find that there are places where there are species that are absolutely intrinsically important to the maintenance of the evolutionary cycles and systems and biotic communities in Australia that are not on your land. That is going to identify that maybe you should be doing a deal with the guy that owns it to create national park status in that area for that suite of things. I would suggest to you it is time to do an audit. Do not take decisions on whether it should or should not in the simple context of now; go find out the answers first, or the relevance of it.

When you have done that, I have a very strong feeling that a nation has to have, for the benefit of its people, a living museum. It has to have an ongoing place where evolution can happen for the benefit of its people and their studies and their aesthetic and educational benefit. Having said that, it means that you are going to have to say 'We have got to be able to afford that thing'. No nation should have the temerity to run around declaring national parks for itself unless it can afford them, because if you do you are running a stupid process. Here we have what is absolute bottom line essential, and you can afford it. The moment you have done the audit it will start to help you decide if you can afford it.

My next concept is that national parks should not be for tourism. National parks should be for education, and I will explain that. Tourism is a consumer. Mr Heinz's baked beans, the 57 varieties, has a tin shed somewhere and in that shed he makes tinned baked beans. But to make them he has got a property out here that makes tin, and in comes tins on a line. Out there he grows beans, and the beans come in a line. Out there he has got

boxes, they make boxes, and finally he has got tomatoes grown by an Italian gentleman who makes tomato sauce. In this factory he cooks them all up and he makes baked beans in tins and out they go. No problem, that is the analogy of the park.

However, what we are doing with tourism in national parks is this: it is the same as Mr Heinz letting you and me into his factory to pay at the end of the production line for a tin of beans and then to eat it, right there, and then to use the lavatory on our way out. That is exactly what we are doing by putting tourists in national parks.

I have all the time in the world if you want to debate it. I will try and cut the corners off quickly because I know somebody is going to say to me, 'We can't possibly have national parks if the public can't go in there.' If you tell the public, 'No, you can't go but your children in the context of their curriculum can and will', at least then I feel that bit of consumption that is going on is paid for by the fact that this guy in the future, that citizen, will understand what this whole environmental conservation system is all about, or protecting the system. You are asking me to understand concepts like that. As we keep saying, it is this huge jump. Why don't we show our kids it is no huge jump, let them find out.

Secondly, it should be used for research. And thirdly, it should be a school for teaching enviro-recovery—as in competitive agriculture—to your farmers. Because what better place? This is what you do with the tourists. You go through the process of tourists in national parks with facilities, resources and everything else, because without those things you are wasting your time on tourism. You say to 10 impeccable private enterprise corporations—designed by you—who run tourists to the Barrier Reef, Kakadu or whatever, and there must be such people, 'We are going to allocate to each of you a concession area. In fact, you should tender for it.'

Those people with a proven track record of being absolutely sensitive and producing the right stuff at the right level should have these 10 different areas of this park. But it should be based on, firstly, a finite lease and secondly, very high cost, because remember you are giving them absolute exclusivity to the crown jewels. But you allocate to them, make them pay or whatever, an equivalent size in area next to the park, that is outside the fence. In this five- to 10-year period that they are allowed to have their tourist resource in your park, you make them responsible for developing the wildlife in the one outside so that when 10 years comes up you say, 'That's your land'. So you move your tourism out, but you do not be stupid and cut off your cash flow system.

I am going to deal with one final concept on education. I see our parks, yours and anybody else's, as being the global schools of the future. It should not just be for Australian kids. Of course, they should come first, but it should be paid for out of the education budget because you are always looking for money for kids, and where does the money come from? The kids from Japan, Croatia and South Africa will pay to go into that park for that educational component.

Now, obviously this is hugely exciting for me, because I am good at—as is Amanda, my hostess here—finding people to go and do those things. We are dealing with my schoolkid educationals who are coming out and saying ‘We are all going to "private enterprise" that.’. They are not even going into the national park. There is the most incredibly exciting thing there. When those kids leave, their parents have paid for them to come—or the educational budget—our local South Africans have made a profit out of them and at a very low reasonable level and those guys have gone home for ever as my dashing white knights.

Senator FERRIS—I just have one last question. Going back to your situation in Africa, I wonder if you could talk to me about what specific commercial activities involving the utilisation of some of your wildlife are most popular, most common and most sought after in Africa?

Mr Johnson—First of all, whatever it is—whether it is consumptive or non-consumptive; please may I get away from that—it is just use. Whatever the use is, the first and most valuable prize is indigenous; it belongs to us and it is unique to us. We do not bring wallabies to South Africa to raise them and release them, which I am sure we could do. No. The first prize is indigenous. In other words, it is of your nation. That is the first thing that he wants to use.

The second thing that the foreign visitor from whence we get our money wants—and of course, we have our own local market as well—is this concept of the wilderness. He must be somewhere where he feels he is walking with evolution. He feels that he walks around a corner and can bump into a dinosaur that reappeared. He wants to be part of a spiritual, as well as a technical and physical experience. So we have these three or four tiers of use. The first—and the most expensive and the one that gives us the biggest revenue generation—is the big wilderness with the big five, the lion, the elephant, et cetera. They are the things that epitomise wilderness in a broad scale.

May I digress in one tiny way? Of them all, one of the greatest signs of wilderness that we have ever had—and today it does not work the same way, but it was our most powerful—was the bushmen or the sand people. You will have read of them. You have hunter gatherer people, that is people with a hunter gathering history in Australia. The fact that they are there is one of the greatest signs of wilderness in the perception of the Western world, the bloke who is paying you to come. So do not forget it. We made a bit of a mess of ours.

The next thing is that, in the strictly consumptive sense, we have to run this continuum. We have birds and animals, either separately or together, available for consumptive use. Let us call it a purely consumptive thing, but we must not forget that that person does not all day every day blast things to bits. He may go out and shoot a kudu. In fact that is what he is there for, but when he has shot one kudu he is paid for a licence, the bloke to take him in and the whole infrastructure. But he has done it. He does

not go on and on and on. Now he during the day goes and does something else. He sits up a tree and takes photographs.

Interestingly from a financial point of view, this fellow is contributing 80 per cent more revenue than a guy who comes there just to sit in the Kruger Park taking photographs. We get much more out of him and he takes away much less, actually.

Senator FERRIS—In a physical sense, but probably not in a mental sense.

Mr Johnson—No, not in the mental sense. I thought you were going to say he is still taking more away. He does take more away of our resource, because we have to put in a road. For the guy who is going there hunting, the latest way of doing it is backpack and walk. They set up bush camps at one day or three days away and you walk. You do not use a vehicle to go and shoot your kudu. You walk. Actually they are now consuming this and paying more than anybody we have ever had in history.

As for the consumptive use of birds, again all these things are only done when it is sustainable to do it and we have enough to do it. I am largely responsible for developing this. I do not say that as a boast. I want us to have a point. The sort of person who comes to me is spending in excess of \$US1,000 a day and the only thing he is ever going to take away with him are the meals they give him and the wine he drinks and all of that goes back into the economy. Yes, they use a railway line, but then railway lines are just the same as a normal trunk road system.

If you go then to the photographer fellow, if you offer him exclusivity—and I mean real exclusivity where he can be the first at the lion kill and nobody else will be there to take photographs while he is doing it—he is paying £1,000 a day, but he is expensive to maintain out there. The question is one of the best. I am just hoping that I have got the components of it that you posed to me. Have I answered it?

Senator FERRIS—You make it all sound so fascinating.

Mr Johnson—Can you just take me back to the possibility that it was written here in this question that you have just come up with?

Senator FERRIS—No, it was not.

Mr Johnson—The value to us of the incoming fellow is that it stimulates us to create yet another piece of wilderness or recover another piece of habitat. We have now so much economic incentive in the form of just straight profit out of straight trading that we have a tidal wave going on. South Africa and Zimbabwe today have more wildlife of a general sort on farmlands outside national parks than there is in national parks—far more. The private enterprise system has more than the state has and so it should be. The state's job or the country's job is to make resources available to private enterprise and tax them,

not compete with them. The moment you put a tourist in your national park, you are competing with me, private enterprise. Do not do it. I will beat you.

Senator FERRIS—I have no doubt. The only other question that I would like your comment on is in relation to elephants, the management of elephants and the ivory trade. It is somewhat wide of our terms of reference, however, so if anybody else has any other questions, I will leave that one.

Senator O'BRIEN—I apologise and take my leave, but I will be looking with interest at the balance of the *Hansard*. I just have another engagement now. Thank you very much, Mr Johnson.

Senator FERRIS—I am interested in the issue of elephants because just this week we are looking at the failure of world public policy to save the whales. The Japanese, using the word 'research', have found a loophole to kill whales and sell their meat on the black market. So we are looking again at how we can best manage whale conservation. Surely the principle also applies to the management of elephants in relation to ivory.

Mr Johnson—The essential component of the problem of elephants is not the fact that God gave them teeth which stick out the side and which man has perceived for a long time to be of decorative value or real value. The problem is that an elephant is a big creature and it requires an awful lot of land. To have one elephant, you need several hundred hectares, if not square kilometres, of land to maintain it.

What has happened is that the pressure of the human population in Africa has become so large that these vast acreages over which these vast numbers of elephants could wander have, since 1960-something, shrunk dramatically because we are dealing with population birth rates of four or five per cent. They are having babies constantly; the leaders tell the people to have babies as it is the best way to get over the problem of colonial people. This vast exponential and hopeless, in terms of its quality of life expectation, population explosion has effectively shoved the elephants into smaller and smaller places.

As it has done that, it has exacerbated all the problems that elephants have amongst themselves, let alone their interface with man. Elephants do not compete with man. They have had it, in the face of man. The only place where you can maintain them or do anything with them is where you have a man adaptation system, such as in a national park. In other words, we have adapted the land to accommodate the elephant. The moment you do that, you still have to manage them; otherwise they are going to flatten the place.

It does not matter which action you choose—that is, have maximum elephant numbers and let them return to grassland and let them die, or sort them out now and maintain the broadest possible species diversity—because you only get species diversity if you have habitat diversity. If you leave the elephants alone, they will do what their job is

supposed to be. They are a pioneer animal and they will flatten the land.

It does not matter which decision you take; what matters is taking a decision. You cannot just leave this thing. You cannot say, 'We won't hit them or we will hit them.' You cannot leave it. We have been saying that we think man's thought is that we should manage them. In other words, we should have so many per 100 square kilometres because we can maintain that. All the other animals and birds which the developed Western world is paying us to come and see and wants to see will get that. The Western world does not want to come to Africa to see one bull and one pigeon and no elephants left but just grassland. They will not pay for that. If they want maximum species, that is fine; we can deliver them.

In the process of managing, we are going to produce elephant by-products. How could one legitimately say to the black nations of Africa that it is wrong to sell the products of their nation? How would you feel if they came here and told you that you could not sell shiraz grapes?

What is happening now is that we are dictating the terms under which we are prepared to pay money to go to Africa to see elephants. Is that right? There are aspects of it that are right but most of it is wrong. The aspect that is right is that an elephant and a whale probably should be seen as world creatures because they are not just African or just Taiwanese or just something—they are world creatures. Where you begin and end that one, I am not sure, but it is a reasonable place to have a debate.

Where the crunch comes is that those damn things live with me. It is my cost 364 days of the year and you are expecting me to maintain them for the one day you come and then you have the nerve to tell me that for the one day you come, you want to see them under your conditions. I can't do that. Why should I?

On the ivory thing, what matters is the sustainability of elephants. Are we managing elephants so well that there is a constant supply of them? If there is, there is no reason why you should not use the ivory. The second part of it is whether we are doing a job with elephants that is persuading the neighbour who has already shoved the elephant out of his ground to let it back in. Can we invent some system so everybody will share some of this benefit?

But if we just say that the only benefit out of elephants is people who come and see them and walk away from them and that money goes to central coffer, and if Joe Mhlangu, the guy who lives next door to them and whose crops are knocked flat and his house is busted by them, is not going to get a single cent out of them, how am I going to persuade him to keep elephants? The moment my back is turned he is going to drill them. Elephants represent wilderness. That is why they are so popular. For us they are a nightmare—a brilliant, beautiful, staggering, extraordinary, totally aesthetic nightmare. Because nobody is being honest about them.

CHAIR—Most of my questions are answered, in a sense, but I am asking them for confirmation or even in a different way. As I have gone round the country, we have been looking at the commercial utilisation of certain species, such as crocodiles, and one of the ways indigenous people here were able to benefit from them was through the collection of eggs in the wild which enabled them to preserve the habitat. The question I had which was not answered as we moved around, but I think you have answered it now, is that I could see why they would preserve the habitat for those crocodiles, but that is one species. What about the other species? What you are saying to me is that the other species are preserved, along with the crocodile, because they fit the whole thing.

Mr Johnson—Good. You have got it. Absolutely.

CHAIR—Nobody was able to answer that for me as we went around.

Mr Johnson—You have absolutely got it. The bottom line is the habitat. We see a guineafowl as the provoker, the provider, of approximately 200 freeloaders on the back of it. There are 200 other species freeloaded on the guineafowl. The moment they get that patch of grass back and they have got a guinea there, he pays for another 200 things, which all belong there. But the guinea on his own is useless; it will not happen.

I can give you a hell of a simple example. On one of our key places when I first started there, we had, I think the census said, 819 guineafowl on 15,000 to 20,000 acres of land, which is reasonable. We now have over 4,000 on the same land and we off-take 2,000 a year by various things—catching them, hanging them in the larder, eating them for dinner, shooting them, the lot.

The interesting thing is I have now got two pairs of martial eagles, as in wedge-tailed eagles. They have come back—they have not been there in 100 years—because the guineafowl now are so many that I can create the territory of a mega-predator that requires 30 square miles to have a territory. I have got the food for it. I have got two pairs. Those eagles, in the context of ornithologists coming to look at them, are probably worth \$300,000 each. Incredibly, they control the predators of the guineafowl. They are doing a better job for me than I can do with any man invented system. The integrity of the total habitat is unwritten.

CHAIR—Another question that we have wrestled with as we have moved around, and it is part of the debate, is what we ought to do, say, in our marginal desert land. That land has got sheep and cattle—but mainly sheep—and it is being degraded rapidly. What we should do is replace those animals with the harvesting of kangaroos or whatever. One of the arguments that has been put against that is that the farmer will not remove the sheep. He will harvest the kangaroo as well as keeping the sheep, so you have done nothing for the habitat. I sense part of an answer is that, if the harvesting of the kangaroo has sufficient value, he will remove the sheep.

Mr Johnson—I can almost give you an exact case in point. The more desert, the more fragile, the poorer the people—our poorest people are our desert dwellers—

CHAIR—We have got lots of desert.

Mr Johnson—The more you can switch their agriculture onto the indigenous rather than the exotic, the more they will survive because the system does this. It gets very bad in very bad droughts out in deserts but, incredibly, the thing that survives the best is the indigenous rather than the exotic. So your kangaroo is a winner. It just has no downside potential. Your sheep is an absolute nightmare and its environmental cost, by the way, just gets higher and higher and higher.

So here is our example. We have a thing called a grey wing partridge. It is a small bird about the size of one of your topknot pigeons. I do not think you call them a topknot, but I saw them when we were at the horse thing.

CHAIR—Crested pigeon.

Mr Johnson—Crested pigeon. It is about the same size, maybe a little bigger. It lives in this dry mountainous area of ours in quite nice numbers in groups. The partridges are there; they have been for one million years. The main land use there is sheep, and it is very borderline sheep stuff. There is some cattle but it is borderline.

With some friends, I started this organisation. We needed a hook to have a go at, so we chose this partridge which is indigenous to South Africa. It does not even exist in Zimbabwe or outside our boundary. We chose it, firstly, for that reason; secondly, because it was interfaced with sheep; and, thirdly, because that area, the Eastern Cape, is the poorest and most politically nasty area we have.

Today, as a by-product to the bird shooters from Johannesburg—because we cannot really sell that thing overseas: it is in these mountains and it is physically exhausting to go there, et cetera; it has become a local thing—that bird is worth 50 rand more than a sheep, and that bird weighs 12 ounces and a sheep weighs whatever a sheep weighs. So by volume, by weight of meat, that bird is like the ultimate caviar. It is the most valuable thing that has ever happened. We did the research. Those farmers know that, if you find a covey of six, you can shoot three, or catch three, or hit them with a stone, or do what you like, but you cannot ever take more than three. That one bird has completely out-competed the sheep.

Therefore, your answer to the desert, the kangaroo and the sheep is to create the value for the kangaroo. Do not put in any arbitrary rules unless you see people are fudging something somewhere. It can happen—humans are humans. But the thing to do is to encourage them to think that the best farming is the kangaroo rather than the sheep. Pay them an incentive to get rid of the sheep and carry on with the kangaroos.

Senator FERRIS—Or the black cockatoo, as this particular case may be. In this particular rangelands area I think the chairman is referring to, there is a prolific supply of these very beautiful glossy black cockatoos which are highly protected, but I was struck by the comparison because at the moment they are not supposed to be killed or harmed in any way. If you took the same analogy you just made with the pigeon, there would be no doubt at all—certainly in the short term; I do not know about the long term—that one of those would be far more valuable than a sheep would ever be, even when the wool price was double what it is now.

Mr Johnson—The great advantage of the indigenous is it costs less. That is really where its first strike in the wall is and will always be its best. It costs much less. It is there naturally for nothing, and it is probably there because you have introduced water to the system. Is that right?

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Johnson—So you could go the other way and take the water out, take the sheep out and drop the kangaroo numbers down to what the original carrying capacity was. You could do it. Anyway, you have got it. Habitat, habitat, habitat.

CHAIR—I have another question, and again I have started to see the answer because this was a puzzle to me. In your system, the very marginal and socially disadvantaged people at the bottom actually do benefit from this.

Mr Johnson—Absolutely, and we have now seen a remarkable piece of constitutional movement in from Namibia. When Namibia became independent, its independence was from South Africa. South Africa took the land over after the First World War as a custodian of enemy property—we beat the Germans. When we took it over, everything was fine. But as apartheid evolved, obviously, they started to shove those rules and regulations at what was really United Nations trusted territory. That really was not very fair, but they did it. With it, they heaped on Namibia the same environmental laws and regulations as we have had in South Africa for a long time—that is, the rule of *res nullius*; the Roman Dutch law that the state owns everything.

So when Namibia became independent, its first interests were in its very difficult economic circumstances. It is a very large and very poor country with very few people, luckily. So it looked to its diamonds and its mineral resources first and foremost and then towards its agriculture, which went through a mega-hiccup when the bottom fell out of the *karakul*—a Persian lamb they make coats from for ladies to wear in the evening.

CHAIR—It sounds a bit like mohair.

Mr Johnson—Yes, but this is virtually an embryonic harvest. You cut open the sheep, take out the foetus, clonk it on the head and then strip this thing off and make a

coat out of it. That is what those farmers were doing. The world does not like those sorts of things, and fair enough. But the by-product of this was you now made this country very poor, and we have no right to make people poor, I think.

So then they started to rapidly look very carefully at any single possible renewable resource based in Namibia in order to find some money to keep the people going, to build their schools and to provide them with some quality of life, which Africa lacks horrifically if you are poor. The next thing they seized on was tourism. Australia is interesting in this respect, isn't it? Its first earner at the moment is minerals, its second earner is agriculture and its third earner is tourism. I can predict right now that, if you go along some of the courses I am telling you about, you can clobber mining. Give it 10 years and you will have more out of tourism, which is the great growth industry of the world.

But I will go back to Namibia. Sam Nujoma, the President, and his boys were now stuck with a very interesting problem. What are they going to do about generating tourism? So they went back to the drawing board. They got a lot of help and talked to a lot of people. They spotted the fact that the state owned all the animals, all the birds, all the fish and everything. There is no way you are going to make an industry out of that if the state owns it. So they said, 'It's time we started divesting ourselves of X, Y and Z species, provided that we have a government owned thing where this species is adequately represented for the future so that, if private enterprise makes a cock up, we know we have it safe somewhere. But all those species which we can share with them, they must have.' So they have the Etosha National Park and in it are lots of gemsbok, so they could free gemsbok, which they have done.

Now comes the interesting part. When they looked at this thing, they found they were stuck with *res nullius*—the state owns everything. So many of us—including me and my organisation—have been consulting with the Namibian government endlessly on what to do and how to do it. We finally got through the Gordian knot when we said, 'Decide what the state wants to own and tell us what you do not want to own.' Take some rare migrant thing like a flamingo. The government says, 'I want to own it.' Therefore, if it appears on your farm, you cannot do anything about it. You cannot touch it. It belongs to the people of Namibia. But if it is a sand grouse, a guineafowl, a gemsbok or any of a thousand other things which are represented elsewhere, it is yours. You are totally in charge of it. If you want to be an idiot and bulldoze the land flat so that none can survive there, so be it. But then do not come and ask us for some more; it is going to cost you to get it back.

The second part of this is that they had to then address the tribal land-holdings of very ancient tribal systems. They found there the same thing—that these poor people had been totally divested of all their assets. Whether it was mineral, animal, vegetable or whatever, it was not theirs; it belonged to the government. We have been part of the design of: what do you hand back and how do you hand it back in a natural history sense? I am not a minerals expert, so that is somebody else's job. But when it comes to

swallows, water and kudus, I am pretty good.

So we have now completely redesigned that thing, and the government, unbelievably, has handed it all back to them. Now the most unbelievable thing is going on. They are being incredibly careful who they are dealing with—it is very time consuming because you have to go there 25 times to get one small thing agreed—but the whole thing is booming. Suddenly the poorest people in the desert are looking at the potential of being middle-class wealthy out of a sand grouse, out of a kudu, out of a fish which somebody can catch with a fly or a bait or whatever. It is sustainable.

CHAIR—I think we have just about done you over.

Senator FERRIS—So to speak.

CHAIR—More as a bit of a throwaway comment: one of the other debates we have had was over some irrational evidence about the degree of cuddliness.

Mr Johnson—Of cuddliness?

CHAIR—Yes. In other words, some of the people who would not allow you to commercially utilise it would say, ‘It is okay to do it to a crocodile because nobody loves them, but don’t ever kill a kangaroo or, particularly, a koala.’

Mr Johnson—Oh, I like your point.

CHAIR—That is an interesting debate we are having which we have not resolved. It is a fairly illogical debate. Who is to say, in the hierarchy of values, how you assess the value?

Mr Johnson—Can I try you on a throwaway line which you could throw to a constituent or somebody like old Mrs Giles hitting you with her duck head umbrella because she was very angry with you.

CHAIR—That happens.

Mr Johnson—What you could try is: the only person who has a right to say that a koala is ugly or good looking, or for that matter that a crocodile is ugly or good looking, is another crocodile or another koala.

CHAIR—That is a good one.

Mr Johnson—As far as I know the evolutionary process did not select the good looking. What it asked was: is it functional and does it do the job? Are the form and the shape functional within the context of its evolutionary history and survival?

Keith Shackleton, the famous English wildlife artist, particularly of marine wildlife, is a great friend of mine and was the nephew of Sir Ernest, of Antarctic fame. One day I was with him and he was painting in his log book the most beautiful watercolour of a black-browed albatross. All Australians probably know it because they are not uncommon around your shores.

If you look at the black-browed albatross, it has this absolutely pristine, virginal, snow white, beautiful white head with this gorgeous big yellow beak. When you look at it as this totally beyond compare design there is an extraordinary thing. It has this beautiful black eye and it has a tick of black feathers as its eyebrow.

I was photographing one of these things and Keith was sketching and painting it. I put the camera down and watched him. I said, 'Keith, why do you think it has that little tick?' He carried on painting and he said, 'God could not leave that eye just round; it is perfect with the tick. If you take the tick away it is not finished.'

Senator FERRIS—That is a very good note to leave it on.

CHAIR—We will close on that note. Thank you very much from the committee and, hopefully, on behalf of Australia.

Mr Johnson—Thank you.

Committee adjourned at 9.34 p.m.