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Submission to the Senate Inquiry: Foreign investment into agricultural land
Examination of the Foreign Investment Review Board National Interest Test

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2 September 2011

A
Terms of reference

An examination of the Foreign Investment Review Board (FIRB) national interest test (the test), including:

(i) how the test was applied to purchases of Australian agricultural land by foreign companies, foreign sovereign funds and other entities in the past 12 months;

(ii) how the test was applied to purchases of Australian agri-businesses by foreign companies, foreign sovereign funds and other entities in the past 12 months;

(iii) the role of the Government, regulators and receivers, including their obligations under the Corporations Act 2001 and/or the Foreign Acquisitions and Takeovers Act 1975, including the role of the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, in upholding the test;

(iv) the global food task and Australia's food security in the context of sovereignty;

(v) the role of the foreign sovereign funds in acquiring Australian sovereign Assets;

(vi) how similar national interest tests are applied to the purchase of agricultural land and agri-businesses in countries comparable to Australia; and

(vii) any other related matters;

B

Foreign Investment Review Framework (from Senate Inquiry website)

National Interest Considerations

- National Security
- Competition
- Other Australian policies (including tax)

- Impact on the Economy and the Community
- Character of the investor

Submission

Confidentiality

I do not require confidentiality on my name or the contents of my submission.

Background

My research background is across the discourses of the sciences and the humanities, focusing on critical discourse analysis of science. This includes the ways science and technology are applied to the environment and the ways these actions affect communities.

I am a member of several community action groups advocating for the health of the Murray Darling Basin system and the health of the marine ecologies in the two South Australian gulfs: Gulf St Vincent and Spencer Gulf.

I have been a member of community groups writing submissions for EIS actions for the MDB. I presented a submission to the Windsor Inquiry on the MDB and was invited to speak to that submission at Murray Bridge in January 2011. I presented a submission to the SA Legislative Council Inquiry into the Port Stanvac Desalination Plant and was invited to speak to that submission in July, 2011.

Discussion

I refer to the following terms of reference for Senate Inquiry: Foreign investment into agricultural land

(iv) the global food task and Australia's food security in the context of sovereignty;
(v) the role of the foreign sovereign funds in acquiring Australian sovereign Assets; and
(vii) any other related matters;

With reference to

(iv) the global food task and Australia's food security in the context of sovereignty;

I am presenting the following analysis

1. In the past 150 years the world population has increased from 1 billion (an estimate at 1859, the year of the publication of Darwin's work), to 6 billion at 2000, to a projected 10-11 billion at 2050.
   This presents an exponential increase at a rate which has not been encountered before in world history.
   This number of people on the planet by 2050 will require food, water, shelter and employment.
2. The dominant and persistent response to this situation of need around the world is to respond in terms of what needs to be done to supply the needs for these people. The discussion is only about supplying their needs.
3. There is no discussion of projections beyond 2050
4. What are the projections for 2100? 30 billion?
5. What are the projections for 2150? 60 billion?

6. The current world-wide responses are to draw on the knowledges of science and technology to meet the short term needs of food and water.

   This is an inadequate analysis of the crisis (supply of sufficient food) confronting all nations around the world as connected communities.

   New stances and standpoints for analysis are required to address this situation, but there is little evidence that these new, required analyses exist within governments within nations, or between nations around the world.

   I explain the absence of the necessary shift in addressing the future in relation to the global food task in the following way.

   a. Western communities have inherited the benefits of 400 years of science.
   b. There are two dominant practices within science that have transferred into bureaucratic, political, economic thinking as dominant metaphors. These metaphors are so strong and are so universally embedded that they exist 'naturally' and as a result are difficult to see. They create effects which are difficult to see because they are so universal. We are all swimming in the same goldfish bowl—and as fish we are unable to see that we are in the same water environment. Our task now to address the future is to take a stance outside of the bowl.
   c. The two dominant practices of science are firstly, the behaviours of classifying the incredible diversity of living and non-living 'things'. This practice has greatly increased knowledge and power over the planet. The second practice is the scientific method, which takes the complexity of something, and by strategic application of a consistent and reliable method, brings us to a point where we can name something (an element) or a process (oxidation, effect of a vaccine…). This practice has also greatly increased knowledge and power over the planet.
   d. The combined effects of these two practices, as knowledge has exponentially increased, is that a metaphor of exponential proportions has also been created beyond these two practices: and that is the belief that science has made the human species so knowing and dominant that we can control the world. This is much different than just 'understanding' it.
   e. The metaphor of control has become fixed at the combination of practice and belief: that we can take complex living and non-living systems and break them into their parts and thus change them for (temporary) human benefit.
   f. This metaphor of control has not yet understood that we have not yet developed strong knowledge systems to take these parts and bring them back to their interacting complexities before our intervention. So we put dams over extensive river systems; but do not see how interconnected living ecosystems are along the whole movement of water from one place to another, and over passages of time;through droughts; floods; times of medium flows.
   g. This metaphor of control means that the practices of splitting and reducing for control has infused into all areas of our cultural systems. It has infused into economics (the production line…). Because it has become so

dominant we have lost knowledge of the nature of interconnecting biological systems before human intervention.

I offer a pertinent case study to make this point.
The Australian, Tuesday 30 August 2011 p 24 (The Wall Street journal section)
Superbug finds chink in Monsanto GM corn
First paragraph:

> Widely grown corn plants that Monsanto genetically modified to thwart a voracious bug are falling prey to that very pest in some Iowa fields, the first time a major Midwest scourge has developed resistance to a genetically modified crop.

Later paragraph:

> Monsanto said its rootworm-resistant corn seed lines were working as it expected "on more than 99 per cent of the acres planted with this technology", and that it was too early to know what the Iowa State University study meant to farmers.

Analysis

- Year 11 students of biology learn about natural selection and diversity in species. Students of biology and all the related fields of specialisation never encounter this knowledge again through university courses, as they work on research projects funded by the big multi-national agribusinesses such as Monsanto, Aventis, Bayer and so on.
  We know that it only takes less than 1% to be resistant to anything that humans develop for the whole species to 're-form' around that resistance within a few generations (rabbits and myxomatosis etc)

- The whole tenor of this article is based around the assumption that Monsanto can 'overcome' this problem: that it, that the company and its technology is in complete control of the process.

  > If this works, a bug munching on such a plant could ingest genetic code that turns off one of its essential genes.

- There is no ethical consideration of the effects of altering genes on the wider biodiversity. It is wrong science to assert that there is a one-one correlation between one gene and one effect.

- It is a wrong application of science to make claims that this practice is justified on the basis of providing food for the world, when the precautionary principle is not considered or applied.

- This is a model not primarily about food production, but capital production. This is a model consistent with a power metaphor, but it is not consistent with proper science, where basic knowledge accessible to 16 year olds in high school biology is overridden in the pursuit of economic control.

- This model of control is also extended to the practice of controlling water systems, where the access of local communities is denied by the privatisation processes of external companies.

This is an immensely complex issue and analysis, but it is also too simple. I make the following case to regard it in its simplicity.

1. We have been captured by the power of science, by its mystique, by its delivery of increased knowledge and control over our daily lives. We are captured by its power to convince us that as science has altered so much in the past 400, and past 50 years, that it will be our salvation for the future.
2. These are now spurious claims and must be analysed more deeply and thoroughly.
3. We must step out of the 'scientific' fishbowl we are immersed in. Instead of following science, which proclaims that it can produce more and more (fertilisers, genetic modification, adaptive management procedures) and instead of following economics, which presents only one model for the future —expansionary 'development', we must instead understand what part of the exponential curve we are on, at this point in history.
4. We must now realise that science cannot save the future. The current model of economics cannot save the future. We must cast further ahead than 2050. We do not need to be captured by the rights of the yet unborn. There is no text which says that 20 billion people can live well on this planet.
5. We have lost sight of the reality of the deep complexity and interconnectedness of the living systems of this planet, including the place of the so-called non-living elements, all of which are in interplay. These living systems—the oceans, the species on the lands, the river systems, the climate systems, are all under immense threat.
6. The overriding cause of these threats is the pressure, demands, needs so many people and their requirements have placed on the planet.
7. The problem is to ask: what is the main problem to be considered?
8. The answer to this question is not: how can we squeeze this threatened planet into more production? but, what are the main causes of the dire problems the planet faces and how can these problems be addressed?
9. My answer to this problem, is to describe the problems facing the planet, and work out solutions.
10. In my advocacy work I have spent many hours in public places talking to people about these issues. I have learned that most members of the public know this is the task we face. They are angry and concerned that governments are not doing this work. They know what the solutions are.
11. The solutions are:
    - Develop a world project of a target population of 4.5 billion in 5 generations (that is, to reduce the current population)
    - To achieve this goal; declare a state of emergency
    - Set up rationing systems
    - Set up community management control of these processes. Western countries have knowledge from three generations ago from the Depression and the second world war how to go about this. Third

world populations already know how to achieve this. A task embedded in this process is a realignment of equity for provisions around the world

12. The knowledge to develop and manage this solution is not available within the fields and discourse of politics or within economics, nor within the current, corporatized, dysfunctional and corrupt practice of science.
13. The fields of knowledge for these transformations exist within education, where and when it is free from political imposition regarding ‘testing’ and ‘standards’.
14. An outline of how communities can engage in these transformational processes of reduction, not expansion, is outlined in the submission I presented to the Windsor Inquiry, (2011).
15. Science, technology, politics, economics have brought us many advantages, and there is a cultural impetus to believe that we are entitled to more of the same. In the current, and future conditions, that is a false belief and must be addressed forthwith.
16. The cultural practices to mediate the disconnecting practices of science already exist. They exist as knowledge and practices within the fields of the arts and the humanities. Art exists to keep engaging as with the complexity of the world around us. Artists deeply know by their practices that they can never control these complexities. That is the knowledge that must be recombined with the historical and cultural practice of science.
17. As an advocate of a non-expansionary vision for the future, I am practising these attitudes and behaviours daily and as a long term plan as an exemplar. As a positive choice, reflecting on the inheritance of the historical riches of the past, addressing the current conditions of the present, and without fear looking to a healthy future for the planet, for living systems, for future generations, I can report that a life of satisfaction, health and pleasure is entirely possible.
18. This kind of future delivers more than it takes away.

In relation to
(iv) the global food task and Australia’s food security in the context of sovereignty;

I want to see a different kind of leadership from Australian governments, to speak to the world community about recasting the nature of the future.

I want to see ecologies given proper respect about the extent of their needs to remain viable. They cannot do this under further expansion for population, food and water.

I want to see new models of economics and politics which are about addressing the real problems, not continuing on in false belief that ‘business as usual’ is acceptable.

I want to see people from education who do know how to do this brought into these tasks at a national and international level.

In relation to
(v) the role of the foreign sovereign funds in acquiring Australian sovereign Assets;

As developed in the argument above, the immediate and long term future for the planet requires different actions, analyses, plans. I do not have any respect for the

ways multinational companies superimpose an economic model of extraction for capital gain over the interests of local communities.

A case study for this, which I have not developed in this analysis, is the way huge capital investment for cotton production has completely altered a living water system, the MDB, in Australia.

Cotton is not a crop that should be grown in Australia, in these conditions of droughts and flooding rains. Hemp is a much more viable fibre, at every level of production. Cotton is controlled by the major agri-chemical-industrial complexes—imposing many undesirable outcomes affecting the environment. I believe the extent of chemical contamination of soil and underground water systems is an unacceptable risk and outcome.

In relation to
(vii) any other related matters;

I refer to the headings under the section

Foreign Investment Review Framework *(from Senate Inquiry website)*
National Interest Considerations

- *National Security*
- *Competition*
- *Other Australian policies (including tax)*
- *Impact on the Economy and the Community*
- *Character of the investor*

None of these categories includes 'the environment'.

Who speaks for 'the environment', or is it a phenomenon that is there for one species to act upon, to extract what it wants for its own expanding needs? Is it a phenomenon of deep interconnection that we have overridden for our own purposes, needs, exploitation and greed, to the point of irretrievable destruction?

How is it in a so-called rational, so-called scientifically literate community, that we attempt to deal with the immediate threat of climate change, and at the same time keep extracting metals for manufacturing faster than has ever happened before? And knowing that the extracting, the manufacturing, the materialism, increases, not decreases the impacts on climate?

We can do this in the same way an agri-business can disregard the mechanism of variation within a living species, in the name of power, control, domination and economic advantage. We are internationally now captured by the practice of false science, science which has become corporatised to the extent that the practitioners have lost their ethical compass and commitment to the precautionary principle.

Do we have the cultural capacity to look, see, stop, withdraw and take another direction?

There is no more knowledge that we need; it is all assembled and available. It requires political will.

The question from ethics is: We can do many things through science, but should we?

The public is ready to take a new path. Their despair is not that it will be challenging, but that they can see that we do not have the strength within the current practices of political leadership, nationally and internationally, to take us towards a viable future, one that extends beyond 2050.