

SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE ENQUIRY INTO THE ARDB BILL

I AM A FARMER OF 66 YEARS QLD, NEAR ROMA IN QLD

I SUSPECT MANY OF MY FARMING CONTEMPORIES WILL NOT WRITE AS THEY HAVE GIVEN UP IN BELIEVING THAT GOVERNMENTS WILL EVER TAKE ANY INTEREST IN AGRICULTURE BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE. I WRITE THIS IN SOME BLIND MISTAKEN BELIEF THAT SOMEONE SOME DAY MIGHT JUST REALISE THAT "SOMETHING IS ROTTEN IN AGRICULTURAL AUSTRALIA"

7 YEARS AGO A GROUP OF US (ALL REPRESENTATING VARIOUS FARMING GROUPS AND RD&E BODIES) REALISED THAT AGRICULTURE WAS BEING NEGLECTED. ETHICALLY YOU SHOULD APPROACH YOUR LOCAL FEDERAL MEMBER. THIS WE DID. HE HAS NEVER REPORTED BACK TO US. WE THUS HAVE TO ASSUME THE LNP IS NOT INTERESTED IN AGRICULTURE

DO NOT MAKE THIS MISTAKE. IF PEOPLE IN POSITIONS LIKE US SEE EMERGING ISSUES, IT IS GOOD GOVERNANCE TO LISTEN AND ACT. MANY FARMERS DO NOT BOTHER TO COMMUNICATE NOW AS WE BELIEVE GOVERNMENTS DO NOT LISTEN OR UNDERSTAND

I BELIEVE AGRICULTURE IS IN CRISIS BUT NO ONE WANTS TO ADMIT OR TALK ABOUT IT (THE ALCOHOLIC'S DELIMNA – YOU HAVE TO ADMIT TO A PROBLEM BEFORE YOU CAN SOLVE IT). FOREIGN INTERESTS IS NOT THE SUSTAINABLE SOLUTION. BUT WE SHOULD ASK OURSELVES WHY THEY ARE INTERESTED AND WE ARE NOT. AUSTRALIA IS MISSING SOME VITAL UNDERSTANDING. SURELY THE ALARMING RURAL SUICIDE RATES WOULD INDICATE AN EMERGING PROBLEM!

I WOULD LIKE TO RETIRE AS LIKE OTHER FARMERS, I AM "WORN OR BURNT OUT"

EXTENDING THE RETIREMENT AGE PAST 65 DOES NOT APPLY TO FOR MANUAL AGRICULTURAL WORKERS AS THEIR MUSCULAR-SKELETAL STRUCTURE HAS BEEN STUFFED YEARS AGO. ASK ANY RURAL DOCTOR

THE PROPERTY MARKET HAS EFFECTIVELY STALLED WITH FEW ABLE TO GET OUT WITH ANY PROVISION FOR RETIREMENT. THIS RESULTS IN OLD FARMERS STAYING ON WITH RESULTING CONTINUALLY REDUCING PRODUCTIVITY. FEW PROPERTIES ARE SELLING (EXCEPT TO OVERSEAS INTERESTS)

ON THE OTHER HAND , YOUNGER POTENTIAL FARMERS WOULD LIKE TO TAKE OVER OR BUY IN BUT THE POOR PROFITABILITY AND THUS A LACK OF SUSTAINABLE PROFITS (THE ABILITY TO PROVIDE A REASONABLE WAGE , A REASONABLE RETURN ON INVESTMENT AND A MARGIN TO BUILD A RESERVE TO PROVIDE FOR RETIREMENT , EDUCATION , DROUGHTS AND FLOODS) DOES NOT ENABLE THEM TO FINANCE THIS SUCCESSION . A RECENT SUCCESSION WORKSHOP SUGGESTED THAT THE INCOMERS OR NEXT GENERATION WOULD FIND IT VERY ADVANTAGEOUS TO BRING ADDITIONAL CAPITAL IN WITH THEM. THIS DOES NOT SOUND LIKE A VERY SUSTAINABLE OR PROFITABLE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

CONTINUAL RISING DEBT SUGGESTS THAT WE ARE NOT COVERING OUR LONG TERM COSTS OF PRODUCTION. I SEE MANY SUBTLE INDICATORS OF GENERAL MAINTENANCE ON PROPERTIES BEING RUN DOWN (see www.benrees.com.au for debt figures)

THE ARDB IS ESSENTIAL TO PROVIDE SOME BREATHING SPACE FOR THE REMAINING FARMERS BUT IT MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY OTHER PARALLEL MEASURES TO RESTORE PROFITABILITY AS WELL OR IT WILL JUST KICK THE CAN FURTHER DOWN THE ROAD-NOT GOOD POLICY

IT IS ARGUED THAT FARMERS NEED TO BECOME MORE EFFICIENT. I CAN NOT SEE HOW THEY CAN BECOME ANY MORE EFFICIENT UNDER THE EXISTING COST PRICE REGEIME. I SEE FARMERS RETREATING BACK DOWN THE PRODUCTION CURVE AS THEY REALISE MARGINAL COSTS ARE EXCEEDING MARGINAL RETURNS. I SEE ALSO MORE UNSUSTAINABLE PRACTICES SUCH AS CUTTING FERTILISER RATES IN ORDER TO SURVIVE. I DO NOT SEE PRODUCTION INCREASING BUT RATHER CONTRACTING. TOO MANY ARE SAYING OUR PRESENT FARMING SYSTEMS ARE NOT SUSTAINABLE (SEE "THANK YOU FOR THE FOOD WE EAT" ATTACHMENT)

THE IMPORTANT SUBSIDERY BENEFITS OF THE ARDB BILL WILL BE TO RESTORE CONFIDENCE IN THE RURAL SECTOR (IE SOMEONE CARES) AND FACILITATE SUCCESSION

ALL THE CONVENTIONAL ADVICE IS TO PUT SOMETHING AWAY IN THE GOOD YEARS. IN 35 YEARS OF FARMING, I HAVE NEVER HAD ENOUGH GOOD YEARS TO PUT ANY AWAY. ALL I WAS ABLE TO DO WAS TO PAY OFF THE DEBT ACCUMULATED DURING THE DROUGHTS. IN THE RECENT YEARS I HAVE FOUND THAT FLOODS CAUSE MORE LOSSES THAN DROUGHTS. IT IS GOING TO BE A LONG HAUL BACK TO REPAY THE ACCUMULATED DROUGHT AND FLOOD DEBT OF THE LAST 10 YEARS ESPECIALLY WITH AN AGING FARMER, LIMITED LABOUR AND UNDER FINANCIAL PRESSURE

I BELIEVE WE ARE GOING TO SEE A SIGNIFICANT EXODUS FROM RURAL AUSTRALIA WHEN THIS SITUATION UNFOLDS. THE TRIGGER WILL PROBABLY BE WHEN THE BANKS LOSE THEIR PATIENCE. GOVERNMENTS SAY THEY WISH TO SEE SUSTAINABLE AND GROWING RURAL AND REGIONAL POPULATIONS AND AREAS. BUT I SEE FURTHUR REDUCTIONS AND AGING IN RURAL POPULATIONS – A VERY BARREN SOCIAL LANDSCAPE! AUSTRALIA HAS LOST ENOUGH FARMERS, WE DO NOT NEED TO LOSE ANYMORE. WHETHER YOU BELIEVE THEY ARE DESERVING OR NOT, THIS IS THE RESOURCE YOU HAVE TO WORK WITH. THEY HAVE MOST OF THE NECESSARY SKILLS. ALL THEY NEED IS SOME SUPPORT AND RELIEF TO CONTINUE TO PRODUCE FOOD WHICH SHOULD BE THEIR CORE SKILL, NOT BATTLING RESTRICTIVE GOVERNMENT LEGISLATION. IF YOU BELIEVE IN "AUSSIE FOOD FOR AUSSIE PEOPLE BY AUSSIE FARMERS", THE ARDB BILL IS ESSENTIAL. IF YOU ARE HAPPY TO IMPORT FOOD FROM UNCERTAIN PLACES, THEN DO NOTHING. BUT DO ASK HOW WE ARE GOING TO PAY FOR IT WHEN THE RESOURCE BOOM IS OVER

MOST OF THE PROPERTIES ON MY ROAD ARE FOR SALE, SOME HAVE BEEN ON THE MARKET FOR AT LEAST 5-6 YEARS

THE COMMENTS I AM HEARING ARE – "I CAN NOT SEE ANY LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL" AND "WHAT AM I DOING THIS FOR "THESE ARE DISTURBING COMMENTS. IT INDICATES A GENERAL MALAISE IN RURAL AUSTRALIA. I SEE PEOPLE LEAVING WHO HAVE YEARS OF VALUABLE EXPERIENCE AND THERE IS A CONCERNING LOSS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

THE MOST DISTURBING COMMENT WAS AT THE RURAL DEBT ROUNDTABLE. "OUR POLITICIANS AND AGRO-POLITICIANS HAVE LET US DOWN BADLY" THE POTENTIAL FOR A LOW FARM INCOME PROBLEM WAS RECOGNISED 50 YEARS AGO. WE HAVE DONE NOTHING TO PREPARE FOR THIS EVENT. ALL PARTIES HAVE TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

AS USUAL I WOULD SUGGEST YOU ARE BEING FAR TOO NARROW IN YOUR INQUIRY BY ONLY ADDRESSING THE SYMPTOM (THE DEBT) WITHOUT RECOGNISING THE ROOT CAUSE – POOR OR MARGINAL PROFITABILITY. FEW SEEM TO FULLY UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANT ROLE AGRICULTURE HAS IN THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY (NOT ONLY PRODUCTIVE AND FINANCIAL PLUS MULTIPLIER EFFECTS BUT ALSO ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL)

WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING THE REAL CAUSE, YOU ARE UNLIKELY TO SOLVE THE REAL PROBLEM
AND YOU WILL ONLY KICK THE CAN FURTHER DOWN THE ROAD

AUSTRALIA URGENTLY NEEDS A BIPARTISAN NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL POLICY. WITHOUT THIS WE
HAVE NO VISION TO AIM FOR AND TO AUDIT OR MONITOR FOR

THE ARDB BILL IS ONLY ONE STEP IN THE PROCESS TO RESTORE AGRICULTURE BEFORE IT IS TOO
LATE. WE NEED TO KEEP IT AFLOAT WHILST THE OTHER ESSENTIAL STEPS ARE TAKEN

WHILST I AM NOT THE SMARTEST PEANUT IN THE PACKET, I DO HAVE 2 UNIVERSITY DEGREES AND
RUN 800 COWS AND 3000 ACRES OF CULTIVATION. SURELY THIS WOULD BE SUSTAINABLE AND
PROFITABLE.

IT IS NOT!

ATTACHED ARE SOME ARTICLES TO EXPAND ON THIS AND WIDER AGRICULTURAL ISSUES

- THANK YOU FOR THE FOOD WE EAT
- YEAR OF THE FARMER
- VARIOUS UNPUBLISHED OPINION PIECES
- SUBMISSIONS TO THE NATIONAL FOOD PLAN UNDER MY NAME AND CONCERNED
CONDAMINE COCKIES

PLEASE ALSO READ "CRISIS ON THE LAND" BY RONALD ANDERSON –PUBLISHED IN 1972 (I
BELIEVE WE HAVE NOT PROGRESSED IN 40 YEARS) HE WAS A RESPECTED AGRICULTURAL
JOURNALIST OF HIS TIME. MANY OF HIS COMMENTS ARE STILL VERY RELEVANT TODAY

CHARLES NASON

ROMA

B.RU.SC. (UNE) DIP. AGRIC. ECON. (UNE)

PAST CHAIR OF SEVERAL COMMITTEES -SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND BEEF RESEARCH COMMITTEE
(AND THUS A REPRESENTATIVE ON NABRC AND NBIC) , REGIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (GRAINS
RESEARCH FOUNDATION) , BALONNE-MARANOVA CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE AND
BALONNE-MARANOVA GRAIN AND GRAZE PROJECT

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