

PROOF



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

SENATE

RURAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS AND TRANSPORT REFERENCES
COMMITTEE

Reference: Commercial utilisation of native wildlife

CANBERRA

Tuesday, 2 December 1997

PROOF HANSARD REPORT

CANBERRA

SENATE
RURAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS AND TRANSPORT REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Members:

Senator Woodley (Chair)

Senator Calvert	Senator Forshaw
Senator Bob Collins	Senator Herrenan
Senator Crane	Senator O'Brien

Participating members

Senator Abetz	Senator Cook
Senator Bartlett	Senator Eggleston
Senator Bob Brown	Senator Ferris
Senator Brownhill	Senator Gibbs
Senator Chapman	Senator Lundy
Senator Bob Collins	Senator Margetts
Senator Colston	Senator Murphy
Senator Conroy	Senator Tambling
	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.

CONDITION OF DISTRIBUTION

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WITNESSES

FORSHAW, Mr Joseph Michael, Wauchope, New South Wales 2446 1199

**ROGERS, Ms Katherine Margaret, Spokesperson, Animal Societies
Federation, New South Wales, PO Box 211, Gladesville, New South
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SENATE
RURAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS AND TRANSPORT REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Commercial utilisation of native wildlife

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Tuesday, 2 December 1997

Present

Senator Woodley (Chair)

Senator Calvert

Senator Heffernan

Senator Forshaw

Senator O'Brien

The committee met at 8.19 p.m.

Senator Woodley took the chair.

CHAIR—Over the last 12 months, the committee has held 13 public hearings on the subject of the commercial utilisation of native wildlife. Some 341 submissions have been received and the committee had also held a number of private inspections in various states—I might say in every state.

This hearing tonight is the last public meeting planned before the committee hands down its report to the Senate in March next year. 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 submissions made to the committee in 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.

[8.20 p.m.]

FORSHAW, Mr Joseph Michael, Wauchope, New South Wales 2446

CHAIR—Welcome to the hearing this evening. In what capacity are you appearing to give evidence?

Mr Forshaw—I appear as a private individual with expertise in the conservation and biology of parrots. I am a professional ornithologist and have made a lifelong study of these birds.

CHAIR—We are very keen to meet with you and are sorry about the delay tonight. A whole lot of things have overtaken us in terms of our program this week. I need to leave but I will certainly be very interested to read the oral evidence. I found your written submission very interesting.

Senator FORSHAW—Could I formally put on the record that I do not think it is a conflict of interest, but I should indicate that Mr Forshaw is a relative of mine, as is probably obvious from the spelling. He certainly knows a heck of a lot more about birds than I do.

CHAIR—That probably means that, like everyone else in life, Joseph has some burdens to bear. I am sorry, I have to leave now.

ACTING CHAIR (Senator Calvert)—We are reasonably well into our inquiry into commercial utilisation of wildlife. As a Tasmanian, one of the things that has not gone unnoticed by me is that there is an illegal trade in parrots, particularly some from my own state and, from time to time, these feature in the media. There is what would seem to be a huge illegal trade in smuggling wildlife, particularly parrots, out of Australia. Would you like to comment, from your knowledge, as to what extent this is happening and what you think we could do as a Senate to perhaps change things a bit?

Senator FORSHAW—Before Joseph begins, he has provided a written opening statement. I am not sure whether you intend him to read that, but we can certainly have it incorporated into the *Hansard*. Maybe he could fairly quickly summarise that statement.

ACTING CHAIR—Is it the wish of the committee that the document be incorporated in the transcript of evidence? There being no objection, it is so ordered.

The document read as follows—

Mr Forshaw—Thank you very much. As we have put the written opening statement in the *Hansard*, I would just like to take five minutes in canvassing the salient points in the submission which I believe will put your questions into some sort of context which may then be able to lead us into the issue.

I think we have to look at parrots on a worldwide basis to start with. More than one-third of the approximate 330 species are now in imminent danger of extinction which makes parrots one of the world's most endangered groups of birds. Because of this there has been, in the last year, a concerted effort to draw up a world action plan for the conservation of parrots. Through the permission of the author of the general section of that world action plan, I have been able to make available a copy of the final draft of his general section which gives a total overview of the world situation.

The subsection of interest to us and this committee is called sustainable harvest. It talks about export and breeding, et cetera. I would like senators, if they have the opportunity, to read as much of the total overview as they can because it does put the world situation into perspective.

When we talk about commercial utilisation of native wildlife in respect to Australian parrots, we talk about meeting the live bird trade. That is really what it amounts to. There are three arguments relevant to this point that have been put forward. The first one is the export of the so-called pest species and that this will alleviate the incidence of damage to crops by cockatoos and parrots. The second point is the export of captive bred birds by aviculturists. That will give aviculturists a legitimate market for the birds that they breed in captivity and also will earn export dollars.

The third point to this argument is that the export of both pest species and captive bred birds will undermine the incidence of smuggling or illegal activity. Concerning the export of so-called pest species, I must say that I am amazed in this enlightened age that any serious consideration can be given to permitting the export from Australia of species of cockatoos that are known to cause damage in crop growing areas.

To emphasise this point, I would like tell the committee of a meeting I had some years ago with officials of the US Department of Agriculture in the office of the Curator of Ornithology at the Bronx Zoo in New York. I said to the officials, 'What would be the United States's attitude if Australia were to permit the export of cockatoos or parrots, and the basis of the selection of those species was that they cause damage in crops?' He very quickly said that the US would invoke our injurious wildlife legislation and prohibit importation. I said, 'Of course, you would.'

The proposal from the Northern Territory, which I have seen in the *Hansard* to this committee, put forward for the export of red-tailed black cockatoos falls partly within this ambit. If we have an opportunity, I would like to raise that specific issue with the committee as we move along.

On the export of captive bred birds, I am sympathetic to the representation that we permit the export of captive bred birds, but at this time I am very reluctant to support the proposal. I say that for two reasons. There is the possible inadequacy of techniques for positive identification of captive bred birds. I know much has been made of DNA fingerprinting and microchipping as foolproof techniques, but the recent overturning of a conviction in New South Wales, which was based on DNA fingerprinting, leads me to believe that these techniques may not be as foolproof as is claimed. There is the likely upsurge of illegal capture from the wild to meet the increased demand for both the export market and, more likely, the domestic market because it may no longer be able to meet the higher costs that the export market would provide.

Lastly, I agree with the point made by Dr Snyder in his overview that all over the world we have enough evidence that there will be no decrease in smuggling activities as a consequence of legal export of Australian birds. That is simply because the disparity in cost-effectiveness is too great. Legally exporting birds is costly to the exporters and costly to the importers. To smuggle some eggs out is not costly and that is the problem. You have to get a legal scenario or legal system that is as cost-effective as smuggling and that is very, very difficult.

The proof in that has been in the importation. We have had legal importation now for a couple of years. The upsurge in illegal importation into this country, that coincided with the legal importation, is firm evidence that one seems to lead to an increase in the other. That is the problem. Those are the salient points. Perhaps as we move along we may be able to touch on some of those again.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you for that opening statement. Could you point us in the direction where we could get some actual evidence or reports on what you have just said about the legal importation of wildlife having led to an increase in smuggling? I think that would be of interest to the committee.

Mr Forshaw—The legal importation revolved around certain species of parrots—namely macaws, plus a few mutations, and amazons and some lorikeets—permitted by AQIS through the two quarantine stations in South Australia. At the same time, there appeared on the aviculture scene in Australia some 50 species of parrots that were not known to be here prior to 1959 when the import ban came on. To quote one example, the red-fronted macaw, which is now in this country, was unknown in aviculture anywhere in the world until 1973. Nobody had seen a live bird outside Bolivia until 1973. There is no way in the world that species could have been here in Australia prior to 1959. It has appeared on the scene in the past two to three years, and so have umpteen dozen other species.

You have only to look at the for sale notices in the Saturday paper to see that these species are openly advertised and openly available. They were not here in the 1960s or 1970s. We know that. I can rattle off numerous species, such as the red-bellied parrots,

Jardine's parrots and, as I said, red-fronted macaws. Two other species are also of very strong interest to us. One is the hyacinth macaw. We have documented evidence of the death of the last two hyacinth macaws in this country, in the Adelaide Zoo. The last one died in 1972, I think. That species has now appeared here again. The other species is the Moluccan cockatoo. I remember seeing the last live bird: I went all the way to Melbourne in 1964 to see it. It was the last Moluccan cockatoo alive in this country. Those last two birds to die are both preserved in museums, one in Melbourne and the other one in Brisbane. We know the specimens and we know the history of those last two birds. The Moluccan cockatoo is now here in numbers.

Senator FORSHAW—When you say 'we know', you are talking about yourself and people who are involved in the study of birds. For the purposes of the record, I think that is in the material you sent us.

Mr Forshaw—That is true.

Senator FORSHAW—The two major works you have written are *Australian parrots* and *Parrots of the world*.

Mr Forshaw—I wrote *Parrots of the world* under a Churchill scholarship and published it in 1973. That took me 10 years between 1963 and 1973. We canvassed every foreign parrot in this country, because it was of vital interest to us in compiling the data for that publication. We knew where all the foreign birds were. We knew who had them and we knew what they were.

Senator FORSHAW—Do you mind if we carry on without you, Senator Calvert?

ACTING CHAIR—No. Keep going. I just want to be able to read tomorrow about smuggling, and you have started on that. We have some unique species in Tasmania that I am concerned about. The only issue I would like canvassed a bit more is the export of what we call 'pest species' of parrots. I cannot understand, really, why you are concerned about that happening and what effect it will have. I would rather see them exported for commercial value than shot or poisoned in the paddocks.

Mr Forshaw—But it is not an either/or situation: exporting will not cause any diminution of crop damage. That is the problem. The two issues are totally separate. We have to address the two issues and we should address the two issues, but there is no nexus between the two. That is the problem.

ACTING CHAIR—Fair enough.

Senator FORSHAW—Could you explain that a little more? I suppose that, for the average member of the community, if someone says you have an oversupply or overabundance of particular pest cockatoos and that one way is to cull them and shoot

them or export them, the logical assumption is that that will have some beneficial impact by reducing the numbers and therefore the consequential damage. Why is that not so?

Mr Forshaw—Let us start at the beginning. What is a pest species? There is no such thing as a pest species, per se. Galahs are not pests in areas where they do not grow crops. The conflict between agriculture and wildlife is worldwide. It is very common in all countries; it is not unique to Australia. It just happens that, in Australia, it is parrots and cockatoos that are involved. In the United States, it is red-winged blackbirds. In Argentina, Dr Enrico Buca is probably one of the leading world authorities on research into crop damage by parrots, but we know virtually nothing of his work. The point is that they have been exporting monk parakeets out of Argentina for years, on the basis that it is going to help the crop damage, but it has not made one iota of difference.

There are two things involved here: you cannot export enough birds to make any significant impact. How many galahs are you going to have to export to remove damage by galahs to wheat crops? Millions. But the point is that it is not going to solve your problem. The question of impact between crops and birds has to be addressed in the context of agricultural practices. The question of whether we should export galahs has to be looked at, firstly, in terms of the impact that has on the exporting country and, secondly and very importantly, the impact it is going to have on the importing country. What is the likelihood of numerous galahs being exported to the United States? The United States might not be too happy if galahs suddenly become established in the grain growing areas of the south-west. There is likely impact at both sides of the argument.

That is the difference between exporting dead animals and products and exporting live animals. They are two totally different issues. Looking at the *Hansard*, I notice that the Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory could not appreciate that difference. They questioned why there were different treatments under the legislation for live animals and for dead animals or products. It is very simple: the impacts are totally different and that is why they are dealt with separately. But the Conservation Commission people could not understand that, and that is why they have come forward with a proposal for red-tailed black cockatoos, which are live animals, based on a program for crocodile products, which are dead products. Crocodile handbags are not going to bring diseases in, nor are they going to get crocodiles established in Italy. That is the problem.

We must address the question of crop damage. Firstly, what is its significance? Nationally, it is insignificant. Our crop levels are increasing and we are still holding stockpiles from the previous two years of grain crops, trying to get world markets. It is not important nationally. All inquiries that have looked at it have realised that it is insignificant nationally. I will concede that it is very significant to a local farmer in a local area, but exporting the birds is not going to help his problem.

ACTING CHAIR (Senator O'Brien)—No; but it has been suggested to us that that farmer might preserve habitat if there is some value to be gained from the wildlife

that use that habitat, as against clearing it for a rice crop or a wheat crop, or whatever.

Mr Forshaw—This came up in the Northern Territory proposal; I think I looked at the *Hansard*.

ACTING CHAIR—Yes, it did.

Mr Forshaw—Senator, I would just make one point about the Northern Territory submission where they looked at this. The question was very correctly put by Senator O'Brien, where he said, 'I'm wondering about the long-term economics for the property owner in these circumstances.' Dr Freeland, on behalf of the commission, replied, 'Given the harvest levels that we are talking about, I do not think we will saturate a global market for many years, even if they do try to captive rear.' But that is not true; that is the problem.

ACTING CHAIR—Why not?

Mr Forshaw—If you are sending out a consumable product like crocodile skins, then that is virtually a non-diminishing market: people are going to keep buying a crocodile skin products. If you are sending out live cockatoos, the aviculturists overseas are going to breed them. The birds themselves are long-lived. The market is not insatiable. It is limited. It is a finite market and, from the very moment that you export your first birds, your market is declining. It is not an expanding market, nor is it a fixed market. Therefore, the economics of it is such that, eventually—

ACTING CHAIR—Sorry to interrupt, but I can think of an argument where, by making the birds more freely available, you would actually expand the market. If you could buy a bird that was not illicitly brought into the country but was there legitimately, you could find that the market naturally expanded. Indeed, the aviculturists who breed red-tailed cockatoos in Queensland argued that they could see that the price would go down but they felt that the market was expansive and, as I recall—I think it is on the *Hansard*—they believed that taking the product that they reared, captive bred, would reduce the price but there would be an expansion in the market; and that, in any case, if we did nothing, aviculturists overseas would take smuggled birds or eggs and breed to that market and take it from us.

Mr Forshaw—They will continue to do that. That is the point: they will continue to do that.

ACTING CHAIR—Yes. I think that is what the aviculturists say. Their argument is, 'What harm do we do in exporting birds that we breed that we know are captive bred, when we do no harm to the environment?' That is a different argument from the Northern Territory government's argument. What harm do they do?

Mr Forshaw—There are two points that we have to look at. Firstly, we have to know that they are captive bred, and that raises a question. I have grave doubts and real concerns about that. Secondly, we have to have a system that is cheap. They are sending eggs out with a courier on a plane. In other words, you have to be able to meet the costs at the other end through a system. Under the present circumstances, I doubt very much that you can come up with a legal system that would be cost-effective. But the real reason for my opposing the Northern Territory proposal is that they do not have the biological data; and that is the crunch.

There is no biological data. The proposal put by the Northern Territory Conservation Commission is bad science, bad research. They have no information whatsoever on the recruitment levels of red-tailed black cockatoo. None of us has. The only work done on the red-tailed black cockatoo in Australia was done in the wheat belt of Western Australia by Dr Saunders from CSIRO. He found an amazing situation, because there the bird is expanding its range. It is moving into areas where it was not known before, and therefore we assumed that it was becoming more common. In actual fact, when he looked at the recruitment, when he looked at the breeding, he found that the bird was in a precarious situation, that it was not replacing its population. The whole question of expanding into new areas was simply because it was reliant on one source of food—namely, seeds of the weed pest GG—and it is expanding into other areas simply because of that single food item.

The other point is that the red-tailed cockatoo is a single-egg layer. It lays only one egg.

ACTING CHAIR—Not two?

Mr Forshaw—No, it does not lay two. The white-tailed black cockatoo lays two. We have done a lot of work on the white-tailed black, and the Western Australian Department of Conservation and Land Management have a very good program for harvesting white-tailed black cockatoos. But they pointed out themselves in their report that the sustainable or commercial use of native wildlife is ‘more likely to be accepted if it is based on good scientific data’ and that programs such as the one being conducted with Carnaby’s white cockatoo, which is the white-tailed black cockatoo, ‘would not have been possible without the extensive and detailed field studies undertaken by Dennis Saunders and his workers at CSIRO’—and they were undertaken over 20 years: that is the sort of data that they had.

Senator FORSHAW—When was that? Was that in the time when you were at the CSIRO?

Mr Forshaw—No; it started just after. But that is the sort of data you have to have. Numbers of birds and aerial surveys mean absolutely nothing. These are long-lived birds. They live for 60 and 70 years.

ACTING CHAIR—In the wild?

Mr Forshaw—Yes. The point is that it may take many years for any failure in recruitment to show up in the population, by which time you will get a very sharp drop. I will refer back to Dr Saunders's work on the red-tail. He said that it is particularly worrying that a species which lays only one egg should have a failure rate of eggs of 35.3 per cent. That was the failure rate he found in the red-tail in Western Australia. Observations at the nest indicated that females were not consistent in their incubation, readily leaving the nest for long periods.

ACTING CHAIR—We could check this, but I am sure that when we visited the agriculturalists in Queensland and looked at their aviaries they were adamant that these birds laid two eggs. They were able to take the first egg and incubate it and leave the second egg with the bird.

Mr Forshaw—I am not an expert on red-tailed black cockatoos in captivity. All I can do is tell you what the situation is in the wild, and they are the birds we are dealing with. This is what Dr Saunders says. This is a bird that lays one egg. You are assuming that, if we take the egg in the Northern Territory, the bird will re-lay. We have no evidence of this in the wild. There is no information at all from the wild for this.

The other point I might make is that it takes seven months to hand rear a young red-tailed black cockatoo from egg to fledgling stage. I think the Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory estimated that the value of each bird is about \$1,500. If I look at *Hansard*, I am sure that is what it is. I question the economics of the whole program, given that sort of work intensity. I do not believe the economics of the program would hold up. The returns to the land-holder are simply not there.

The simple fact is that they do not have the information. There is no scientific basis. If we were to permit it, we would have the same old arguments that we have had with the US over the years with the kangaroo industry. The United States would question our scientific data. They would question our management program, which they would be quite legitimate in doing. I am sure anybody who examined it would see that it was just not sustainable.

ACTING CHAIR—We should permit that only if there is a sustainable resource behind it. Is that what you are saying?

Mr Forshaw—Any commercial utilisation of wildlife has to be conducted on the basis of sound scientific evidence. That is what the Western Australians have conceded in their program, but they had the scientific evidence and they had 20 years of research. What they knew was that by taking the second egg, which the parents did not raise anyway, they were actually increasing the yield of the birds. They knew that from all the studies that had been conducted. That is why they were able to do it. We have no such

evidence whatsoever for the red-tail. The only bit of evidence we have sounds warning bells. It says, 'Caution!'

I am not saying that the red-tail is not common in the Northern Territory; it is common in the Northern Territory. We still do not know anything about the dynamics of the population. What are the recruitment levels? What birds are breeding? Where do they breed? Very few nests of the red-tailed black cockatoo have been found in the Northern Territory, despite it being a common bird. That raises all sorts of queries.

Senator FORSHAW—I want to ask some questions about the smuggling issue. You were saying earlier that it is a large problem, and that appears to be the evidence that has been put before this committee. I think there was a witness who appeared in Melbourne, Mr Hoser, whose specialty or area of interest was reptiles. I recall his solution to the issue was that, rather than bring the full weight of the law down on these people, we should let it basically be open slather. I do not want to misrepresent his evidence, but that was my recollection of what he was putting, and he was not limiting that to reptiles anyway. I would be interested if you have any comments about that sort of approach, that if we cannot control the problem through the current laws then we should let it go.

What is the extent of the smuggling problem in Australia, both into and out of Australia? I understand you have given evidence as an expert witness at prosecutions both here and overseas. How many are we catching compared to what you believe the extent of the problem is? What can be done, if anything, with the current legal system?

Mr Forshaw—We are catching only a small percentage. I would like to make a couple of points leading up to that. I would like to refer to the evidence given by Michael Kennedy to this committee on 2 December last year, and I would have to agree with his statement:

Legal trade will permit more illegal trade. The myth is born that, if you legalise trade, you will remove illegal trade. That is a mythical beast. It does not occur; you simply provide smugglers with new loopholes to use to ply their trade. They can substitute birds, rename birds, say the birds come from other countries. Illegal trade will be always with us to some extent. Legalising trade, as many states and traders are preposing these days, is not tenable. Also, you will find that the markets for those live birds are decreasing annually around that world.

I think that final point is very important. Most of the markets will not allow the import of wild caught birds. In the United States and the EC, that is out; they will not allow it. As a matter of fact, that is why I do not believe that the Northern Territory proposal would get up either, because they are wild birds. It is a ranching proposal; it is not a captive breeding proposal. My personal belief is that the United States would prohibit their import.

The point he is making is that illegal trade will always be with us but you have to look at it as to whether it is really a conservation issue. To a large extent it is an animal welfare issue. Even though we do have smuggling out of Australia, it has not jeopardised

any individual species. It has certainly posed risks to some local populations, namely the northern Victorian population of the Major Mitchell cockatoo, which was very, very severely depleted by smuggling operations until we caught the people involved. I was instrumental in the US in obtaining custodial sentences on those people, which was very rewarding. That was a particular instance where it had gone on over 10 years, over a long period of time, and we uncovered it purely by accident. That illustrates the point that we are not catching too many.

A lot of the difficulty in apprehending smugglers is due to the inadequacy of Commonwealth legislation. Commonwealth legislation does not have what we call the reverse onus of proof. Wildlife legislation, virtually all over the world, has the reverse onus of proof. In other words, somebody who keeps wildlife has a licence to keep legally acquired wildlife and a condition of that licence is that they have to be able to prove they legally acquired it. New South Wales, in giving licences to aviculturalists, continually recommends that aviculturalists keep all their bills of sale, they keep evidence of where they bought the birds, et cetera, which is very, very sound advice.

In the Commonwealth legislation the onus of proof is on the law enforcement officer to prove that these birds were illegally acquired, and that is virtually impossible. That is why these birds that we know have been illegally smuggled in are able to be advertised widely for sale. My understanding is that the Commonwealth DPP has advised that unless you catch them at the barrier then you cannot prove they were illegally acquired.

Senator FORSHAW—They would be reluctant to even take a prosecution if that were the position.

Mr Forshaw—They will not take a prosecution; that is what it amounts to. The aviculturalists know this. This is what they have acted upon. They have known that if they get them through the barrier, then they are home and hosed.

That is the problem. I do not understand it. I just do not know why it has not been fixed up. I have talked to some of my former colleagues about it and they believe that the Commonwealth parliament would not approve the reverse onus of proof. I do not know that it has ever been tried but, while that fault is there in the legislation, you will never get on top of it. That is the reality of the situation. Everywhere else in the world, wildlife legislation is based on the fact that it is up to the person who has the wildlife to be able to prove that they acquired it legally. If they cannot, you assume that it was acquired illegally.

Getting back to your other point about how widespread it is, I do not think it is widespread but it is dangerous because it is very specific to the rarer species. That is the problem. The black cockatoos are prime targets for smuggling and those are the really worrying aspects of it—that they target species that are highly desirable. That will

continue to happen. If you export galahs, that will not do anything at all to the demand for black cockatoos. As a matter of fact, it may increase it because people will say, 'I do not want galahs anymore; anybody can get galahs now. I like Major Mitchells so I will go for Major Mitchells.'

Noel Snyder, in his overview, continually makes the point that, if we look at the whole aspect of wildlife trade, it is continually shifting onto rare species, and that as the market becomes saturated the dealers shift to the rarer species. I think that would happen.

Senator FORSHAW—That was also an issue that I know Senator Woodley and Senator Calvert were interested in. I think you have dealt with that aspect.

ACTING CHAIR—Just a couple of points of clarification. Which overseas countries' legislation should we look to to get the examples of this reverse onus of proof?

Mr Forshaw—Most of the state legislation in Australia. I do not know of any state wildlife legislation that does not carry the reverse onus of proof. They carry it as a provision of the licence.

ACTING CHAIR—So it is a condition of licence?

Mr Forshaw—Yes, that is a condition of licence.

ACTING CHAIR—What about the US? Do they have the reverse onus of proof?

Mr Forshaw—The US is very interesting because the US does not permit native wildlife to be kept in captivity. It is a most unusual situation.

ACTING CHAIR—Yet they advertise widely: we have seen magazines, and all sorts of excerpts, about all sorts of animals from all over the world for sale in the US.

Mr Forshaw—Yes, that is the hypocrisy of the situation in the US. I remember pointing it out to the assistant director of fish and wildlife there when they had a conference. I said, 'It absolutely amazes me that you cannot keep a red-winged blackbird', which is a bird that is subjected to very high levels of destruction in the southern states to protect corn crops. You cannot get a permit to keep a single red-winged blackbird in the United States but they can keep all the foreign birds that they like. However, the US is tightening up now on the importation of foreign birds.

ACTING CHAIR—They do not have this reverse onus of proof at this stage?

Mr Forshaw—I do not know what their legislation is because, as I say, it is almost impossible to get a permit to keep native wildlife in the United States, as it is in Europe.

ACTING CHAIR—But there are a lot of imported wildlife species in Europe.

Mr Forshaw—They can all keep non-native because most of their legislation is only in so far as it is fulfilling CITES and that is what has brought about the tightening of the law. Aviculture in Australia is somewhat unique in that it is really based on native species because we have had an import ban for so long. I have no problem with that. I am quite happy with that. The thing that has always annoyed me a little is that aviculturists in this country do not realise how well off they are. Virtually nowhere else in the world are they able to keep native species to the extent that they can in this country. I would like them to say, ‘We have got that privilege.’ The threats posed by import through disease and competition to our native parrot species is so high and so great that I have opposed importation, whether it be legal or illegal, all my life. All I am hoping is that now we have legal importation I do not live to see the consequences, which I feel are going to be quite catastrophic.

In the trade-off, being able to keep native species, it would have been nice for the avicultural community to say, ‘We recognise the dangers in import; we recognise the high incidence of disease levels in foreign birds. Therefore, we’ll agree that we don’t import them’, but that has not been the case. I think, really, you have to go to state legislation.

ACTING CHAIR—I think you mentioned that there was a case in New South Wales recently where your conviction was overturned on appeal. Can you help us with a reference or a time?

Mr Forshaw—I do not know a great deal about it. It would be very easy to get the full details by contacting the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service. It involved black cockatoos.

ACTING CHAIR—How long ago?

Mr Forshaw—Quite recently—only a few months ago.

Senator FORSHAW—Could you get any more information. We will try to here; if you could give us the source or something, we will chase that up as well. But certainly the secretariat could—

Mr Forshaw—I was not involved in it. I know very little about it, but it was a fairly high profile case.

ACTING CHAIR—We have been given evidence of convictions on that basis, so if there is some evidence that there is an undermining of that—

Mr Forshaw—That is right. That was exactly my concern as well. We are always led to believe that this was foolproof but, all of a sudden, maybe it is not.

ACTING CHAIR—We were told, for example, that although smugglers were breaking the eggs, a conviction could still be gained. Even the residue of the eggs was able to be tested and from what particular species established. That is the evidence we have so far, so I think we would be keen to see the—

Mr Forshaw—I agree entirely. It is a worrying development; there is no doubt about that.

ACTING CHAIR—There could be some other reasons—

Mr Forshaw—Yes, exactly. It could be a legal technicality—I do not know. All I am saying is that it happened; therefore, I am concerned about it. We always said that it was foolproof and that it was watertight. Maybe it is not—I do not know. But I agree that that is a concern.

Senator FORSHAW—I do not have any further questions. From what I have managed to read of the submission, there is quite a deal covered in there.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much, Mr Forshaw. I am sorry I missed the beginning of your evidence, but that is the way this place works sometimes.

Mr Forshaw—Thanks very much, Senator.

ACTING CHAIR—Thanks for coming.

Senator FORSHAW—Sorry, I did have one further question. When is the remainder of that report, or action plan, due to be released?

Mr Forshaw—The whole action plan, and the second part of the action plan, will be covering all the individual species—the hundred, or whatever the case may be. The whole action plan will be published next year by the World Union for Conservation, formerly IUCN. It will be published out of Geneva.

Senator FORSHAW—Any idea of when—for example, the first half of the year?

Mr Forshaw—We would hope sooner rather than later, but the IUCN is a bit like many other bureaucracies: it does not quite move as fast as we hope it would.

Senator FORSHAW—Thank you, Mr Chairman.

[9.03 p.m.]

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s Katherine Margaret, Spokesperson, Animal Societies Federation, New South Wales, PO Box 211, Gladesville, New South Wales 2111

ACTING CHAIR—Welcome, Ms Rogers. I understand you are representing the Animal Societies Federation. I am not sure if you are aware that these proceedings are recorded in *Hansard*. They are protected by parliamentary privilege. The proceedings are normally conducted in public, but if at any time you have evidence that you wish to be taken in private, the committee will consider your request and it may accede to that.

There is a possibility, however, even if the committee does that, that that evidence could be revealed by order of the Senate or in a minority report by an individual senator; but, nevertheless, that would be a rarity. Are there any amendments you would care to make to your written submission?

Ms Rogers—There are possibly some additions, if I could just briefly run through the main points.

ACTING CHAIR—You can make an opening statement. We have your written submission and that has been recorded in *Hansard*. If you are hoping to leave that as it is, then you can add to it.

Ms Rogers—I do have an addition here which enlarges on some of the figures I have provided. I am afraid they are in handwriting because I only got them very recently and did not have the time to add them in any other form.

ACTING CHAIR—Okay. We can simply add this to your written submission, and it has already been agreed that that be published so I do not think there is any need for any formal orders in relation to that. Thank you for that. If you would care to make an opening statement, then we might have some questions we could ask you.

Ms Rogers—The Animal Societies Federation of New South Wales has very serious concerns with the proposal to commercialise our wildlife. We are an animal welfare organisation so obviously our main concerns relate to animal welfare. We believe that commercialisation of wildlife carries with it cruelty to the animals and suffering for the animals. I think this has been evidenced in a lot of the submissions that have been put forward.

We are talking of the capture of wild animals, the killing of wild animals, the farming of wild animals. All the well-documented stress and suffering that has been put forward by many other people we are fully aware of, and we deplore the whole thrust on

the basis of that cruelty. So we have very strong ethical concerns. We also have concerns that are social concerns relating to the society we live in. We have concerns as to the environmental impact. We believe that the whole concept is flawed economically. So all those concerns are there but, primarily, it is the suffering of the animals.

We believe that the only way we are going to get genuine progress as far as the environment is concerned is by promoting an attitude of respect of other living creatures, and respect and compassion for the sentient creatures. We feel this whole thrust to commercialise wildlife is in direct opposition to that and is in fact counterproductive as far as environmental process is concerned and also in conflict with current values in the community. We feel it is a very divisive thrust.

Increasingly, we are seeing divisiveness in our community. This whole Wik issue which is happening at the moment is one example of it, where we have opposed the genuine ethical values of the community on the one hand, and the greed and self-interest of small groups on the other. I think this issue is coming through in a whole range of areas and making a very divided community. It is certainly coming through in the fact that so many people now are increasingly endorsing environmental values, increasingly valuing the natural world.

I have given a couple of quotes in my paper. There is a reference to research done by a couple of researchers at ANU where they see a growing trend in Australian society for people to value the natural environment for what it is, for philosophical and ethical reasons. This, in fact, is happening worldwide. I refer also to an article in the Middle East where the same sorts of values are coming through. We see the increase in bushwalking. We see a very strong feeling of respect for and a feeling that people gain something from the natural environment. This is in complete contradiction to putting a dollar value on wildlife which, once again, will increase that divisiveness.

We saw, for example, quite recently in Tasmania that people were prepared to go to prison to protect the forests, although there was a release of old-growth forests, and not so long ago in Victoria more old-growth forests were being released. So, on the one hand, we get this very commercial thrust and, on the other hand, a growing feeling in society that the natural world is something that we must value and that more and more people care about, especially as we become increasingly industrialised.

Part of this concept is the idea of wilderness, which is an idea that has been promoted for some years. But of course, all this commercial thrust is impacting on the wilderness. If you are looking at making a commercial use of wildlife, where do you end up with your wilderness? These two concepts are going hand in hand but they are making for a confrontationist not a harmonious society and it is very worrying.

Linked with the commercialisation issue with wildlife, of course, is the whole marketplace concept which people are fighting in a whole range of areas, including health

and education. So we are looking at a very divided society, which is very worrying. I notice that your first term of reference states:

- (a) the potential impact which commercial utilisation of native wildlife might have on the Australian environment . . .

We are concerned about the social environment, just as we are concerned about the physical environment. At the level of the physical environment, as the other speaker brought out, we do not know enough to be doing these things. We know about 15 per cent of the species we have in our environment, and this point was made by Tim Flannery quite recently. He says, 'We're blundering around the Australian environment like an elephant in a pansy patch.'

We do not know what we are doing. We are leaping in, gathering eggs and killing things. By our killing, we are enforcing selected breeding. At one stage, we were killing all the big kangaroos. Now in Queensland, at least, they seem to be moving to smaller kangaroos because the meat is sweeter. We do not know the result of the sorts of things that we are doing. It is very dangerous.

One of the principles in environmental work is the precautionary principle: we always have to err on the safe side because of our lack of knowledge. We do not know very much about how ecosystems work and we must be careful. But we are not being careful in promoting this thrust.

At the same time that we have the growth of the environmental movement, we have the growth of the animal rights and the animal welfare movement. Of course, from this perspective, there is every sort of concern—for instance, the toe clipping of emus which cuts away sensitive flesh and the killing of kangaroos. There is no way that you can kill large numbers of social animals without causing extreme suffering. Even if the will was there to police it, which it is not, it would be impossible because of the cost. These are things that are happening in remote areas.

In addition to this, we get statements. In fact, I am just wondering whether I should have added these to my report when you asked me whether I had any changes to make. I brought along some photocopies of a statement from the report on ecologically sustainable land management from the Industry Commission. They actually say:

The proposed regulatory reform places greater reliance on self-regulation—to minimise the deficiencies in 'command and control' regulation.

So they are saying that command and control regulation does not work, so let us do away with it altogether and have self-regulation.

Not only are we looking at self-regulation, but we are looking at codes of practice being developed by local stakeholders. Presumably, these will include—and perhaps be

dominated by—people with a monetary interest in what it is going to do. It goes on:

Voluntary standards and codes should be used to replace as many of the mandated standards as possible.

So we are having local people making their own codes, possibly without the knowledge of the big picture and without the qualifications with which to develop these codes. It is a very worrying thrust. If we are looking at commercial use, the only way it could be justifiable would be if it were heavily monitored, but we actually see that this is not going to happen. So that is a very great concern also.

The other problem, as the earlier speaker referred to, is disease. I have a cutting here from the *Sydney Morning Herald* which shows us that the deaths of frogs, which we have all read about worldwide, is now seen as possibly being due to a disease which is being spread by fish transported from one country to another. So the whole concept of the export of live creatures from one country to another raises grave threats and concerns as to the health of species on a worldwide basis. It is well known that zoo-bred animals released back into the wild can carry diseases from the zoo to the wild animals in the area where they are released. Moving animals from one area to another, and especially from one country to another, can have extremely dangerous consequences for the environment.

One issue that we want to raise about the rationale for the commercialisation of wildlife is the concept that people will preserve what they are making money out of as it will be a long-term resource. Obviously, in the past, we have no evidence that this is happening. We all know what is happening to the resources of our native forests and we all know what is happening in the fisheries. With the kangaroo situation, and I include a paper at the back which shows the 1997 quotas for South Australia, we see that in some areas the quota for kangaroos is 50 per cent: they are killing 50 per cent of the population. There is no way this can be considered sustainable.

Over the last 20 years, the quotas for kangaroos have just gone up and up and up. There is no justification. In drought years the numbers may rise. There is no clear link between dangers to the species and the kangaroo quotas. What are they linked to? One would assume they are linked to market forces so the concept of sustainability is shown not to be adhered to in the kangaroo quotas and in every other area we are looking at.

The other issue that we raise is that we are in an age of agribusiness. The concept of the family farm being passed from one generation to the next is no longer happening so much in Australia. The small farm is going out and big business is moving in, and not only big business but foreign investment. I have figures on page 5 of my submission for the amount of foreign investment in the areas of agriculture, fishing, hunting and forestry for recent years.

A lot of Australian industry, as we know, is owned by people outside Australia.

They are people who may want to come in for a quick killing and then move on. One of the most interesting things I found about these figures is the immense variability from one year to the next. In 1989-90, we have \$699 million and in 1990-91 we have \$2,241 million. The next year it drops down to \$1,277 million, and you can see the variability there; it is amazing.

I thought I should give you some more detail about these figures. I asked the Bureau of Statistics to break it down for me into direct investment, which is where they have 10 per cent or more invested in an organisation, to portfolio investment, where it is less than 10 per cent. With direct investment, one would think you would have some sort of say in how the organisation is run because you have 10 per cent or more, and it might be a lot more.

For 1989-90 they did not have figures available broken down but for the next year 1990-91, where the overall investment is \$2,241 million, \$1,444 million of that is direct investment—that is, foreign investment with people who would have, one would think, a significant say in how the investment was to be used. If you run your eye down those figures, you can see that in every case the majority of foreign investment is direct investment. That is to say, foreign people will have a substantial say in how that investment works. If we are looking at long-term investment and a commitment to sustainability, it may be there with people outside the country investing, or it may not. The concept that they want to keep this resource going for evermore may be there, but it may in many cases be profitable for them to make a quick killing and move on to some other more profitable investment. We know that this can occur and we know that this has occurred. So I think the concept of long-term sustainability, given the level of foreign investment and the level of agribusiness, has to be very open to question.

ACTING CHAIR—Perhaps you might take questions. That might prompt other remarks you might like to make.

Senator FORSHAW—We have had representatives from other animal welfare groups. I think we had one group here in Canberra on the last occasion; I am just trying to remember its precise title. My recollection of the evidence was that they adopted a strict philosophical position, as well as a political position, which was totally opposed to any form of culling, say, of kangaroos. So they were not just opposed to commercialisation, export or trade on the domestic market; they had a fundamental philosophical objection. Is that the position of your group of organisations, or is it, rather, one which accepts that the populations of animals—and maybe some native wildlife animals such as kangaroos—need to be controlled, but nevertheless you have a strong concern about the extent of that? I notice that you are from the Animal Societies Federation. I am trying to see where you fit into the spectrum of groups that extend from those totally opposed to any form of interference, as it were, with native wildlife.

Ms Rogers—I will start by saying, yes, we are opposed to the killing of wildlife. We think the killing of wildlife has caused a lot of problems. Ethically, we would consider it as follows. Environmentally, I will have to give my own view because it is the view of a number of us; I am not 100 per cent sure that it is the view of all of us. From my point of view, I believe we would be far better off to look at the natural environment and, as far as possible, adopt a hands off attitude. I have to say also that I am a little concerned at the question, which I think is outside the terms of reference of the inquiry. I suppose all of us see people as having certain groupings of characteristics, but I do not think we should categorise people.

Senator FORSHAW—I was prompted to ask that question because you are representing the Animal Societies Federation of New South Wales, and I was trying to get an idea of where that group stands in respect of other groups.

Ms Rogers—I understand that.

Senator FORSHAW—We have groups which are called conservation groups and we have groups which are called environmental groups. I am not trying to put labels on them. They put labels on themselves.

Ms Rogers—I am sure you were not. I will just state that concern because I think it is important that we are aware that that is not what we are into doing. But, yes, we are opposed to the killing of animals because of the cruelty involved. I suppose most of us would see that we do not have the right to do that. Certainly environmentally there are the sorts of things that we have come in and done to the environment, for example, wiping out so many of our predators which leads to the so-called pest species. We have destroyed the natural balances that were created in the environment. We have wiped out so many wedge-tailed eagles, we have killed so many dingoes, we have wiped out so many of our quolls, and then we turn around and say, for example, ‘The cat is killing wildlife,’ when in fact predation is an essential and necessary part of every ecosystem.

The quoll is a very savage little predator. We are coming in in a heavy-handed way, interfering in systems. We have upset the balance. In Tasmania, for example, so many predators have been wiped out and possums are now seen as a pest. Partly as a result of that we are getting the horrors of the possum abattoirs, and so on. I think it is when people come in in a heavy-handed way that we do get environmental problems. A balance has been established and we are coming in and upsetting it.

ACTING CHAIR—The thylacine has been removed from the Tasmanian environment. Which other predators have been wiped out?

Ms Rogers—Usually when farming communities move in the birds of prey, for example, tend to be decimated because, of course, they are seen as a threat to small animals, chickens, and so on. This is one of the things that happen when farming

communities move in.

ACTING CHAIR—Sure. When farming communities move in they remove most of the habitat for rural animals and drive most wild animals of all sorts from the area.

Ms Rogers—That is right.

ACTING CHAIR—You just made a statement about predators. I was wondering which ones you were referring to because I am aware of that particular one. In our inquiry we are looking at what has been termed consumptive use and non-consumptive use of wildlife—wildlife as ‘animal’—plant material. Are there any lines we should draw—figuratively speaking of course—on your submission to say where you draw the boundaries? For example, does your group oppose the non-consumptive use of wildlife in wildlife reserves for tourism purposes or the like?

Ms Rogers—No, we would not oppose anything that had no negative impact on the life of the animals. If we are talking about wildlife reserves, we are talking about animals in the wild; we are not talking about so-called parks where they are not living their natural life. Certainly we would see ecotourism as fine as long as it is very carefully managed, the environment does not become degraded—of course, this is quite difficult to do—and the rights of the animals are respected so that their lifestyle does not give way to the needs of tourists to come and stare at them.

The other use that we think is very important is that our wildlife should be an inspiration to artists and other creative people. In this way we could earn a lot of money through the artistic products created around our wildlife. But certainly we are not opposed at all to maintaining our wild areas and bringing in tourists to those wild areas, with a very careful eye on how we do it. We are opposed to cruelty and suffering. Unfortunately, most of what is proposed does involve cruelty and suffering.

ACTING CHAIR—I take it—and correct me if I am wrong—that your organisation does not agree with the consumptive use of any sort of animal, be it domesticated or wildlife?

Ms Rogers—I would say the majority of our member groups do not. We have not actually asked all our member groups that. Some of them deal with quite specific issues, but I could certainly say the majority of our members probably would not like to see the killing of animals. Anybody who has been to an abattoir I think would realise how horrific they are—the dreadful suffering, terror and fear that occur there. Obviously we would be opposed to that. But, once again, that is I think outside the terms of reference of this particular inquiry.

Senator FORSHAW—But it has been the content of a lot of our evidence.

ACTING CHAIR—I think the purpose is to position, I guess, a view in the

context of the view of the society, and it appears that the view that we should not eat animal products is certainly not a majority view in our society. Animal meats of various kinds are consumed by the majority of the population, I would have thought.

Ms Rogers—They are, although there is a growing trend towards vegetarianism, as you are probably aware, especially among young people. I became a vegetarian when I was 16 years old. When I went to university I was the university vegetarian. A few years ago I went to a summer school at a university and the first thing they said was, ‘Hands up all the vegetarians,’ and about a quarter of the people there put up their hands. It is an increasing area. You only have to look at the number of vegetarian restaurants in Sydney. The people who are not full vegetarians are moving much more closely to it. Much more notice is taken of the views of animal welfare and animal rights people.

Not long ago I spoke to the Industry Commissioner in relation to a very closely related area. At the end of the session I was waiting at the lift with one of the administrative support people who were there and I said, ‘What did you think of that?’ She said, ‘I’m going to join Animal Liberation.’ So there are a lot of people out there who are moving very much in this direction and becoming aware of the cruelty to animals.

When I speak to people I work with who are not in the animal welfare movement and I tell them there is a possum abattoir in Tasmania, they are genuinely horrified. There is a lot of horror.

ACTING CHAIR—Shouldn’t they be more horrified about the way they slaughter cattle than the way they do possums?

Ms Rogers—I suppose one of the things is that we have grown up from young children to accept the slaughter of certain animals. It is not that it is any less cruel. It is every bit as cruel. Most of them have not been to an abattoir and would be sick if they went to an abattoir but, because they have accepted this from the time they were young children, they do accept it in a way that they do not accept the slaughter of wild animals. This of course is another concern—that our society views wild animals in a different way from the way they view what are normally regarded as meat animals. There is a lot of horror and outrage at the thought of eating a crocodile. Lots of them of course are becoming increasingly aware of the cruelties to pigs, sheep and so on. In New South Wales there was some slight improvement in the legislation relating to the farming of pigs. If legislation is developed, you know that they believe that there are a lot of people out there who feel strongly. So there is a very strong movement in this direction.

ACTING CHAIR—Crocodiles and kangaroos have been eaten by the indigenous population of this country for thousands of years, haven’t they?

Ms Rogers—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—That seems to be a cultural view rather than a view that is based on the actuality. Human beings have eaten those animals for thousands of years.

Ms Rogers—I think the cruelties of other cultures are always more obvious to us than the cruelties of our own culture. We are so habituated to our own cruelties that we do not see them so clearly for what they are, and that is why people in the animal welfare and animal rights movement have to keep showing people what these cruelties are. Most people are not aware of what goes on, for example, on a pig farm. When they are aware of it, yes, they see them as cruelties.

But in the past Aboriginal people relied on this as part of their diet. They no longer need to and we do not need to. All the statistics show us that vegetarians get cancer less and suffer from heart disease and stroke less and are far healthier than people who eat a lot of meat.

Senator FORSHAW—What is your response to the argument that has been and is put by the farming lobby which says that, if we are going to move more towards a vegetarian or non-meat eating society, we are going to need more crops and that therefore raises issues of how we control so-called pest animals, whether they be rabbits, locusts or kangaroos? How do you respond to that argument, in view of wanting to have an expanding viable agricultural sector to provide the vegetarian products in the future?

Ms Rogers—Providing plant protein, for example, uses far less land than providing animal protein. I cannot remember the exact figures, and it varies depending on whether you are talking about wheat or soy beans and whether you are talking about pigs or cattle, but you use far less land to grow crops.

Senator FORSHAW—I am putting their argument and it is important for you to respond—

Ms Rogers—No, I understand.

Senator FORSHAW—They would say that the more acres or the more hectares of wheat or whatever we grow, the greater the area kangaroos will have—and where they are in surplus attack those expanded areas.

Ms Rogers—I take your point. If I could just finish: the amount of wheat that is grown in the United States each year and that is fed to their cattle to have grain fed beef would feed the whole of the Third World. So by feeding plant food to animals we are making very extravagant use of our resources. Basically we would need less land for agriculture—a lot less. But we would still have to keep our wheat crops safe, as you say, if we are growing them for us. I suppose what I would respond to that is that we would have to look at humane methods of control. For example, with kangaroos, electric fencing has been shown to be effective and cost-effective in the long term because the animals

learn to stay away from it, it is soundly built and you do not need to do the usual repairs.

You might say it is reasonable to accept a certain level of loss. I know there has been research that shows the effect of kangaroos on crops. It is very significantly less than is genuinely supposed. I think you have to look at the actual amount of real damage and at whether it is really cost-effective to say, right, a certain amount of this will be lost but, unless it gets above that percentage, it is easier to run with it.

The other way is to look at cost-effective ways of doing it. For example, we get mouse plagues every so often. Look at the causes of that. It may well be that, if we stop killing so many of our predators, those mouse plagues will be significantly reduced. So I would say we should look holistically at what is happening in the environment and look at it in a humane way, with compassion—one of the principles which we base any action on.

Senator FORSHAW—Factor those things into the equation.

Ms Rogers—That is right. I would say have them as the primary—

Senator FORSHAW—One other question: what is your view or your society's view on the fishing industry in the context of your earlier comment about essentially not being supportive of harvesting of wildlife?

Ms Rogers—We would see the fishing industry as a very cruel industry and we would be opposed to it. In particular, we would be opposed to the big game fishing, but all the fishing industry is certainly very cruel. It has certainly not been sustainable—we all know what is happening to the fish. I would see it as a prime example of the way not to go, and an example which shows the flaws in the thrust for the commercialisation of wildlife.

Senator FORSHAW—If you look at this industry in economic terms, it is one where we have been seeking to open up some markets in other countries, and we have been somewhat successful. Equally, we do import a fair amount of seafood as well. But, anyway, you have made your point.

Ms Rogers—There is no doubt, though, that fish have been very badly depleted worldwide. In Indonesia, I understand, it is incredibly bad. It is an example of what we do when we just go open slather. Supposedly, we have actually had some regulation there but it has not maintained the levels of fish, if that is what you are most concerned about.

Senator FORSHAW—When I visited a dietitian once to try to get my weight down, I was actually told to eat more fish. It is marketed as a healthy product—

Ms Rogers—It is less fatty than meat.

Senator FORSHAW—As an alternative to meat products. We are getting away from the terms of reference, but it is at least relevant to the general philosophical position.

Ms Rogers—But, of course, vegetarians do live longer—I have to make that point.

ACTING CHAIR—I do not have any more questions. Are there any other matters that you want to put on the record?

Ms Rogers—I would like to table a letter that we received which is an account of a visit to the possum abattoir in Tasmania.

ACTING CHAIR—We have been there.

Ms Rogers—You have been there?

ACTING CHAIR—Yes.

Ms Rogers—I will just briefly read one part of the letter, which I think is worth noting. It says:

After the captive bolt pistol was used, possums were flung into plastic crates (2 to 3 per crate). By this time crates were full of blood, with animals writhing around. Then the crates were shoved through to the processing room. The possums were removed from the crates into a stainless steel trough where once again the animals were left to thrash around. Their throats were cut, a hole made in their hind leg & put on a hook. Then they checked for pouched young. From the time the possum had received the captive bolt to the time their throat was cut, ranged from a few minutes to eight minutes. The code of practice says "to ensure death, the possum should be bled out immediately after collapse." This DID NOT occur. I witnessed one possum trying to crawl out of the stainless steel trough covered in blood. The slaughterman was very concerned at my witnessing this event.

If that occurs when someone from the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee is there—and presumably every care is taken—I would think it must be a matter of major concern as to what would happen when people perhaps are not taking special care and there are not people there that they are concerned about.

I think that is evidence of the inherent lack of possibility of animal welfare issues being appropriately addressed. Your third term of reference is 'the adequacy of existing Federal Government regulations and control', and I think that shows—

ACTING CHAIR—That is a state control matter in that area. The federal government would be involved in the export controls, but the code of conduct in that establishment is monitored by the state advisory body—I cannot remember the appropriate name. We witnessed that process. I do not recall it occurring in precisely that way. In fact, it seemed to be a speedier process when we were there.

Ms Rogers—Once again, I would imagine that when you were there every effort was made to make sure that things went smoothly. Yes, it does come down to state control, and the will has to be there; but even if the will is there, inherently, when you are trapping wild animals—

ACTING CHAIR—On that species, of course, the evidence we have had is that for the last 50 years between 100,000 and 400,000 possums have been taken. That is, over most of the period, they have been shot in the wild for skins; but in the last couple of years they have been trapped. That is the history of that species. In terms of it being a sustainable process, it appears that, on the raw evidence, it is a sustainable process. What has been focused on is whether there is a humane process for dealing with the 12,000 possums per year that they are dealing with now.

Ms Rogers—I would doubt very much if it were possible to have a humane process there. In relation to that, we had reports that a lot of 1080 poison was being laid about quite close to the possum traps.

ACTING CHAIR—That has been categorically denied in the evidence on the *Hansard*.

Ms Rogers—Has it?

ACTING CHAIR—Yes.

Ms Rogers—We have received a recent report of that from local people. If it were to be true, it would have effects on the possums and, I imagine, on the people who eventually ate the meat. I would like to ask another question that Marjorie Wilson, who appeared at the Sydney hearing, asked me to put to you. She appeared for the Kangaroo Protection Cooperative and, at the hearing, she talked about the first wildlife abattoir, which was a possum abattoir.

I think it was Senator Heffernan who said that there was another wildlife abattoir in Queensland. We have been trying to find out if there was one. Marjorie asked particularly if you could give us any information. As far as we can discover—and were aware of at the time, indeed—for farmed emus there is an abattoir at Cherbourg—

ACTING CHAIR—That is right. We have been there.

Ms Rogers—As they have been farmed, we would not see that as an actual wildlife abattoir in the sense that the possum one is, where they are trapped in the wild. I was also talking to some of the primary industry people up there and I understand that at times pigs and goats are trapped and taken to the standard abattoirs. But as far as we can find, there is no actual wildlife abattoir. We would be happy to learn from you what it was that the senator was referring to there.

ACTING CHAIR—We will refer the *Hansard* to Senator Heffernan. I think he was probably referring to Cherbourg, but we will draw it to his attention.

Senator FORSHAW—He will get a copy of this.

ACTING CHAIR—I am not aware of the particular facility he is referring to, if it was not Cherbourg.

Ms Rogers—Just before I go, there is one more thing I wanted to give you. I was talking about attitudes to the environment and the growth of a caring attitude to the environment. There is a lot being written, and has been, I suppose, for the past 10 or 15 years, in this sort of area and exploring the different attitudes that different societies have to the environment. This refers to the attitudes of the indigenous people to the environment. As we all know, Aboriginal people have a very close feeling for land and this is typical of indigenous people throughout the world.

Could I just pass those across. I wanted to submit this as an example of the indigenous people's relationship to the environment. This is specifically from the American Indians, but it is surprising how this same feeling seems to be there—respect for the environment, care for future generations, and respect for the other living creatures in the environment. This can be contrasted with the attitude of commercialisation, where we put a money value on things. So many people these days are exploring their attitudes. They are looking at the attitudes of indigenous people and the attitudes expressed in a lot of European literature, where a great value is placed on the natural world and there is a very strong wish for people to share it.

In that context we want to say that Australia now has the opportunity to preserve what is left of its wild places and its animals. Other parts of the world are destroying their wild places. This could be something that people might want to come to Australia to see: our wild animals in their natural state. If we are looking at the commercial use of wildlife, we would see this as the way to go.

ACTING CHAIR—I think we have received that statement. Ms Rogers, thank you for your evidence. That concludes the evidence for this inquiry. The committee will now prepare its report, which will be presented to the Senate in the first sitting period in March.

Committee adjourned at 9.51 p.m