



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

SENATE

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

Reference: Commercial utilisation of native wildlife

DARWIN

Wednesday, 6 August 1997

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

CANBERRA

SENATE
RURAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS AND TRANSPORT REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Members:

Senator Woodley (Chair)

Senator Calvert	Senator Crane
Senator Bob Collins	Senator Foreman
Senator Conroy	Senator Heffernan

Participating members

Senator Abetz	Senator Gibbs
Senator Bob Brown	Senator Lundy
Senator Brownhill	Senator Margetts
Senator Chapman	Senator Murphy
Senator Colston	Senator Murray
Senator Cook	Senator O'Brien
Senator Eggleston	Senator Tambling
Senator Ferris	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.

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Present

Senator Woodley (Chair)

Senator Ferris

Senator O'Brien

Senator Foreman

The committee met at 8.34 a.m.

Senator Woodley took the chair.

FREELAND, Dr William John, Deputy Director, Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory, PO Box 496, Palmerston, Northern Territory 0831

LAWSON, Dr David, Wildlife Management Unit, Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory, PO Box 496, Palmerston, Northern Territory 0831

STIRRAT, Mr Simon, Wildlife Management Officer, Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory, PO Box 496, Palmerston, Northern Territory 0831

CHAIR—Welcome, and we are very pleased to have you with us. We have been looking forward to coming to Darwin. In fact, a lot of the evidence we heard yesterday needs to be filled out by the evidence you will give us today because there are a lot of references to Darwin and to what the Northern Territory government is doing.

Today the committee holds its fifth public hearing on the subject of the commercial utilisation of Australian native wildlife. The first hearing was held in Canberra on 2 December 1996. Hearings were held in Brisbane and Cairns during the first week of July this year, and one was held in Alice Springs yesterday. The committee has also conducted inspections in the Brisbane and Cairns regions, and yesterday visited the Desert Park in Alice Springs. Next week hearings and inspections will be held in Perth and Adelaide.

This matter was referred to the committee by the Senate on 30 October 1996. To date the committee has received over 330 submissions, many of which have contained lengthy and comprehensive attachments. The committee's terms of reference are broad ranging and require the committee to look at all aspects of the commercialisation of Australian native wildlife.

On 27 May 1997 the committee tabled an interim report which noted that because the subject was a complex one and because some aspects of it were of considerable concern to many people, the committee had decided to conduct an extensive program of public hearings and inspections throughout Australia. This hearing today is part of that program. The reporting date for the inquiry is the last sitting day in February 1998.

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

As I said before, you are very welcome and we are eager to hear from you. If you have an opening statement, we would be pleased to hear that now.

Dr Freeland—Our submission states our position fairly clearly. The important thing is that there are four points. The first one is that the Northern Territory promotes sustainable use of wildlife as something that will provide conservation benefits, and that is the primary outcome that we are looking for in the long term.

The second point is that it will do this through providing some form of an economic return from lands which at the moment are not sustainably used for anything very much. In other words, wildlife can be harvested from lands which are unsuitable for cattle raising, growing rice, wheat or whatever else.

The third point is that one of the primary recipients of those economic benefits in the Northern Territory could well be the Aboriginal people who live in remote areas, with few sources of employment, and who are owners of large tracts of land which, by and large, at the moment are unproductive in economic terms.

The final point that we think is very important is that one of the major issues confronting Australia is illegal trafficking in wildlife. It is our belief that legalisation and appropriate management is the only way to eliminate illicit traffic and all the negative connotations that that has.

If you put those four things together I think we have our strategy that we have published and is now government policy. It is early days, it has only just begun. We have experimented with the crocodile industry and we are beginning to look in other areas. It is a beginning enterprise and we hope it has a positive future for conservation.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Dr Freeland. We will move to questions.

Senator FERRIS—We heard some evidence yesterday in Alice Springs relating to the need for indigenous people to be able to have access to hunting for bush tucker. I was interested to ask a question of them yesterday and I would like you to give a view on it if you can. If you were to have an arrangement where people can take bush tucker as they wish, how do you set in place some means by which conservation of a species can be maintained? Do you, as a state body, have any circumstances in place where that happens now, or do you leave it to the Aboriginal groups themselves?

Dr Freeland—Senator, if you are referring to the Northern Territory, I think you have been misinformed. The Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory have the right to hunt, gather and use lands for ceremonial purposes and always have had. That right has not ever been removed from them and they can hunt on their traditional lands. The catch is in the legislation: it is for traditional purposes and on traditionally used lands. In other words, if I am an Aboriginal from Melbourne, I cannot come to the Tanami Desert and

catch myself a bilby. You have to actually be associated with that piece of land upon which you hunt and gather.

The issue that you allude to is something that has concerned us to a remarkable extent. We believe that, in the long term, the only effective way of ensuring the good management of our wildlife used by Aboriginals for sustenance or other traditional purposes is for the people themselves to have control over the management of that wildlife. Our minister earlier this year—and I think even late last year—announced in the parliament that we are investigating ways in which we can provide traditional owners with the capacity to manage their wildlife. There are several ways of doing that that we are looking at. Functionally, it does not give them actual ownership, but it gives them total control over who can hunt where and when according to traditional purposes. We are looking at that at the moment. We do not have any outcomes as yet.

Senator FERRIS—Thank you. The submission of the Northern Land Council that we have to speak to this afternoon suggests that there be an inquiry into trophy hunting. Do you have a view on that and could any of you here this morning give us a bit of a response to that statement?

Dr Freeland—We have trophy hunting in the Northern Territory at the moment for buffalo and Banteng—Bali cattle—up on the Cobourg Peninsula in Gurig National Park. Both enterprises are conducted on Aboriginal land for the benefit of Aboriginal people. The issue that I think you are referring to is the issue of hunting crocodiles as trophies and it is not possible under the current plan of management.

We, in fact, sought Commonwealth interest in this issue when we were putting together the most recent plan of management. At the time, we were informed that trophy hunting and safari hunting would not be acceptable and so it is not in the current plan of management. It is something, however, that we believe is probably the best way in which Aboriginal people who own billabongs and swamps, or pastoralists even, can gain an economic return from having large populations of large crocodiles in amongst their cattle or on their lands, causing threats to humans. We believe that it is the way to go because of the economic value involved, rather than simply harvesting them as at present.

Senator FERRIS—I should just clarify that there is nothing specified in the submission from the Northern Land Council. They do not mention the word ‘crocodile’ but perhaps that is the animal that they are referring to. Could you just speak to us a little about the Northern Territory’s experience with the crocodile industry?

Dr Freeland—About anything in particular?

Senator FERRIS—I am just interested to learn a little more about the way in which the legislation manages farming of crocodiles in the Territory.

Dr Freeland—In the Northern Territory, the legislation that we administer is the Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act. That act provides us with the capacity to regulate take from the wild—that is collection of eggs or other sorts of animals. It obliges us, if we are managing a population, to produce a management program and that management program is a public document subject to scrutiny. It has a limited lifespan and it basically lays down what we can and cannot do in terms of the management of any wild population.

The crocodile management program was the very first one that we ever produced. It has been in place for a long time. The crocodile populations have grown under that management regime that we have put in place. As well as that, we now have a stand-alone crocodile industry that includes captive breeding on farms, ranching—which is the collection of eggs, incubation and captive rearing—a small tannery, and a significant tourist component, both in some of the farms and also in the wild. Wild viewing is a very profitable enterprise.

It also provides a very key security factor. Crocodiles are not sheep. They do eat people and that makes our management a little difficult. On the one hand, here we are trying to nurture and increase the size of our population. On the other hand, we have a growing human population which, like other humans, loves to splash around in water. The two are not compatible and we have to work out strategies and ways in which we can ensure that people are safe as they go about their normal functions and also during their recreational periods. I think the crocodile management program has served that function very well to date.

Senator FOREMAN—Dr Freeland, you say that conservation of wildlife is the concern and responsibility of everyone. But how can conservation be assured when economic conditions dictate that land must be used for maximum return, and the Northern Territory government believes that this can be done by making conservation an attractive and profitable land use, and by ensuring that landholders are given access to new opportunities of income generation using wild resources in a sustainable fashion and developing stable markets for products derived from such use? Do you agree with that? Would you like to comment?

Dr Freeland—I do agree with that. It has not really been tried in Australia anywhere. If you look at the kangaroo industry, they at no stage involved the landowner. The key concept at the basis of our entire strategy is that, when we issue a permit for a harvest or take, that permit goes to the person who owns the land and it is on the understanding—written—that that land will be managed for conservation purposes.

We believe that for the owners of otherwise unproductive lands, which is what we seem to have largely in the Northern Territory, if we can manage conservation well through providing an economic return to the owner—it does not matter whether it is an

Aboriginal or a pastoralist or whoever—then we have a better chance of looking after those lands and having those lands managed than if there is no economic return or benefit for the people involved whatsoever.

Senator FOREMAN—In respect to the adequacy of existing federal government regulations and controls, you say that the federal legislation pertaining to sustainable use of Australian native wildlife is the Wildlife Protection (Regulation of Imports and Exports) Act 1982 and the Wildlife Protection (Regulation of Imports and Exports) Act 1995. These acts are supposed to ensure Australia's compliance with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species and to regulate wildlife exports and imports generally. At the moment, this legislation is seriously flawed and should be immediately reviewed. Do you agree that the legislation is flawed?

Dr Freeland—Yes.

Senator FOREMAN—Would you like to comment?

Dr Freeland—I have two issues and I am sure David will have some more. The first one is that it was introduced, in my understanding, as a way of honouring Australia's obligations under CITES. It makes a mistake in going a lot further than is required of CITES and that has negative impacts on conservation both in Australia and overseas. In particular, the embargo, if you like, on the export of live native wildlife is contrary in our belief to good practice in conservation both in Australia and overseas. It causes things which, if we involved ourselves in exports, could perhaps be stopped. It also fosters and encourages an illicit traffic, with no management, no control, no conservation benefits and significant animal welfare negatives. We do not see that as being positive, helpful legislation that is designed to achieve anything in the way of conservation.

Dr Lawson—From a purely practical point of view, the fact that that legislation is in two acts, makes it almost unintelligible to the people that have to use it—enforcement officers like myself, Dr Freeland and Mr Stirrat. In fact, we went through an exercise to try and make it a little more easily understood and the only way we could do that was to take the amendment act apart and actually put it into the regulation act 1982 and, as you can see, it was quite a job. It actually took three days. Under those circumstances, this piece of legislation is practically useless, if you want to use it as an enforcement tool. So that is one thing.

I think that it is important, also, to understand that this wildlife protection act was brought in in 1982 and at that time there was popular opinion in the CITES organisation that wildlife utilisation had not become respectable. Since then, CITES has moved on and, particularly in the last two meetings of the parties, it has now become an accepted conservation strategy. And this particular piece of legislation has simply not kept up with it, so it does need serious amendment.

Senator FOREMAN—Have you got any other views about maybe upgrading it?

Dr Lawson—Australia needs to look very clearly at what the CITES secretariat is now promoting in terms of properly controlled trade. CITES is not an organisation which prevents trade; it is a convention on the international trade in endangered species. It is there to regulate trade, not to ban it. The organisation itself went through a period of confusion and now it is beginning to rationalise much more what it does.

Also, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature in recent times—probably in the last two or three years—has very much come around to accepting the fact that utilisation of wildlife is a valid conservation strategy. And certainly, Australia seems to have lagged behind in the acceptance of those newer views.

CHAIR—If we can go back to crocodiles and, particularly, the legislation that relates to the management of crocodile farming in the Northern Territory, there is an anomaly between Queensland and the Northern Territory particularly in relation to the fact that in Queensland they can use only product which is bred in captivity. They cannot collect eggs or juveniles or anything like that at all, and they look rather jealously across the border at the Northern Territory where you can collect eggs.

Logically, I suppose, if you simply said baldly that you were going to collect eggs from the wild, people would see that as an anti-conservation measure. But, in fact, you would say that it is a conservation measure, I presume. Would you like to give us a bit of reflection on how the collection of eggs from the wild has not diminished but perhaps enhanced the whole industry?

Dr Freeland—In the Northern Territory the observation is very clear that our populations have grown dramatically and continue to grow and that the harvest that we are imposing has not had major impacts at all. The reason for that is probably the inherently high mortality rate of crocodile eggs in the first place and the inevitable high mortality rate of the hatchlings. We are not making a big change in any sense so the population goes on.

Why Queensland does not do it I can only assume is a decision for the Queensland government to make. We cannot presuppose that but I assume that they believe that their crocodile population and their state of development in terms of numbers of people in various places is such that they view it as an inappropriate strategy in terms of trying to keep the crocodile going. I cannot answer for the Queensland government.

CHAIR—No, it was more to do with trying to get on the record the Northern Territory experience, which may help the Queensland government to reflect further in either direction.

Dr Lawson—The crocodile program in the Northern Territory has been a real

pacesetter and continues to be so. We have a very healthy population of crocodiles, as I am sure you all realise, and we are now, as we speak, looking at new ways to utilise that population. In fact, this year we are carrying out trial harvests of adult crocodiles from the wild under close monitoring and survey. One of the gentlemen who is going to talk to you later on is involved in that as well. That is Dr Webb. We have a situation where these trial harvests will be carried out on Aboriginal lands.

That clearly shows that an animal that was once reviled is now seen as very much an economic resource to the extent that we are almost embarrassed by the number of people who want to come forward and who are interested in talking to us about these trial harvests.

We have large areas of Arnhem Land, particularly the Arafura Swamp, where we do have very successful Aboriginal groups that collect eggs and are going to participate in this harvest. Interestingly, no matter what the Queensland government has decided to do, some members of the Queensland community have recently been across here to see what we do in the Northern Territory. Specifically, we had a councillor from Cairns come over to look at our crocodile management program dealing with problem crocodiles. It was of interest to me that he also asked many questions about the actual management program, harvest and so on. Maybe he is going to go back and try to rub off some of our experience, I do not know.

Our crocodile program has really been a pacesetter. We have a great deal of interest in crocodiles in the Northern Territory. It is one of our major wildlife earners. You probably have not been here long enough to see the new television advert which promotes crocodiles and tells people that they are valuable to us. All in all, that is probably par excellence an example of an animal that was in dire straits being turned into a positive, economic resource which people, even in the remotest communities, can take advantage of in a controlled fashion.

CHAIR—You are not concerned that you could put any more pressure on the crocodile population in the wild by further collection of eggs? Do you collect juvenile crocodiles, as well?

Dr Lawson—Yes, we do have juvenile crocodiles on quota. In practice, I think I am right in saying that we do not have many people that take advantage of that particular part of the quota. It is a lot easier to collect eggs, for instance.

CHAIR—They do not bite you.

Dr Lawson—They do not bite you. Mum might, but you have to watch out for that. What was your original question?

CHAIR—Do you have any concerns that if you continue to put pressure on the

population, through the collection of juveniles and eggs, that the numbers may begin to decline again?

Dr Lawson—No. It is a very important part of the management program that surveys are done of these wild populations. In fact, we spend a lot of money each year surveying the populations.

CHAIR—So you monitor them?

Dr Lawson—Continually. It is also interesting, and it is often missed out in discussions of wildlife utilisation, that it is impossible to discuss utilisation of wildlife and the effects of that unless you actually do it. That point is often missed. We can talk about the biology of crocodiles and we can say, 'We think if we took this amount out this would happen.' But, until you actually do it, you cannot measure it. We continually monitor, we continually measure.

CHAIR—What methods do you use to monitor the numbers? We have been trying to get some feel for the kinds of scientific methods available—for example, kangaroos are counted from helicopters. What methods do you use to count crocodiles?

Dr Lawson—The best person to answer that is Simon Stirrat, who has just come back from a crocodile survey. He is our crocodile management officer.

Mr Stirrat—Two methods are used: one is a helicopter survey, which gives a very broad scale look at a lot of the river systems; the other is the spotlight survey, which gives more detailed information on specific river systems. The two methods complement each other. The helicopter surveys tend to give information on larger crocodiles and the spotlight counts give us information on smaller crocodiles. They are complementary methods.

CHAIR—Obviously, both the Central Land Council and Northern Land Council are very interested in this issue because they see the possibility of some benefit for their communities. I am not sure whether you understood exactly what we were saying from the evidence we had yesterday but they simply raised the caution that there could be some conflict between traditional use of native wildlife and commercial farming. They were particularly concerned about that issue. They did not necessarily see it as a block but rather as something that needed to be worked through.

Dr Freeland—I would agree that there is that potential. However, in the way we are approaching it, by involving the landowner as the primary beneficiary in terms of getting permits to harvest, we would obviously then be going to the Aboriginal landowners. That Aboriginal community would then have to sit down and work out how they wish to deal with any potential conflicts or difficulties involved. This is happening with the current trial harvest in Arnhem Land of large crocodiles where the people have

essentially undertaken their own form of consultation and worked out what they intend to do. I do not know what it is yet but they have worked it out and we will find out when we start. They have to have that level of control and that level of authority to determine their own actions on their own land.

CHAIR—You might not want to comment on this because it is probably partly a political question but I will ask the question anyway. They did raise a bit of a niggle, I guess, about Desert Park. I have to say to you that we were very impressed with what we saw there yesterday but they felt they would have liked a little more consultation with the Northern Territory government over whether they could be involved in that.

Dr Freeland—I am not sure in this case who ‘they’ are but I can assure—

CHAIR—The Central Land Council.

Dr Freeland—Okay. The traditional owners for the site have been intimately involved in and consulted from day one in the design, location, animals, interpretations, stories—everything.

CHAIR—That is useful because we did not hear that yesterday.

Dr Freeland—You cannot do those sorts of things in the Northern Territory without dealing with the people who have traditional affiliations with land. It is part of our general practice. You may or may not be aware that we have had certain communication difficulties with the Central Land Council.

CHAIR—No, I am not aware of that.

Dr Freeland—They do not respond to letters.

CHAIR—We will probably get into politics soon so we will leave that one sit.

Senator FERRIS—It was intriguing because we saw evidence that some Aboriginal people were involved in interpretation there.

CHAIR—Yes, that is right. We were trying to get the bits together.

Dr Freeland—That is also a form of commercialisation of wildlife.

CHAIR—It is, absolutely.

Senator FERRIS—And very popular.

Dr Freeland—I hope it is.

CHAIR—I must say that it is very clear in your submission that there is no doubt about where you stand, and that is very helpful. However, in a couple of controversial areas it would be useful if you could give us a bit more background. Your submission says:

If landholders come to see that conservation and the sustainable use of wildlife is a profitable form of land use then they will be more inclined to use the land in an ecologically sustainable way.

Obviously there is a big debate about whether that is true. I guess the crocodiles would be the main evidence you would give us on that. Is there any other evidence you can give us which would substantiate that statement that you have made fairly strongly?

Dr Freeland—As I said earlier, it is very early days. We have not pursued a rigid line of making it mandatory that participants in sustainable use enter into covenants over land use and so forth. We have done that in some cases and are doing it. We had one recently involving the harvesting of ironwood out of a pastoral property known as Mary River East. That person has covenants on the land lasting for the next 50 years on the terms of good management for conservation purposes. He pays royalties. It is done sustainably and that land is as good as anything you will get in the Northern Territory, in terms of conservation. That is just one instance where we have done something mandatory.

In other cases, we have not and we have relied entirely on the fact that the landowner is getting returns. Therefore, they will find it useful not to chop down that Melaleuca swamp, and to put a fence around a billabong rather than shoot the crocodiles. A good example would be the people at Arafura Swamp. In their first year they made more money from crocodile eggs than they ever had from their cattle industry. That has continued—give or take the effects of wet seasons and so forth—such that that is now their major enterprise. It is far more important than the cattle industry that has been there for years and years and has not really given them the goods. We are hoping that their decisions about how they manage the swamp will be more influenced by the economic returns of crocodiles than the needs for getting economic returns from Brahman-cross cattle. We think it will come through but we would rather they make those decisions.

CHAIR—That is good, and certainly I do not think anyone can refute the evidence of the crocodile industry and what has happened there. However, I wonder whether we are going to see the same kind of conservation value applied to other species if we start to use the same logic that we have used for crocodile farming for some of our other animals or species. Certainly your experiment in red-tailed black cockatoos is using the same logic. Do you think we are going to see the same kind of conservation values show up in terms of other species?

Dr Freeland—There are two things in particular that seem to stand out from that. The first is that crocodiles are unusual—not unique—in that they have a high economic

value, inherently. They have a good skin. You can also sell the meat, the teeth and so forth. Of course, there is a market and that does help. In the case of certain other animals that I can think of, finding a market would not be quite so lucrative but that does not necessarily preclude their consideration.

If you have several hundred square kilometres of savanna and you have the equivalent of one crocodile population, yes, it would be economically worthwhile. But maybe five, six or a dozen different species could in fact provide the same economic returns from that land as a good crocodile population. So there are alternative prospects available. It is early days. As you mentioned, we are looking at the red-tailed black cockatoo. We are looking at cycads; we are looking at the native timber species for very selective harvests; we are looking at seed collection. We have draft management programs being developed for the magpie goose. The freshwater turtle is another one we have a draft of.

We are branching out, and most of those things are going to be there as much because people are already using them as for any major commercial thing in the future. For example, the agile wallaby is a major food resource for the Aboriginal people in the Top End and one group of Aboriginals in particular is very desirous of doing some habitat improvements and managing wild populations for harvest for meat for the tourist trade. So those sorts of things are going to come through and we are going to be pushed in that direction as well as in the more commercial directions. If you look around the fauna in the Top End in particular, you do not see a lot of crocodile equivalents. Probably the best one would be the hawksbill turtle and we are doing a feasibility investigation on that at the moment.

CHAIR—Just to push you a bit further on it, what I am trying to do is push the logic because this is a very important part of our inquiry and there is a lot of controversy surrounding this issue. If I go to another part of your submission, where you talk about the possibility of multiple land use, you say:

As more species are used in a multiple land use system so whole landscapes would be conserved.

I have a question about that because if you start developing a species such as crocodiles, or any of the other species, it seems to me that the logic of it suggests that it is the single species that you are going to develop, rather than the other species that might be there. It is the one that is profitable that you are going to develop in terms of its economic use. Wouldn't that in fact mitigate against the conservation of the whole landscape? Can you see what I am saying?

Dr Freeland—There are two ways of approaching it. You can focus on one or two species, and in our case we focused very clearly on crocodiles and magpie geese in terms of wetland conservation in the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory has over 25 per cent of its flood plain wetlands in the equivalent of national parks and reserves. No other

place in Australia has got anything like that, and that has been geared and structured around two species. The whole concept is, in fact, looking after those species. Inevitably, once you have got those species in parks and reserves, they do not live there alone. You have got all the plants, the file snakes, the whistle ducks and everything else. They are all sitting there and they are in fact managed as a whole; you cannot just manage one.

If you create a national park for an endangered species, you create a national park for many things. It is exactly the same logic and the same processes are involved. Whether it is a park for something that is threatened or a park for something to be used, the outcomes are similar: you have got a park for thousands of species.

CHAIR—So you are confident that biodiversity would be maintained under this regime and not threatened because you over-exploited one species?

Dr Freeland—Our harvests are inherently very conservative. If you look at the Red-tailed Black Cockatoo, we did an aerial survey in the Victoria River district. I cannot remember the numbers now.

Mr Stirrat—It was over 30,000.

Dr Freeland—That was just the Victoria River district. If we assume 25,000 for the whole Territory, which is probably less than a quarter of what is there, we are talking about taking 600 eggs a year—eggs or fledglings. To make that sustainable, you need an exponential rate of population growth of 0.02, which is about 2½ per cent, which is nothing. In other words, all of our harvests are inherently very conservative, and the level of harvest on red-tailed blacks is so small that I doubt if you could ever measure it.

CHAIR—How would you use them commercially? Are you mainly looking at an export market or domestic market?

Dr Freeland—In the short term obviously it has to be domestic. It is up to you to determine whether or not—

CHAIR—You have got to convince us.

Dr Freeland—We believe that that is the ultimate aim. That is where economic return can be gained for people in remote locations and where land can begin to be managed properly and appropriately for conservation. At the moment much land is not appropriately managed for conservation. We would like to encourage it, and without that tool it is going to be that much harder.

CHAIR—So, at the moment, they would be for sale for personal use?

Dr Freeland—That is correct.

CHAIR—If you did export, would you export from captive bird populations only? That is another big issue.

Dr Freeland—There is a difficulty in that. Our concern in that instance is for the welfare of the individual cockatoo. That puts an onus on us to ensure that the product that we export, or even ship to Melbourne or wherever else, is one that is of a high quality. That means one that is well acclimated to human contact, that knows people and knows modern society, if you like, so that it is not going to get stressed out; one that is tame and friendly.

There are two ways to achieve that. One is to put them in a large aviary and breed them, and export the product. That has no return for conservation whatsoever; no value for conservation in any sense at all. If you look at our draft management program for red-tailed black cockatoos, you will notice that it is a ranching program, similar to the crocodile program, where we are advocating the harvesting of eggs and fledglings which would be hand reared. They would then be well acclimated to people and modern surroundings and be capable of being transferred and transported around the place without undue stress. In other words, captive breeding will produce what you are looking for, but ranching will do the same thing and give you additional benefits.

CHAIR—Are you planning to do any captive breeding at all?

Dr Freeland—That is up to the people involved. We have people who breed them and we would obviously never endeavour to stop them; that is their prerogative.

CHAIR—I want to get on to export and illegal trafficking, but I would first welcome Senator O'Brien. Do you have any questions?

Senator O'BRIEN—Thank you, and my apologies for my late arrival. I am sorry I missed the early part of your submission. I was interested to ask some questions in relation to your last comments about the potential for export of native birds, particularly the red-lead black cockatoo.

When we were in Queensland we visited some captive breeders of the same bird. Their argument was that by having a specific breeding stock you could actually ensure that any birds which were exported could be traced back to that breeding stock. That seems to contrast with the proposition that you put, which is that you perhaps would take eggs from the wild. It seems to me—

Dr Freeland—One of those birds could be traced back to a particular nest in a particular forest which is managed for conservation.

Senator O'BRIEN—That is the question: can you trace back the parentage of every one of those birds? And does that mean that if you cannot do that, you put a

question mark over whether the birds being exported are being managed in the way that you suggest or are being harvested from the wild illegally?

Dr Freeland—Every bird will be microchipped.

Senator O'BRIEN—Every bird that is hatched here?

Dr Freeland—Yes, or collected from the wild. You will not know the parents of the bird, but you will know something better. It is much more marketable to have a bird that is taken from nest X in location Y on a particular property which is managed for conservation purposes as part of getting you this nice cockatoo. So you have a good product and it is traceable to a particular place which is managed appropriately, as opposed to being traced to two parents in a cage somewhere. We think that has got benefits.

Senator O'BRIEN—What is the cost of that management system?

Dr Freeland—We will let you know once we launch it. That is a frivolous answer but, honestly, at the moment I can tell you what might be involved, but I cannot tell you what the cost of that is.

Essentially what it will be is that if a property owner has a piece of land we will make a covenant with him on the land as to how it is to be managed. We will get rangers to be present during any harvests. Eggs will be marked, fledglings will be microchipped, eggs as they hatch will be microchipped plus the normal bureaucratic things such as issuing permits and drawing up agreements.

It is not that onerous; the cost is going to come in in sorting out how you monitor the impact of something you cannot measure. In other words, you cannot measure on the whole population level because the harvest is so low, so what you have to do is monitor it on a more local level in terms of the particular piece of land that is being managed.

Senator O'BRIEN—You are going to have to influence the land owner to follow the regime of gathering the eggs and perhaps hatching them or selling them to a hatchery.

Dr Freeland—Correct.

Senator O'BRIEN—What sort of economic drive is there going to be? How many eggs are going to have to be retrieved to make it worthwhile given that, with the crocodile, you are talking about a very valuable skin and a meat product coming out of the crocodile egg eventually.

Perhaps I am wrong, but I do not see the same value being there with the birds. The other side of it is: once you start to export in numbers it is very likely you are going

to have breeding in the countries that import the birds. We have the techniques here to hatch and breed our own from imported bird species, so there is every reason to believe that in Europe and the United States they will be doing the same. I am wondering about the long-term economics for the property owner in those circumstances.

Dr Freeland—I honestly cannot comment. A red-tailed black cockatoo is worth \$1,500 at the moment. The industry in Australia has a very short-term future and you will saturate the market remarkably quickly. 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.

Senator FERRIS—Presumably they are doing that now with illegally obtained birds in other countries.

Dr Freeland—This is true. We do not think that that is very good.

Senator FERRIS—I agree.

Dr Freeland—We would much rather have a legal export industry that you can regulate. Dr Webb, who will be appearing this afternoon, could give you more information but the history with the crocodile industry has been that since the legalisation of trade in skins around the world, under CITES, the illicit trade has dropped through the floor. It is just no longer worth the effort or the cost or the danger. I firmly believe that until we do that we are going to continue to foster illegal trade.

CHAIR—This is an issue which has been raised peripherally to our inquiry, but in fact it is also something that obviously is controversial. We have certainly encountered the idea in other places that if you have a properly regulated and monitored export market, you would make serious inroads into any illegal traffic. Is there a lot of illegal trafficking going out of the Northern Territory?

Dr Freeland—I have absolutely no idea. We occasionally get whispers, but the people it would be better to talk to would be the Customs Service and the Environment Australia people who have jurisdiction in that area.

CHAIR—In Queensland we are told that the problem now is not so much them going out of, say, Cairns Airport or Townsville or wherever in suitcases, but light aircraft landing on remote strips that we have got everywhere in Queensland. You have got plenty of them in the Northern Territory, too.

Dr Freeland—If that has been demonstrated then they should be arrested. It is all a lot of hearsay.

CHAIR—Yes it is. That is why I am asking you.

Dr Freeland—I do not know; I cannot give you the answers.

CHAIR—But you would be confident that if there was a properly regulated and monitored export market this would make illegal trafficking—

Dr Freeland—It would reduce the incentive and, as you would know, the more you export the lower the price is going to be and the incentive simply disappears.

CHAIR—That is for sure. Just coming back to the adequacy of existing federal government regulation, this is an important part of our inquiry and certainly the Minister for the Environment has spoken to me and the committee about it. He is rather pleased we are doing this work because it is saving his department. Obviously, he will be very interested in your comments about federal legislation because that will be one of the things he needs to pick up.

I notice that, in particular, you talk about the complexity of the legislation in that there are two bills: one is a bill and the other is an amendment. Is that the main problem with it? At the end you say what you want is regulation of export as well which is, of course, a federal matter.

Dr Freeland—My view is that it is conceptually wrong in its foundations and needs to be viewed from that perspective. It is structured almost to stop it rather than to encourage a new form of conservation. So it is philosophically flawed and the end point is a very constrained capacity to export live animals.

The other thing is that it is incredibly onerous. I have never seen anything like it. Our last crocodile management program took nearly 12 months to get through whatever happens to it when it gets to Canberra to get approval under your wildlife act. We thought that was excessive and for a long period of time we actually were running on the old management program rather than the new one. We felt that nearly a 12-month delay in gaining approval for something that has been in place for over 10 years is a little excessive. In other words, some of the procedures need to be looked at in terms of their efficiency and cost effectiveness.

CHAIR—So it is the flow-on from the legislation, particularly the mechanics of it, that you would like to get to—

Dr Freeland—Yes. Some of it is appropriate. For example, we can issue permits and so forth, and I think that is appropriate. The empowerment of the state agencies and so forth is good. There are certain parts of it which are excellent, but the philosophy is wrong. It is a stamp-it-out approach rather than a use-it-for-benefit approach, and I think that needs to be turned around.

CHAIR—That is all the questions I had. We have certainly heard from you, Dr

Freeland. I just wondered if there is anything Dr Lawson or Mr Stirrat would like to add?

Dr Lawson—I would like to bring up one matter which is often a cause of confusion when you talk about wildlife utilisation, and that is animal welfare. It is very important to understand that no conservation professional will countenance cruelty. This is often a thing that is thrown up to us. In each one of our management programs we emphasise the welfare of the creature that we are actually using. In the case of parrots, for instance, the Parks and Wildlife Commission has adopted the International Air Transport Authority standards for transport of animals which are internationally the best you can get. We must always distinguish between using an animal and cruelty. As I say, I am often dismayed somewhat by the more emotive sides of the issue where people actually equate the two, that somehow it is cruel to use animals. It is not. Animal welfare is always a prime consideration for us.

I would like to make one comment on your federal act. I agree totally with Dr Freeland that it is philosophically flawed. One day there is going to be a drafting lawyer who writes in plain English, and I think that will be a revelation for everyone.

CHAIR—If you find him, send him down to Canberra!

Dr Lawson—Yes. We will clone him for you. If you actually read that act—believe me, I have, several times; it is quite a task—it seems that it is telling us that it is perfectly okay to export native timber, which is not covered under this legislation, but we cannot export, for the best reasons, a red-tailed black cockatoo.

Dr Freeland—Unless we stuff it.

Dr Lawson—Unless we kill it first and stuff it. From that message we are getting the message that if you want to clear-fell a piece of land and turn it into a desert that is fine, but please do not use it for conservation and please do not send out anything that has an emotive tag on it, like red-tailed black cockatoos.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for your evidence. We may need to come back sometime in the future, perhaps in correspondence. Thank you again for appearing.

Dr Freeland—Thank you for the opportunity.

[9.32 a.m.]

DYALL, Ms Robin Dorothy, Solicitor, Environmental Defender's Office, Box 3180, Darwin 0801

CHAIR—Welcome. Thank you for coming and thank you for your submission. Do you have an opening statement? There is no need to read your submission because we have read that. Do you have any other comments you would like to make?

Ms Dyall—No, I think the submission was fairly clear about what aspect of the committee's inquiry we were particularly interested in.

CHAIR—We will move to some questions.

Senator O'BRIEN—Have you got any reaction to the evidence from the previous witnesses?

Ms Dyall—As you know, the submission made by the Environmental Defender's Office really centred around the legal regimes under which these proposals can be carried out. It is in the context of that that we have concerns with proposals that are put up. That is probably the extent of any comment I would like to make on the evidence that was given.

Senator O'BRIEN—So your concerns are specifically to do with the Northern Territory legislation?

Ms Dyall—The concerns are with the proposals that are put, the nature of those proposals and the scientific basis of some of the proposals. Our concern with the legislation focuses on how the public can actually address those concerns: if they feel that their questions are not being addressed informally then what can be done using the legislative framework?

Senator O'BRIEN—The only thing we can do is to look at their submission in the context, as they put it, of the national legislation, particularly with the export of animals. It would be useful if there was a development of the view that you have put to us, which seems to be that there is a transparency problem and you are not certain they are going down the right track. It would be interesting to know what specific concerns there might be about any program that Parks and Wildlife is talking about—be it with cycads, red-tailed black cockatoos, magpie geese, crocodiles, native timber species.

Ms Dyall—Has the committee had available to it the strategies that were put up by the Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Commission?

Senator O'BRIEN—I have not seen them, but perhaps other members of the

committee have.

Ms Dyall—I was just inquiring, in order to answer the question, whether the committee has had an opportunity to read through the proposals that have been made public by the Parks and Wildlife Commission.

CHAIR—No, not unless it was part of their submission to us. We have dealt with their submission to us and with their evidence. That obviously is a concern to you. If you have concerns about that, that is what we need to hear on the record.

Ms Dyall—Yes. That was referred to in the submission that we made.

CHAIR—Yes, I see that. That is fairly extensive.

Ms Dyall—I think it is fair to say the framework of what was put out was not terribly logical in its approach. The information was put in it in a very piecemeal fashion. It moved from one sort of statement to another. It did not really back it up with scientific evidence and certainly not with material that is made publicly available, whether that be under any sort of Commonwealth legislation or under the Territory legislation.

The problem that you have is that some of these programs are auspiced possibly to some extent by the Commonwealth, but you still have the commission also operating under the legislation for the Territory. You have this dilemma as to how the legislation overlaps and how it can be used by any member of the public to at least work out what basis on which the commission is operating.

Senator O'BRIEN—They are complaining about the federal act and saying that it is complex and, as I understand it, suggesting that perhaps we should look at this complexity as well as some of the basic principles that underlie it. But going back to the process that is taking place under the state act, your submission says that:

There is no longer an advisory Committee nor is there a Scientific Committee.

Does that mean that there were once advisory and scientific committees established to review these sorts of processes?

Ms Dyall—There certainly was an advisory committee. Then the act was amended to remove that committee. I am not sure that there was ever a scientific advisory committee. That is in contrary distinction to the set-up that you have under the Commonwealth endangered species legislation.

Senator O'BRIEN—Is it fair to say your office believes that is a fundamental change that is necessary to review the operations in a transparent way of the Parks and Wildlife department?

Ms Dyall—Yes, that would be appropriate in our view.

Senator O'BRIEN—Can you describe the outcome you think that would achieve?

Ms Dyall—The office is concerned about the transparency, and also whether there is any participation by the public in any of these programs and in protection of species under the act in general. We are not restricting our comments purely to wildlife utilisation. They are also a comment on the act in general. It is terribly hard to assess and to have confidence in something in which there is no transparency and there is no public participation. There is some limited form of participation under the act, but it is limited basically to people being invited onto management committees in relation to parks.

Senator O'BRIEN—Is there a process of reporting to the Northern Territory Assembly by the department?

Ms Dyall—They produce an annual report that is not really all that detailed.

Senator O'BRIEN—Is there any process whereby they go before committees of the Assembly, or members of the Assembly?

CHAIR—To have the annual report examined.

Ms Dyall—I have not brought the annual report here.

Senator O'BRIEN—I mean, when they produce one each year, I presume that it is tabled in the Assembly?

Ms Dyall—Yes.

Senator O'BRIEN—Is there a process for members of the Assembly to ask officers of the department in a formal hearing?

Ms Dyall—There are various processes of that manner provided. But we say that it should be like the Commonwealth act which has provisions whereby people can, for instance, register themselves as being persons interested to know what licence applications are made under the act to take certain animals or plants. There is no opportunity for that. There is no public statement of any agreements that are reached with private landholders. Those are the sorts of things that the public would like to know as they are happening, and they would like to have some input and information available so that they can make an assessment, rather than feel that they are being kept in the dark, particularly when documents such as the proposed management programs were produced. There was a general feeling of dissatisfaction and disappointment with those.

Senator O'BRIEN—When they were produced and your office came to know of

them, were they publicly tabled?

Ms Dyall—Yes. They are made available to the public and they are available for comment.

Senator O'BRIEN—So, I presume your officers made comments to the department?

Ms Dyall—We did not make a formal submission, I do not think, on those two particular ones, but we did attend a public consultation that was held. Various members of the public did make submissions on those management programs.

Senator O'BRIEN—Has there been any feedback following those public consultations?

Ms Dyall—No, there has not been any feedback.

Senator O'BRIEN—How long ago was that?

Ms Dyall—There was certainly a meeting, I think, in about September last year on the red-tailed black cockatoo.

Senator O'BRIEN—Has there been a series on each of the different sorts of management?

Ms Dyall—There was one on the red-tailed black cockatoo and at the same meeting they dealt with the cycads, because the two programs were released at a similar time.

Senator O'BRIEN—With regard to the management plan for the crocodile population and, I suppose, industry, do you know what process was used for the territory to come to the point it is at now in terms of public involvement, transparency and consultation?

Ms Dyall—I have not really focused on the crocodile management program because I think that is fairly well established.

Senator O'BRIEN—I am looking from the point of view of a precedent as to what happened then, and if there is some way that you can compare the outcome with that process versus the process that has been used on newer issues.

Ms Dyall—I think that the process would have been similar, but I am not really aware enough to make a comment of the sort that you are looking for.

Senator O'BRIEN—Thank you very much.

Senator FERRIS—Could I clarify first, Ms Dyall, the role of the Environmental Defender's Office. I notice in your submission, here on page 2, that you talk about the experience of clients. Are you appearing for some unnamed clients, or can you just tell me a little about the Environmental Defender's Office? How many people has it got? How does it operate? Is it a membership organisation?

Ms Dyall—The Environmental Defender's Office is a community legal centre which was set up originally under a federal government program, the Community Legal Centre program. There were a number of offices set up all around the country at the same time. We are one of those. The office as a community legal centre was originally established to provide legal advice to members of the community on environmental matters. Also, it was set up to play a role in education, law reform and policy making.

Under the recent budget announcement, which you are probably aware of, the Commonwealth did alter the terms of its funding and made the restriction that the Environmental Defender's Office is not to use that funding for litigation related activities. Here today, we as an office are looking at the law that relates to this particular issue and are coming along in terms of law reform and policy matters.

Senator FERRIS—Would the clients that you refer to here be various community groups?

Ms Dyall—It would not necessarily just be community groups. Individuals also come into the office as well; but in terms of this particular one it is community groups as well as individuals.

Senator FERRIS—The comments that you made earlier on some questions asked by Senator O'Brien related to consultation on the development of management programs. You said that you had put in submissions following the tabling of the documents and that in fact there have been public consultations. Is your concern principally that you were not involved within the beginnings of the development of these programs? Can you be a little more specific about where your concern lay?

Ms Dyall—The concern is with the standard of the draft management program that was put up. As I said, I do not think that it was well structured, and it did not seem to put in logical terms any information backing up the assertions that were being made. That made it a little difficult to analyse, because you felt that you were jumping all over the place in trying to work out what was actually really being said and what material there really was to support the propositions that were being put forward in terms of any possible utilisation of the particular wildlife that they were looking at at the time.

With regard to the public meeting that was held as part of the consultation process,

obviously it is more than appropriate to hold a meeting to discuss these matters, and we do not have an issue with that. However, the manner in which the meeting was held was a bit disappointing. There was no independent chairperson. The meeting also did not give any real scientific evidence, which again seemed to be what a lot of the people who were present were looking for. The people present did vary in terms of whether they had their own scientific experience in these areas or were ordinary members of the public with a general interest in the particular species that was being looked at.

In the end, the meeting largely focused on the red-tailed black cockatoo rather than on the cycads, and that is partly because the red-tailed black cockatoo is an emotive issue, which also ended up being taken advantage of in terms of how the meeting was being dealt with in actually passing on the information to actually address the particular concerns that people had. Since then, people have made their submissions and, at this stage, there has not been any feedback that we are aware of from that process. The only thing that we are aware of that has happened since then is that royalties for the two species have been gazetted.

CHAIR—We do not have the two documents that you refer to in your submission, *Wildlife utilisation policy* and *A draft strategy for conservation through the sustainable use of wildlife in the Northern Territory of Australia*, do we? It sounds to me as though they are documents that the committee would do very well to get copies of.

Ms Dyall—Either we can make them available or the commission can make them available to you. They would be helpful for you.

Senator FERRIS—If you were to have the opportunity to comment on how the federal legislation might be changed, what are the particular areas that you would like to see addressed? In particular, could you comment on the evidence of the previous witnesses, which I noticed you were here for, in relation to their comment about legalising the export of native wildlife?

Ms Dyall—If you are going to change the act, they obviously are of the view that there is a philosophical problem with the act. You may or may not disagree with that, and that is the debate; and the political decision really has to be made. The EDO would be looking for a proper basis for changing the philosophy of the act to allow for the things that are being sought by the commission and also to ensure that proper processes are set out in the act to make the export and import of all these things open and accountable. They would be the main concerns that we would have.

There is some accountability provided for in the act specifically, and some information is available to the public on request or on registration of a particular interest in the area. Some of those mechanisms are there, and we would certainly want to see that those sorts of things were retained in the legislation. It is always difficult, obviously, if you have one piece of legislation and then another act comes in, to marry the two

together. However, I am sure that they have got access to legal advice that would be able to deal with that fairly carefully and in a manner that would be understandable and accessible by the commission.

Senator FERRIS—You mentioned in passing in your submission the current program for crocodiles. Do any of your clients have a particular view on how the crocodile management program has worked?

Ms Dyall—I think the view of the clients is that it is very hard to assess how the crocodile program is working, simply because base information and monitoring information are not publicly available. Assertions will be made, and it is then very difficult to see whether those assertions in fact are correct and well founded, and that in itself leads to insecurity in the assertions that are made.

Senator FERRIS—Have you sought to get any of that information? Clearly, it has been documented fairly well here in the submission that we looked at this morning—the figures of 40,000 to 50,000 in 1984 and 65,000 to 70,000 animals today. Are you saying that that information is not publicly available in the Territory?

Ms Dyall—When we were at the public meeting, information was requested that really was not answered in any form that members of the public felt that they could be confident of. That is where the concern comes in. Obviously, it is difficult to count animals in the wild and do all those sorts of things, and you do rely largely on observations made by people that you hope are taken into account. If they think that a species suddenly is not appearing in their particular area, then they might raise that concern with the commission and hopefully it will be taken up.

Senator FERRIS—Do you have a view on the in-principle role that wildlife can play in tourism, particularly in the Territory?

Ms Dyall—A lot of people obviously are interested in Australia's wildlife. There is absolutely no doubt about that. Again, so long as you have got proper management of that, there is no reason why tourism should not play a role. But, again, you are looking at a whole approach: how the land is used and whether numbers are limited so that the land remains with the capacity to sustain those species.

Senator FERRIS—Multiple species.

Ms Dyall—That is how you have to limit it.

Senator FERRIS—Again referring to the previous evidence, your submission says that 'there are no direct public participation mechanisms'. Obviously, in the previous submission and in the questioning, there were a lot of references made to pastoralists and Aboriginals taking part in programs. Are you talking about public debate participation

there?

Ms Dyall—No. What I am talking about there is that members of the public are not involved, other than to comment on the council's proposed draft program. There is no involvement by the public in teams that might help manage those plans and monitoring. They could be involved in monitoring; there is no public involvement in monitoring. The people that you are referring to are involved as landholders. They are involved. Having the habitat on which those animals live makes them a little bit different from just any member of the public who may have an interest and wish to participate so that there can be some public confidence and openness in the management of the species. That is where our comment was coming from. You will probably hear more evidence from the land councils as well as from individual Aboriginal people as to their involvement. As a general proposition, the office would support any involvement they have.

CHAIR—There was one question Senator Ferris asked. I would like to put it again because it is a very controversial one and your evidence is important because it comes from a different perspective. The question involves the whole issue of export. Have you any idea what the opinion would be of the EDO or clients of the EDO about legislation which would allow the export of live animals?

Ms Dyall—Most of the clients would certainly be very concerned about any proposal to allow export. There is absolutely no doubt about that. That concern is really based on the lack of scientific information on and proper basis for the proposals that are being put up and is partly because of the lack of accessibility of information in terms of whether or not there is proper material available to actually assess the viability of the propositions. There is lots of evidence from overseas. Wherever you go in the world there are two sides to the fence in the debate. So it is a very difficult debate and we would probably be recommending caution rather than jumping in there. Markets are obviously very difficult sorts of things. The history of parrots is particularly dreadful around the world. I think it is well known—

CHAIR—In terms of smuggling parrots?

Ms Dyall—Yes, and also the lifespan of the parrots that are kept in captivity and how they are treated. You just wonder where the conservation value is in someone owning a private zoo. Most of them are for private enjoyment. There is some breeding going on in the Philippines. You let a species out overseas and then breeding takes place once a species is outside. You just wonder how Australia is going to maintain its biodiversity and get benefit from it, say from tourism. Tourism is attracted because it is something that is in Australia; you cannot see it anywhere else—and all those sorts of things. There are a lot of factors to weigh up.

Senator FERRIS—But the difficulty we have overseas now is caused by these animals and birds all being exported illegally?

Ms Dyall—Yes, but there is not necessarily evidence that actually says that if you do legalise the export of something then in fact that illegal trade does diminish, let alone conserve the species. It is a question also of where the species are conserved. Are they conserved purely on private land? Where do members of the public in general get the benefit of that rather than just a specific landholder benefiting?

Senator FERRIS—I cannot deny any of that but the situation is currently pretty unfortunate and out of control overseas because those animals have gone out illegally.

Ms Dyall—But there is some export allowed in some countries overseas and the record in those countries is not necessarily to the effect that the export is something that has assisted in conserving the species at all—or even reduced the illegal trade.

CHAIR—So the EDO and perhaps your clients would say that there could be commercial utilisation internally in terms of the tourist trade; and that would be as much as you would want to see?

Ms Dyall—Obviously, there is a lot of economic benefit derived from current traditional use of the species for food. In terms of them taking it for their food, that is an economic benefit that is being derived from that sort of utilisation of the species. Yes, tourism would certainly be fine.

CHAIR—I agree with you that there are strong feelings on both sides of the fence, as you said, on the issue. We need to get from you the kind of evidence and the position that you are taking because we need to consider both sides of the debate. I want a bit of clarification. Towards the end of your submission you say:

A comprehensive review and revision with full public participation should take place immediately.

We hope that we are part of that process. Then you say:

In the meantime the Committee should call for full information on the matter referred to it and not limit its inquiry relating to the NT to its stated interest.

I am not sure what you mean by that.

Ms Dyall—That is really because of the overlap in terms of how Commonwealth approvals can be given to agencies in the NT. The agencies are then operating under a system which is not open and transparent.

CHAIR—Do you mean there the committee's interest in the legislation, because the other terms of reference go beyond that?

Ms Dyall—Yes, that is quite right.

CHAIR—Our terms of reference are pretty wide. We can look at almost anything. The only limitation we have is that we do not want to go to 2025 on this inquiry. We are trying to pull it back a bit, but it is very wide.

Senator O'BRIEN—I just follow on from your comments on what you believe the clients of your service would or would not support in terms of export of native wildlife. It was put to us, in relation to native birds, that where they were bred from captive stock and there was no taking from the wild, there was no good reason to prevent export of those birds, given that they would be able to be transported humanely and that there would be ways of maintaining controls through implantation of chips and other methods to ensure that only the birds bred in captivity were being exported legally. How do you think your constituent members or clients would feel about that?

Ms Dyall—I think that is also difficult. Dr Freeland made the comment that they felt that the better birds for export—and he still did not really explain quite why—were the ones from eggs taken in the wild.

Senator O'BRIEN—I understood he was talking about the fact that they would be domesticated. They would be used to people and modern society versus a bird taken from the wild which is used to roaming wild. These birds bred in captivity are the same as ranch birds. They are hatched from eggs taken in the wild, but raised in contact with humans. There is no difference in that regard. You would be mistaken in assuming, from the point of hatching either captive bred birds or birds that are ranched from eggs taken in the wild, a difference. The difference would be that the eggs would not be taken from the wild if they were captive bred.

Ms Dyall—My understanding of what he said was that the better birds are the ones where the eggs are taken from the wild and then hand reared. As I said, I am not sure of the basis of that comment. But to answer the question, the concerns that are raised relate to the conservation of the species. It is not clear how these methods conserve the species and, particularly, how they conserve them in the wild.

There are no clear figures given on what money is raised from these activities, let alone how the money is then applied to conserving the species in the wild, which would probably be a better way to maintain a population than to say, 'Terribly sorry, all the land has disappeared, we no longer have them in the wild but aren't we fantastic because we are still able to breed them.' That is an issue. With the genetic breeding there are also questions as to whether or not you get sufficient diversity within the particular species that you are breeding.

Senator O'BRIEN—I do not think that there is any doubt that habitat is critical to the survival of native species. On the other hand, what bird breeders in Queensland were able to tell us was that, in fact, there was an imported bird from Central America which was extinct in Central America but because stocks were held here they were able to breed

it and reintroduce it. The habitat problem is probably the main threat to that bird now because having disappeared in the wild in its native area it was able to be reintroduced from captive stocks. So that was the reverse side of extinction.

Ms Dyall—Someone else can save you from your own errors.

Senator O'BRIEN—In that case, that is true. But is that a problem? Is it a problem to have that safety net?

Ms Dyall—I do not know that it is really a safety net.

Senator O'BRIEN—It was for that species.

Ms Dyall—The export of it being a safety net? Presumably, you would keep enough of your own genetic stocks to be able to breed it up for yourself, as well. The question is whether you then lose your market benefit, whether your market is sustained. That is an issue as well.

Senator O'BRIEN—There is no doubt about that.

Ms Dyall—Is the tourist still going to come to your country when, in fact, they can just buy one of these birds or see them in zoos elsewhere? So it is, again, very difficult.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for your evidence. As I said, it is important that we get all the sides of the debate on the record. We will look carefully at what has been said, read your submission and maybe come back to you for more information.

Ms Dyall—We would be pleased to provide it.

CHAIR—Thank you very much.

Short adjournment

[10.32 a.m.]

COOKE, Mr Peter Maxwell, Executive Officer, Caring for Country, Northern Land Council, Rowlings Street, Casuarina, Northern Territory

CHAIR—Welcome. Would you like to make an opening statement? I suggest that in that opening statement you might explain the mix-up with the submissions and table your subsequent submission.

Mr Cooke—This morning the Northern Land Council will present a submission to the inquiry which is intended to replace a submission sent in error to the inquiry at an earlier date. The circumstances surrounding that are that the previous executive officer of the Caring for Country unit within the land council had prepared a submission for this inquiry which focused to a large extent on scientific and technical matters and which was then circulated within the organisation for comment. There were indications from elsewhere within the organisation that the submission did not devote enough attention to matters concerning the core areas of operation of the land council, particularly in putting forward the viewpoints of Aboriginal people in respect of cultural matters and other issues.

There were a number of amendments and additions proposed for that submission, and the organisation presumed they had been made before that officer had subsequently left the land council to take up employment elsewhere. It was only some time later that it was discovered that the submission, which is numbered submission No. 300 by the inquiry, had gone in as it had been originally circulated.

The land council wrote to the inquiry on 11 July pointing out that the earlier submission was a draft, not the final version, requesting that that submission be withdrawn and indicating that we would make a report to the committee here today. I am here today to make that report and speak to a submission which I believe has been circulated now and indicate that we would be happy to follow up any particular areas of interest of the inquiry with a further written supplementary submission some time before the end of September, if that is convenient for the inquiry.

CHAIR—Thanks, Peter. We might just receive your submission. We would be happy for you to speak to this submission because, obviously, we have not had time to read it. Therefore, your comments will help us.

Mr Cooke—I will raise the main points that I believe we are making in this submission and that may give the members of the inquiry a chance to see something that they are interested in asking questions about.

There are a number of points we think are of interest to the inquiry. There is an indigenous tradition of both non-commercial and commercial utilisation of native wildlife.

That tradition is recognised by the Native Title Act 1993. It is recognised that indigenous Australians may have property rights in species even if they do not have property rights on land on which species are located. But at this stage the broader practical effect of that recognition is not altogether apparent but will become more apparent with ongoing determination of native title claims.

We would also point out that within the Northern Land Council's area, a number of indigenous groups are involved in commercial utilisation of native wildlife and there are indications that that level of participation will grow. Crocodile egg harvesting and hatching now seem to be successfully established under the Northern Territory controlled crocodile management plan and the land council notes the provision for population monitoring.

We note that some indigenous groups wish to pursue the high returns associated with safari hunting for native species, in particular, crocodiles.

We believe that one of the most important factors attending the development of commercial wildlife utilisation in remote areas is that in making a choice to be involved to a greater or lesser degree in that industry there will be flowing on from that decision a commitment to the preservation of habitat and we believe that it is the preservation of habitat which is the most crucial aspect in biodiversity conservation.

We acknowledge that the commercial utilisation of native wildlife is unlikely to produce a dramatic reduction in the under-employment of people in remote areas. However, indications are that work in wildlife utilisation projects is regarded highly by Aboriginal people and we believe that through that there may be real potential for appropriate commercial wildlife projects to seed further integrated development of employment opportunities and capacity for land management.

We point out that non-commercial utilisation—often referred to in a shorthand way as subsistence utilisation of native wildlife—continues to be an important factor in remote area informal economies. We would stress that it has a positive effect on Aboriginal health in a physical sense and in a more general sense and we would assert that there is no evidence to suggest that subsistence use produces biodiversity problems within the Northern Land Council area.

We would further assert that external involvement with subsistence use management should only be at the request of the relevant communities. We would say that there is an urgent need for accelerated and continuing government support for community based land management programs, particularly where those land management programs involve an appropriate integration of indigenous principles and practice mixed with scientific management approaches to develop a new paradigm for land management in these areas where there are strong continuing Aboriginal traditions and levels of indigenous ecological knowledge.

We believe that such support needs to be directed both at on-ground programs and also at tertiary courses in land management for Aboriginal land managers and I guess, not surprisingly, we would propose that land management units within land councils, such as the Caring for Country Unit, be resourced to facilitate indigenous debate and information sharing about issues of land and resource use at the regional and community levels.

Those are the main points but there is one other point that I want to mention before we move to questions. That is the issue of definitions in the terms of reference of the inquiry. We have found from our experience of the indigenous perspective that there are some difficulties at the margin with the definition of wildlife in the exclusion of marine species and native trees used for timber. We would point out that there is a difficulty with clarity there in making shut-off points in a general sense. That is particularly so for Aboriginal people who see no difference in the systems which operate on land and in the sea.

That is also in respect of ethical considerations, matters of landownership, resource ownership and resource management. We also note that, from the perspective of Aboriginal people in the Northern Land Council's area, there is a great deal of concern over the impact of the non-indigenous commercial industries on species—particularly barramundi fishing and dugong. That is perhaps closer to the purview of the inquiry.

Also, I think we would like a clarification from the inquiry on timber. Was that a reference specifically to trees used to produce sawn timber or was it a reference to tree products generally which, from an indigenous point of view, might include wood used for carvings in the commercial production of art and craft, and also perhaps bark for bark paintings, fence posts or firewood, for that matter. Those are a summary of the main points that we would like to make here today.

CHAIR—Let me just reflect on the terms of reference. We were aware of the problems that perhaps we were creating by drawing a line. As I said before, our problem was that if we did not draw a line we would never finish the inquiry. My understanding of the discussion about drawing that line was that it was not meant to be a barrier. Where there are obvious implications that go over that line, I think we would be very happy to take those on board.

Mr Cooke—We are gratified by that interpretation because we have taken that position.

CHAIR—Yes. Obviously, a holistic approach to your land council's interests would have to be extended. Certainly, in drawing that line, we did exclude crocodiles. I think we also mentioned species such as dugong, knowing the traditional use of those animals. Unless the committee disagrees strongly with me, I think we would be happy to make that interpretation. It was just our problem of knowing where to—

Mr Cooke—I appreciate the problem.

Senator FERRIS—I was very interested to see in your appendix I, a figure of \$2.6 million in 1996/97 from various Jawoyn enterprises and, in particular, \$36,000 from safari hunting. I will not go through all of the figures but there was a figure of \$8,000 there for feral animal harvesting and a figure of \$13,000 from wildlife harvesting. Very clearly, you obviously have some quite successful, significant enterprises there. It appears somewhere in here that you would be in favour of extending trophy hunting to include crocodiles.

Mr Cooke—The Northern Land Council does not take a position of promoting activity of one sort or another on Aboriginal land. We take very seriously the position that the land council is there to gauge the opinions of the particular landowners and, having found out what landowners want to do, it is the responsibility of the land council to provide support for those landowners in various ways for them to achieve their objectives. So it is not something that is a decision taken by the land council but it is the position of the land council to support people in their ambitions. The particular group that you are referring to will be making a submission to the inquiry after lunch so you will be able to hear it from the horse's mouth, as it were.

Senator FERRIS—Could you explain to me how you manage the research and ecology issues involved in, say, safari hunting? Do you have within your community a structure for research to make sure that you are not taking too many species or do you supply numbers to the Northern Territory National Parks and Wildlife? One of the questions that comes up in my mind with something like safari hunting is how you ensure that you maintain a balance.

Mr Cooke—Indeed. The Northern Land Council does not have an extensive capacity for carrying out its own research. Given the large area of land that is involved, some 50 per cent of the Northern Territory and 23 per cent of the population, it is too big a job for an organisation such as the Northern Land Council to get across. The land council has a great deal of confidence in the work of the scientific people and biologists associated with the Parks and Wildlife Commission.

Senator FERRIS—And they have access?

Mr Cooke—We have close contact with them and we feel that the feedback that we are able to give to people in our communities that they are able to give directly or we are able to facilitate is such that it will contribute to responsible management of those resources. Of course, in respect of a number of these species, the matters are matters of control and licensing through the Parks and Wildlife Commission. While not retreating from the position of Aboriginal people not yet knowing what the native title rights in wildlife may mean, in the context of regulation and so on, the land council has no problem in working responsibly with the wildlife management authorities because we regard them as a resource to assist Aboriginal people in the proper management of their

resources and the care of their lands.

Senator FERRIS—Just to clarify that, the database that might be maintained by national parks would include information from your lands that is supplied to them.

Mr Cooke—I believe that it would do so in respect of those areas where there are commercial enterprises such as this that there is a reporting mechanism. I also point out that I am in the process of taking up the position that I am appearing in. I have yet to step into the position full-time. I will be doing so in a couple of weeks but I still have a general understanding of some of the background. You will forgive me if I cannot answer as extensively as I would like to.

Senator FERRIS—Are you able to give me a little more detail about the way safari hunting operates and, also, is the \$36,400 raised from that enterprise put back into something specific in terms of the management of that particular area where the safari might have taken place or does that go straight to a general revenue within the association?

Mr Cooke—I will check this, but I think I would be correct in saying that those royalty-type amounts would be paid to the traditional owners and that they do not go directly into management. As I pointed out in the submission, the land council's capacity to address these kinds of land management issues and the allocation of staff resources to us has really happened only in the last few years. With a stronger emphasis on these areas, we are developing our capacity to deal with those matters well.

One of the things that we are asking for with our Caring for Country unit is support to engage in and stimulate a broader level of debate at the community level about what their objectives are in involvement in these areas. It is very easy for people to accept that it is useful to increase cash income amongst people who have very low incomes, but there are other aspects that the land council could do more to promote and consider more broadly with people and, perhaps, allocate money to.

It is a matter of scale. Where the amounts of money are relatively small their impact on supporting management processes is fairly insignificant. Where amounts of money may be much larger and where they may develop into much larger and more significant amounts, we would want to speak to traditional owners and encourage a thoughtful approach to where that money is going in the longer term.

Senator FERRIS—I think that you were here this morning when we were talking to the previous witnesses.

Mr Cooke—I arrived a little late for that, I am afraid.

Senator FERRIS—Okay. I am interested to know whether the council has a view

on the export of native animals.

Mr Cooke—It does not have a particular policy on it. I would say that it is something that has probably been very lightly discussed within the organisation. It may—

Senator FERRIS—Do you have a view yourself?

Mr Cooke—A personal view?

Senator FERRIS—Yes.

Mr Cooke—I guess my concern is that we must be careful that we are not providing other people with opportunities that we have not quite been clever enough to utilise for our own benefit. Other people may, in fact, be better at making use of these opportunities than we have been. Personally, I would like to see Australia getting on top of these matters itself and attaining—

CHAIR—‘People’, meaning overseas countries?

Mr Cooke—Yes. I would like to see us take advantage of what we have in our heritage in this country. I would like to think that over a long period of time we will all become somehow weaned from our traditions of where we have come from and develop a relationship with the landscape and biodiversity of this country that is, perhaps, heading in the direction that Aboriginal people have been able to develop over a long period of time. I feel, personally, that that is a very deep relationship which is a very mature relationship between people and their environment and wildlife.

Senator FERRIS—Yes. I am not sure how we would be able to export wildlife unless we ensured that they were unable to breed. And that, in the end, would not satisfy the problem of the black market.

Mr Cooke—No.

Senator FERRIS—I would very much like to have the chance to read your submission, to skim it quickly, and come back at the end.

Senator FOREMAN—Mr Cooke, let me refer to the hunting tradition and animal rights. I would just like to draw your attention to a couple of paragraphs that you may like to comment on. In 3.2 it is stated:

The Northern Land Council is aware that this inquiry has attracted a large number of submissions which originate from what could be termed the animal rights lobby. While this group incorporates scientific and biological elements in some of its arguments the core argument appears to concern insistence, on ethical grounds, that wild animals do not exist for human benefit for human beings to use.

It is in this context that indigenous Australians who continue their traditions of harvesting wild animals and plants for human benefit may reasonably feel threatened by the animal rights and Sanctuary-type campaigns to oppose current positions and seek further restriction on the use of wildlife. These constituencies regard as an 'utopian dream' even a cautious development of possibilities for sustained use of wildlife as a more ecologically sound basis for development in remote areas.

Would you like to comment on that?

Mr Cooke—Certainly. I have looked through the first couple of hundred submissions to the inquiry—I have skimmed through them. The one thing that springs to mind is that there is at work a very concerted campaign to put before the inquiry a point of view specified in a 20-point sheet that has been circulated. People have been encouraged to sign it and send it in. It puts forward, I think, the points that we suggest typify the motivations and intent of that group of people. I believe that those submissions state in a straightforward way that they regard sustainable use of wildlife as a utopian dream. I think indigenous people would suggest that there has been a sustainable use of wildlife in operation in this country for a very long time. It is not a utopian dream; it is a matter of historical and continuing experience in many areas of the country.

I think that what is of great concern to indigenous people and those people who agree with the indigenous perspective is that there is implicit in this campaign an assertion that the moral stance and ethical stance of these people who subscribe to that view should prevail, that that should, in fact, override the culture and traditions of people in remote areas of the country and that that reflects the notion that one ethical tradition is perhaps superior to another. We would feel that that is a fairly dangerous sort of general position for a group of people to take.

Senator O'BRIEN—Mr Cooke, I realise that you have not attended previous hearings of this committee, but when the committee was in Queensland there were some views put, both by the groups you have just been referring to and by representatives of the Aboriginal communities in North Queensland in particular. On the one hand we had a view put to us that the only way it was valid for indigenous Australians to harvest wildlife was the absolutely traditional way and that any use of modern technology was not acceptable.

But we also had a view put that perhaps there needed to be some prioritisation of the rights of indigenous Australians to the commercial utilisation of native wildlife. We had some examples, particularly, I think, the Cherbourg emu farm and whilst we did not see it, the—

Mr Cooke—Edward River.

Senator O'BRIEN—Yes, the Edward River crocodile farm. Queensland does not permit ranching—that is, the taking of eggs from the wild—but we were told that that

farm produces about 3,500 hatchlings a year for the industry in Queensland. Have you got any comments in relation to the sort of evidence we received in Queensland in both of those regards?

Mr Cooke—In respect of the comments about tradition, that is an issue that the land council feels quite strongly about. It has been an issue that has come up in a number of different areas over the years. It has come up in respect of Aboriginal claims to land and the evidence that has been given, and in the definition of tradition. I note that it is also a matter which has been discussed at some length. A quite comprehensive comment was made upon it in Queensland in the matter of the claim to the Cape Melville National Park. The tribunal found—and it is the position that would be supported by the land council—that a tradition is not something that is defined by technology but by intent and by the position of the act contemplated within a continuum of tradition and culture. That does not suggest that tradition is something which necessarily reflects an act in its entirety, with its trappings frozen in time, but reflects something which maintains a close link with its roots, with the intent still consistent with that of the act traditionally.

In relation to Aboriginal people taking a particular role in respect of development of wildlife, it is certainly a matter of concern to indigenous people. A particular example of a matter of great concern is the coastal fishery, which we refer to in our submission. Having lived in the top end for 27 years, and having spent a great deal of that time living on the coast in central Arnhem Land, I have had experience of how Aboriginal people feel about the practices of the coastal fishery. Firstly, while they see their territories extending into marine areas to a certain distance, after which they accept that the waters out there somewhere at some point are for everybody, including them, they feel those waters of the coastal fishery should be protected for Aboriginal people's subsistence use. Secondly, the position of those saltwater people should be considered when deciding the way in which the fishery is to be managed.

There needs to be some intervention in the whole process to ensure that local communities are getting more of the benefit from the resources that are being exploited in the areas immediately around them. We would assert that that is not just a matter of personal benefit to those people who might be involved in it; the development of industry which overcomes the problems of underemployment in these communities is needed. That is really the only way we can go if we are to overcome the have and the have not positions that remote area communities are in.

We could do a great deal to provide opportunities for communities to participate if governments took the first step of recognising the legitimacy of those people's claims to saying, 'We were here doing something with these things and we seem to have been sidestepped on this issue.'

For instance, I have had brought to my attention in the last couple of days—though I do not have the particular details—that the community at Maningrida, in central Arnhem

Land, has been involved in a project of collaborative research with a PhD student from the Northern Territory University, looking at developing plans for the revitalisation of the trepang industry. The community wants to be involved in that industry as a sustainable process, so they are looking at both the scientific basis for monitoring and management and also at involving Aboriginal people. In fact, there are still people at Maningrida who worked trepang just after the war in various areas there. But my understanding of the present situation is that there are only a limited number of licences that have been issued for trepang in the Territory.

CHAIR—Trepang is what?

Mr Cooke—Beche-de-mer, the sea slug. My understanding is that those licences were immediately snapped up. I think one or two of them may rest with an Aboriginal community on Groote Eylandt that is not within the land council's area, but the other licences are not being used actively. We wonder whether their main purpose is speculative, just for their intrinsic worth as licences rather than being used practically. The community has made requests to the Territory government for the granting of an additional licence, at the flat basic fee to get in or gratis, and my understanding is that they have been rejected in that approach on the basis that it might interfere with the profit making of those people who hold the other licences.

That is one area where we would have hoped that the government might see fit to see the benefit that might come in local areas and perhaps give some priority to that, rather than to people who hold licences and live interstate and who are not engaged actively in the industry.

Senator O'BRIEN—I see also in your submission that you refer to the same community having a relationship with Parks and Wildlife and with a private organisation, Wildlife Management International. Do you know anything about that arrangement?

Mr Cooke—Only in its general scope. I do not know the details of it and I guess some matters with that may be commercial matters. You will soon be hearing from Wildlife Management International and they could probably explain that better than I could. But we do make the point that that kind of conjunction or meeting of government—with its overall responsibility for being a watchdog in these matters and its international responsibilities in relation to biodiversity and such matters; private enterprise—with its accumulated skills of marketing and management; and the land and resources of Aboriginal people with, not insignificantly we would suggest, their indigenous ecological knowledge, is something that we would have high hopes of being a fruitful conjunction.

Senator O'BRIEN—There is also talk in the submission about harvesting of adult crocodiles from the wild.

Mr Cooke—This was planned to go ahead some time this year and it may still go

ahead. It was the subject of a press release by the Parks and Wildlife Commission which, because it was about crocodiles, took up the entire front page of the *Northern Territory News*. The kind of prominence that was given to it in the *News* has raised the profile of the whole thing in the community and has perhaps also caused people to speculate about the dollar value of it. Flowing from that, it has given rise to some approaches from people who are totemically affiliated with the crocodile, to see whether they are actually happy about its going ahead or not.

As we note in the submission, a certain tension exists between the rights of traditional owners to harvest and dispose of the animals within their estates and a parallel set of rights at the totemic level of different clans who are associated with one species or another. But the land council's point of view is that those issues can be resolved by discussion between the right people from each of those perspectives: indigenous people sorting it out amongst themselves, with the land council operating as a facilitator of that discussion.

CHAIR—I have a couple of clarification questions, first, on the receipts for commercial activity. By the way, that is a very valuable appendix.

Mr Cooke—We hope to be able to do something more in that respect for you. I have come on short notice to have a go at this, and this bit has been pulled together by some people just over the past couple of days. For instance, where we note in point 4 in respect of crocodile eggs that we are showing a decline there, in fact that does not represent an overall decline but reflects that, in some instances, traditional owners have given us instructions for royalty payments to short-circuit the loop through the land council and go direct from the people who are purchasing the eggs back through a local organisation representing traditional owners. So it has not come through the counting house, but we could seek additional information from Wildlife Management International and the community in respect of that, and perhaps look further at providing you with some more information on those matters.

CHAIR—We certainly do not want to add to your work, but I have got to say to you that it has been very difficult to get this kind of information. Obviously, some of it is commercial-in-confidence, but it does really put the numbers to a lot of the work we are doing. It is valuable.

Mr Cooke—Indeed. A point that we make in several places in our submission is that, while the amounts of money may seem quite small in the scale of our economies and other industries, in areas where there is almost no local export industry, if you like, these things are very significant. We would put a special significance on them as things which could be seed enterprises which could spin off in various directions.

Inasmuch as the kind of work involved in wildlife projects is such that there has been clearly a great deal of enthusiasm from Aboriginal people in getting involved in

these projects and in the ranger work, we see that that level of enthusiasm generation is flowing from these things, and we would like to think that that impetus can be maintained and snowballed, if you like, into other areas.

Senator FERRIS—If it is possible, could you give us an indication of the number of people employed as well—the number of jobs created within those communities? That would be very helpful.

Mr Cooke—Yes; we will do what we can.

CHAIR—If possible.

Mr Cooke—We will do what we can.

CHAIR—It is very valuable, but I understand the kind of work it takes to collect numbers.

Mr Cooke—This is part of the land council's work, to ensure that the people in government understand what is going on out there, and we take it quite seriously.

CHAIR—That is good. I have a couple of other clarifying questions. I noticed that in aquaculture, in your note 5, you say that the activity covered is predominantly lease payments for pearl farms. I did not know there were pearl farms in the Northern Territory. I am aware of Broome.

Mr Cooke—The mother company, if you like, is located in Darwin. Their early farms were Northern Territory ones and from the beginning I think they have worked across the north. We are talking about Paspaley pearl farms here, although there are a number of other operators as well. Where we talk about lease payments here, I presume—and this is something I would have to check—that, with the law standing as it is at the moment, the money is being paid not necessarily for the leases in the water but for the leases for the shore bases which have to be situated next to the farm: it is the marine part of the farms themselves that the leases have been paid for.

CHAIR—You are getting some nods behind you on that.

Mr Cooke—I got that right, then.

CHAIR—Another example is feral animal harvesting, and you mentioned buffaloes and pigs. Are those payments for the animal product, or are there some bounty payments?

Mr Cooke—No, these are animal product payments, in my understanding, and I suspect I will be getting more nods on that.

CHAIR—There is no bounty for them?

Mr Cooke—It depends how you typify the BTEC compensation payments. Some of the buffalo stuff is the tail end of the BTEC scheme. I guess that probably reflects the tailing off of the high point a few years ago; and, with the subsequent slump, that goes more to just meat product. As the person who compiled this points out, there has been quite a radical decline in the price for the wild pig, and it looks to be dropping off quite significantly.

CHAIR—There was a European market for it.

Mr Cooke—It is that European market that has gone a bit soft at the moment.

CHAIR—Has it? That is a pity.

Mr Cooke—Yes.

CHAIR—Are any of the Aboriginal communities involved in running crocodile farms?

Mr Cooke—I can only speak about this in a very general sense. I am aware that the chairman of the land council and his clan operate a small crocodile farm at Nhulunbuy, but I understand that it is a fairly small operation.

CHAIR—Yirrkala?

Mr Cooke—Yes, Yirrkala. Drummie Head, in fact, is its location. With the entry of Aboriginal groups into the crocodile industry, the approach that has occurred has been a sensible one, inasmuch as people are not grabbing a huge slice to start with. It is beginning at the easier end, with the involvement of landowners in the collection of eggs. That went on for a number of years and was operating in a fairly stable way. Now communities are moving to the next step of the incubation of the eggs and the production of the hatchlings. That is another discrete stage which can be tackled, and they can stop there.

When that is consolidated in the community and people feel that they have got the enthusiasm and the capacity to go further, that would be the time to broaden the extent of that involvement. As committee members would be aware, it is terribly important that we approach these things in an incremental sort of way and that people are able to tackle what they can, get across that, get the skills and the infrastructure that they need to work their way into these things and get confidence from having accomplished a particular slab of it, rather than being confronted by a great big thing that is very difficult to leap into all in one go.

CHAIR—That is fair enough. Are you aware of the significant involvement in emu farming of a couple of Aboriginal communities in Queensland?

Mr Cooke—I have heard of them, but in fact the most I have read of them was, I think, in the submissions to this inquiry—just quickly looking at some of the references to them in there. In the land council we have heard of no suggestion of heading in that direction in the top end of the territory. I am not quite sure whether our emu population and our general conditions and environment would be such that they would be suitable. That is a question which we would, I think, need a technical, biological viewpoint on and at this stage we have had no indications from communities that it is something that they are headed towards.

CHAIR—I presume that is caught up partly in the line on concessions entering and camping and access. I am aware of some top end tourism ventures, in which Aboriginal communities are involved, of which a significant part is giving people experience in bush tucker. Can you give us a bit of an outline of where that happens and what it looks like?

Mr Cooke—That may be better for me to address in more detail, if I might, because I think it is probably something of particular interest to the committee. Perhaps, with your permission, we might address that in a more detailed submission. It was something that I would have liked to have got onto, but time precluded my dealing with it here.

CHAIR—Yes, certainly, if you mean a further written submission?

Mr Cooke—A further written submission on that if I could.

CHAIR—Bathurst Island is one place, is it not?

Mr Cooke—I believe it is happening on Bathurst Island, but, of course, that is not within the Northern Land Council's area so we would not presume to know too much about what happens there. I think that there is some bush tucker involved in the cultural and eco-tourism that is going on out of Eva Valley, outside of Katherine, at Manyallaluk, which is an operation under the umbrella of the Jawoyn Association. I understand that there Aboriginal guides take walkers on a walk from the old station at Eva Valley up and into Nitmiluk National Park and I presume, as the seasonal variety presents itself, people sort of munch their way through the bush fruits. I am not quite sure whether it goes to a feast of kangaroo or anything along the way. It is something that, if you are interested, I may inquire more into the particularities of.

CHAIR—I am always worried about asking you to do extra work. I guess it is one of those areas where there is a little more consensus than there is regarding some of the other areas of the commercial utilisation of wildlife. Bush tucker seems to be a little more

acceptable across the spectrum.

Mr Cooke—That is right.

CHAIR—We would be interested in that. Clearly, relating to that is some of the cultural use of native wildlife and how some of the taboos surrounding that can be overcome in its use commercially for bush tucker in order to give other people the experience of it.

Mr Cooke—I would believe so. My experience—and obviously I speak as an outsider to the culture but someone, nevertheless, who has been situated close to it for some considerable time—concerns the evidence about the issues of totemic matters. The crocodile issue, for instance, gives us a good example. Regarding the period up to the 1970s, when hunting was banned in the Northern Territory, Aboriginal people in remote communities and people whom I knew at Maningrida have told me about their early days as crocodile hunters in their own right and working with white fellows and selling skins to the missions and other people who were trading around the coast and so on.

Those people who were talking to me were people who were very seriously culturally attuned people and very much involved in and respectful of their ceremonies and traditions. It seems that those people were able to be involved in the industry in those times. To me, that suggests evidence in its own right that these things can be culturally dealt with and can be permissible in most situations if Aboriginal people are able to sort it out amongst themselves, but there is a fair amount of flexibility in these matters.

Apart from particular restrictions that individuals might have, often these are things that do not persist throughout someone's whole life but maybe happen between a particular period of entering into an age grade and ceremonial situation at this age and for a certain period of time when there are certain foods that they may not eat and that sort of matter. Later on in life those restrictions may be removed.

There is a certain amount of flexibility within the system and the central point of it is the imperative to recognise and respect the authority of the people who have that ceremonial affiliation with those species and so on. The core issue is one of people feeling that they and their totem have been accorded respect, and that is the key element of approach.

CHAIR—And it can be worked through?

Mr Cooke—I believe so. There may be issues where people, for one reason or another, decide that they are going to take a very strong stand. That may persist for a long time or it may be for a much shorter time, it is one of those things.

CHAIR—It is part of the human dimension, isn't it?

Mr Cooke—Indeed; cultural diversity.

Senator FERRIS—I have an intriguing question here. Given that we are looking at how we might recommend changes to the federal legislation, I am intrigued by a couple of sentences here at the bottom of page 8 of your submission. You say:
For example, a landowner might want to send several frozen geese from his country to his daughter studying in Melbourne.
The receipt of those birds in Melbourne could be considered an offence under state legislation.

Mr Cooke—In providing that example, it is not based on the particular—

Senator FERRIS—I realise that.

Mr Cooke—It is just raising that prospect generally. That is a difficult question, trade between states. We can see a very definite role for government to take a strong interest in commercial trade in various areas, but it does seem that with Aboriginal people going away to study and moving around that people do live remote from their communities of origin these days and that these are matters of some cultural significance to them, the eating of traditional foods. We would see that there is an area to be explored there, but not one on which our experience is likely to throw much light at this stage. But, we raise it because it is an issue of some concern.

Senator FERRIS—Presumably, it would not only be frozen geese, it would be—

Mr Cooke—It could apply to whatever.

Senator FERRIS—Yes, a number of other animals and birds too.

CHAIR—Are there any concluding remarks you want to make?

Mr Cooke—No, I am satisfied with that. We will undertake to prepare something on the wild foods and possibly we might also see if we can produce a few more comments on eco-tourism and the non-consumption uses and do what we can to flesh out those statistics a little more for the committee. Thank you very much.

CHAIR—If you can do that it would be marvellous. We thank you very much for your evidence.

Senator FERRIS—And a very interesting submission.

CHAIR—Yes, both of them were, actually.

[11.30 a.m.]

VARDON, Mr Michael, Senior Research Associate, Wildlife Management International Pty Ltd, PO Box 530, Sanderson, Northern Territory

WEBB, Dr Grahame, Director, Wildlife Management International Pty Ltd, PO Box 530, Sanderson, Northern Territory 0812

CHAIR—Welcome. We note that we have a substantial submission from you which is most interesting. We invite you to make an opening statement and then we can have some dialogue.

Dr Webb—I make this submission as a personal submission although I am involved in various organisations.

Mr Vardon—I am an employee of Dr Webb's. I make this submission as an employee of Wildlife Management International, but it is also a personal submission.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. Are there some opening remarks that you would like to make?

Dr Webb—There are many points raised, in our submission, on the areas we are concerned with. I would like to say at the outset that this whole review process you are going through is incredibly timely because there are major global trends taking place in this area. You now even have the World Wildlife Fund saying that they must re-evaluate commercial whaling because world opinion has changed. This is being assessed by public forums and governments all over the world, and major change is in place and it is certainly timely that Australia did it.

Australia's role internationally and nationally can and should be much greater than it is. Currently, the positions we often hold are an international embarrassment. We are the only country whose proposals the IUCN delegates refuse to vote on. At the CITES' recent meeting in Zimbabwe we adopted such a strong attitude against the Africans and their rights to deal with elephants that very senior Australians had to be introduced as though they came from another country.

I have dealt with this problem for years overseas. It is something that is wrong. We are out of touch with global trends and it is time that we re-evaluated where we are and where we are going. Overall, the review is incredibly timely. I sincerely hope that, notwithstanding the complexities of the issues, you are able to get the country back on track.

The only other thing I would like to say at the start of this is that most of the

comments that people hear back on these issues are really driven by markets and market demand, but very few of the people involved in these issues have any experience in marketing or selling. Many people involved with biology are either employed by government or have a job somewhere that has very little to do with marketing. It does make debate very difficult because people who are professing to be experts in relationships between markets and what may be encouraged by those markets often have a very naive understanding of how the markets actually work.

Wildlife marketing is, in many cases, a very specialised area. It is not something that follows general principles of marketing. It is very specialised and, often, a niche market, and developing a keen understanding of that is probably important to being able to work out what is feasible and what is not feasible. I will finish there.

Senator FOREMAN—Dr Webb, would you like to enlarge on the marketing aspect? You said that there are a lot of people not involved in marketing.

Dr Webb—With various organisations I am involved with, such as the IUCN sustainable use specialist group, the IUCN crocodile specialist group and the Asian Conservation and Sustainable Use Group, although they are non-government type organisations, they embrace and involve people from the trade. We are meeting with people from the trade that are involved in various aspects of wildlife trade all the time.

You find that people will make comments that are just totally naive. They will say, ‘Well, the Japs eat sea turtles. They have lots of money. Let us force them to do this.’ They do not understand the intricate traditional relationships in that whole market. They do not understand how it works and how they can work with those markets only if they head down certain paths. The markets are not just like Australian markets for prawns or wheat. Japan wants little packets, but we give them 60-ton containers. They are not those sort of markets.

There is the impression that people involved in the wildlife trade are somehow all very wealthy and big organisations. They are not. In many cases, in countries where wildlife trade is very well-established—such as Indonesia, which has many species—they are very well organised. There are some problems with some species. But the wildlife traders themselves are not really major wealthy people that are making millions of dollars like a mining company. It is a small trade. Relative to most forms of trade, it is small in economic terms and high in social terms. There are a lot of people involved but the end result, with some notable exceptions, is usually low. The notable exceptions are, for example, the bird nest industry in Indonesia, which is probably valued at \$1,000 million a year. They are a big industry in anybody’s terms.

CHAIR—Your comment in that regard also fills out one of your comments in the summary, where you say Australians should start paying attention to the needs of people around the world. You are particularly talking about some of those cultural peculiarities.

Dr Webb—I am talking about two things. Australia plays a very active role in following some really very protectionist attitudes that totally denigrate the rights of people without realising it. The average Australian has no idea that they have been actively involved, through their attitudes on the whaling and seals, in denigrating and hurting the social fabric of Inuit people in the circumpolar region. They do not know because nobody tells them about it. I believe they should be actively aware of the impact of their decisions through not knowing and respecting areas like China and Japan and many other countries. They have no idea what there is a market for and what there is not, and exactly what is required to satisfy that market. There is a whole area that we are not competing in, even if our wildlife laws allowed us to, simply because we do not know. We do not study it; we do not take it seriously.

Senator FOREMAN—Doctor, you also talk about the commercial use of wildlife being controversial. You make a couple of points about that. Would you like to make a few remarks about that?

Dr Webb—Yes, I would. From the point of view of solving problems involving commercial use of wildlife, which is what we get involved in a lot more overseas than here, you have to isolate the variables. There are people that are opposed to the use of wildlife. There are people saying that we should all be vegetarians and not use wildlife at all. Now that is a philosophical opposition. It is more in the realms of a religious type argument. That is fine; it is good for a community to have diverse opinions. But it needs to be argued at that level.

The problem really occurs in the fact that because Australia already tolerates many different religions and many different diverse and philosophical opinions, it is not an overwhelmingly logical argument to expect the whole of Australia to become this way. One of the problems you have in assessing the evidence will be in deciding where people are fundamentally at in that area; they are trying to justify their opinion with all sorts of pseudo science and talk about scientific data and results that they really do not understand. It tries to give the impression of a more logical and reasoned argument to support whatever philosophical position they are going to support. The answer is, 'If you had that data, would you support it then?'

That is the problem world-wide. Anything to do with commercial utilisation of wildlife is going to be controversial in developed countries that get all their produce from supermarkets, where the people are locked in big cities, where they are all experts on wildlife issues, where they have become virtual reality, where they have never had a day that they are hungry and where they have never had to work with other peoples, other cultures and other traditions. It is controversial, especially in a country like Australia.

Senator O'BRIEN—Either Dr Webb or Mr Vardon, I think you were here when you heard me ask questions about the arrangement between the Bawinanga people, Wildlife Management International and parks and wildlife about developing wildlife

resources in a sustainable manner. I asked a question of the previous witness and was told you could help me.

Dr Webb—It is very simple to clarify that. Up until, I think, 1990 we were engaged by the then conservation commission of the Northern Territory as general consultants and specifically to work in areas to do with crocodiles. In that capacity we, on behalf of the conservation commission, basically operated the actual harvest of the eggs of crocodiles and things like that all over the territory. Then the conservation commission charged the farms for the hatchlings and got the money. Our involvement was paid for in a different contract. In fact, for a number of years we did it for nothing to get the program up and running.

In 1990, for reasons best known to the Parks and Wildlife Commission, they made a decision that they would not be involved in that area again. I think it was to do with the collection of funds back from some of the farms as such. It left the whole thing up in the air. There was nobody coordinating the whole program.

The farms then came to us on the side and said, ‘Would you guys continue basically fulfilling that role?’ This was very beneficial because the egg harvest was operating on some areas where eggs are very close and they can be collected cheaply. Other areas, for example, Maningrida and Arafura Swamp, are a long distance out and the eggs are expensive. So what we could do with the one organisation being involved is keep the mean price down so that we could maximise the harvest and many more people could benefit.

Various other things have happened since that time. We have encouraged the development of the next stage, which is incubation at Arafura Swamp and incubation at Maningrida. I can actually give you the figures on that if you want to know how much was earned by those things. Our relationship is that they now do that. We have been involved in doing some training out there on how to do it. The situation with that now—you may need to check that—is that they do everything. They then send the hatchlings to Wildlife Management International. We then pick up the hatchlings, look after them and distribute them to the farms. We put a levy of a few dollars a hatchling to cover our work. So our relationship in terms of crocodiles is perhaps the minimum you can do to encourage the further development of farming.

Outside of that, we have had a close relationship with Maningrida. I have had a close relationship with that community since the early 1970s, when I worked closely there for a number of years with the people. So there is quite a rapport. When it came to areas of the possibility of doing something with trepang, beche-de-mer, which actually is significant to your inquiry, because it is covered under the Wildlife Protection Act, as you are probably aware—it probably should not be, but it is; someone thought it was a good idea to drop it on, which has created all sorts of problems, because there was no real scientific basis for it going on that act—there was a lot of discussion between Maningrida

and us about whether we could help somehow, was there room. We decided that there was, that we could do something together. So we decided to try to do that where we could be more involved with the marketing side of things.

However, as Peter Cooke explained, the licensing situation for trepang was a fairly strange arrangement, where they handed out licences. They have now become valuable property to have, even if they are not being used. There is no mechanism for Aboriginal people even in that area to be given any rights to be able to develop anything with trepang. I do not see trepang as being the major thing—

Senator O'BRIEN—That is a territory licence?

Dr Webb—Yes. That comes under fisheries. That is really the extent of the arrangement. We are all pretty good friends out there—Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal.

Senator O'BRIEN—Just to satisfy my curiosity, is the restriction on the number of licences in an act of parliament or in regulations?

Dr Webb—I do not know; I am not sure. I had a letter just the other day from the minister saying that it is more complex. He is trying to work out a way of revising the whole system, but it is more complex. He said that he does not think he can and that the only way he can see would be for those people to buy a licence from one of the current licence holders. But they are being used now for speculative purposes, so you are talking about Aboriginal people having to buy a licence with nothing that comes with it for, quite possibly, a few hundred thousand dollars. It is not right to me, but I am not fully cognisant with the exact legal situation.

Senator O'BRIEN—What do you think about the proposition that indigenous Australians ought to have some priority rights to the commercial utilisation of native animals, for example?

Dr Webb—I am not sure that is a good idea, because I think discrimination is a terrible enough thing now and that adds to the problem. Rural landowners, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, have many of the same problems. In the case of Aboriginals living in, say, Arafura Swamp and Maningrida, what else are you going to offer those people in terms of economic development? Are you going to build a plastics factory out there, or do you want them to chop all the swamp down and grow aquaculture, or chop all the trees down? The only option you are giving them is to leave the country for economic development. That is not just here, that is happening internationally; they drift to the cities.

I see Aboriginal people in those areas as the same as I see station owners in highly remote areas—key targets for being able to get additional economic return back from wildlife which at the same time will slowly consolidate the value of native habitats and

things. So I see a conservation and economic thing in some cases of such obvious proportions—the kangaroo debate is just so clear-cut and obvious to everybody in the world—that one wonders how this country can call itself the clever country, when the rest of the world—

CHAIR—Sorry?

Dr Webb—I am just saying that the kangaroo issue has been investigated to death. Landowners, not so much in this area but certainly in western Queensland and in areas of western New South Wales, have had to try to argue for their ability to earn extra income from the kangaroos that are eating their wheat, and that have been doing so for years and years. They are the only people who have been left out of the kangaroo industry, and it is a severe indictment of our ability to assess things. The rest of the world cannot understand it; they think we are quite stupid.

Senator O'BRIEN—It seems that we have been criticised by some of the Western governments over kangaroo culls—the United States government criticised us—so there are two sides to that picture, as you present it.

Dr Webb—There are two sides, but let us be very candid about it: the Australian government rarely hears from, and does not send an objective *Hansard* reporter to, any of the international congresses where things take place. Perhaps people there should read about what actually happens, because they get a very doctored version. In the case of kangaroos, the US was encouraged by some elements within Australia to put kangaroos in their endangered species act—when we are talking about harvests of millions of kangaroos a year. It is totally ridiculous. It took years—because the machinery in their act is even worse to change than the machinery in ours—for them to reverse that trend and to send people over and to realise that the information upon which they had made their decision was not scientific at all.

There have clearly been benefits during that process, with enormous resources having been poured into the study of kangaroos. So now we know a lot more about it. There are rural people in Australia trying to make a living from a commitment to the land when there are kangaroos there that they could use sustainably. We still pontificate and go on to make out it is an intelligent argument, but it is not an intelligent argument. If we cannot assess that, we should get out of the business altogether in terms of world problem solving. That is my opinion. I am sick of hearing about it. I do not want to hear another justification or another argument that the issues about kangaroos are clear-cut. We should all go home if we cannot solve that.

CHAIR—Nevertheless, as politicians, we are in the midst of that debate—and will continue to be—but it is very helpful to have your contribution.

Dr Webb—It is not even an issue in logic.

Senator O'BRIEN—I am also interested in your criticism of the non-government organisations that go to forums overseas and, in your submission, embarrass Australia. That is not the way that the matters are generally reported.

Dr Webb—Absolutely not. Let me tell you very clearly: I noticed in one of the submissions from the Nature Council of New South Wales that they said, 'Here is what we submitted to the IUCN.' What they did not tell you was that resolution 1.87 was back to back with resolution 1.86—I have both of them here if you want them—and that resolution was fully in support of sustainable use.

A group was set up to discuss all these resolutions. At the meeting where that resolution was discussed, the representative was attacked by people from all over the world. In fact, World Wildlife Fund International stood up and withdrew World Wildlife Fund Australia's support for the resolution—there was no support at all. The Inuit people in Canada had even written to Prince Philip, who is the World Wildlife Fund patron, wanting to know how they could possibly be party to such a resolution. When the people eventually tried to change it—again, out of session and quite improperly—when it came to the vote, it was rejected, with acclamation from throughout the hall from both the state house and the NGO house—not just the one. In contrast, resolution 1.86, fully supporting sustainable use, was accepted with acclamation by both houses.

That was at the last general assembly. The one before was worse. Some Australian NGO groups had put in many resolutions that were so insulting to other countries and just so out of line with international diplomacy that 30 or 40 countries stood up one after the other and refused to vote on any of them. But then the chairman passed them as a block. All the Australian government heard here was that the IUCN had supported this. They did not hear the details. I do not know why because Foreign Affairs was represented there. It was terribly embarrassing. Does that answer your question?

Senator O'BRIEN—It does expand a little on your submission but it is a matter of concern that we as a country are being reflected upon in such a negative way because of these activities. If we do not know about it, then there is nothing we can do about it. Yours is the first commentary I have heard about that.

Dr Webb—It is probably because most of the people that go to these meetings are government employees and they cannot speak openly or publicly about what goes on. The only other information you get back is from those organisations themselves; they are the target. But believe me, Australian non-government organisations are not looked at with high standing overseas. In fact, it is quite embarrassing to be an Australian at some of these things.

Senator O'BRIEN—Are you saying that they are not looked at—

Dr Webb—As intelligent people.

Senator O'BRIEN—By the other non-government organisations or by the other governments?

Dr Webb—By the majority of people at these meetings, including a lot of non-government organisations. Non-government organisations fall into many different categories. There are some that are very heavily oriented to animal rights and animal welfare issues in which conservation is something out here but there are some that are very heavily oriented to conservation and development and local peoples so it is complex. But the Australians will stand up at these meetings and often say things which are just totally improper, in my opinion, as they did at the CITES meeting on elephants. They showed a total lack of respect for the problems.

Senator O'BRIEN—What did they say that was totally improper?

Dr Webb—They had this attitude of, 'We understand you are having problems, you poor people, and we really are so knowledgeable about these issues and we understand you have done everything right with management but we just cannot support you because we know best in Australia about your elephant problem.' It was unnecessary. If we were going to vote against it, we should have just said nothing. But not us—we stand up and then complain that people are not visiting Australia. It was unnecessary for us, a little country of 18 million people. What gives us the right to have the audacity to set the global standard of ethics in all these other countries where some of these countries have been struggling for years? They have been remarkably successful at developing programs for elephants and some other species. The Australian opinion is just not welcome.

Our position on whaling is the same; we are like reformed smokers. Who is interested in our position on whaling? When was the last time your kids defended the tradition of eating whale meat? We often start heading off in these directions without recognising that we are insulting many countries—in some cases countries we attempt to deal with. I cannot see the wisdom in that. Often our positions are driven by animal rights and animal welfare concerns and not really about the sustainability of the use, which is what should be the first priority. Once you start deciding that whales are more important than crocodiles and that people are no more important than animals, you start to get into a realm of difficult political decisions. I do not think it is a good thing; that is my personal opinion obviously.

CHAIR—I think it is very useful in your introduction where you say it would assist the committee if the underlying philosophical conflict about the commercial use of wildlife was discussed in some detail because, without doubt, it will bias some, if not most, evidence submitted to the committee. I found it very helpful the way you have divided up the various starting points for people. You are right; it is a little frustrating at times in the committee to have people arguing from a philosophical point of view but purporting to argue something else, whereas I think their philosophical point of view is

quite valid for this committee to hear. It would be better if they argued for that. For instance, if they argued that they are against the killing of any animal, therefore there should not be any commercial use that kills animals, that would be a position to take. I would like that argued cogently but on that basis rather than on some other. That is really what we are about. I guess we could ask you the question—the answer is probably here because it is a very comprehensive submission—as to what your philosophical starting point is.

Dr Webb—My philosophical starting point is that I believe that conservation is largely about people. I believe very strongly in tolerance, respect and understanding of all people's cultures, religions and traditions. I do not believe one group of people have the right to impose their attitudes to wildlife on other groups of people.

I am clearly a sustainable use supporter because I see it as an effective answer to conservation and economic development. I am certainly not totally against animal rights. I think the movement is academically interesting but one of the most dangerous trends we could have. I do not think there is a place for it. On the other hand, you clearly need to have animal welfare standards in different countries.

CHAIR—You make a distinction between animal rights and animal welfare?

Dr Webb—Absolutely. They are two totally separate issues. I do not know what I would call myself. I am a pragmatist and that is why we get involved in, I think, a lot of big issues. We get called in to a lot of big and complex issues because we can try to assess them pragmatically and work out what are the real issues. We work out how to try and solve them after making a distinction between them.

Animal rights, animal welfare and conservation have become so intimately intertwined in the eyes of many people that they are seen as the one thing by the public. This makes it incredibly difficult. One of your previous speakers was talking about consultation. Some of the areas that you are wanting to have widespread consultation on are in fact extremely precise technical issues, whereas others are philosophical issues that are well suited to public debate. But you do not debate with the hospital about what model kidney dialysis machine they are going to buy because you recognise that it is a highly technical issue. Wildlife management is a highly technical issue and you need professional technical people to discuss and solve its problems.

The question as to whether you use wildlife or do not use wildlife is a much more public question and it should be discussed in different forums. That is the way I would see it.

CHAIR—I would agree with you there. I notice that you make a clear distinction between different kinds of research. Certainly there are those who would like us to do more research in some of the biological issues, whereas you say what would be far more

useful would be more research in terms of experimental management issues and you give a couple of illustrations. Do you have in mind a large area of marginal agricultural land in the Northern Territory?

Dr Webb—No, I do not. It is just that I see that the Northern Territory would be the best chance in Australia, for political reasons, to advance this concept and determine what were the problems and what were not the problems. The reason I say that is that 30 per cent of the population are Aboriginal people for a start and the average opinion on these matters, relative to, say, New South Wales, is very different. We clearly have a huge population of people who depend on using and eating and having blood on their hands without having to go and see the psychiatrist.

You know what I mean. It is a different place and I think it is probably the best place in Australia to try to find out what does happen by very careful experimentation rather than listen to all of these predictions that in fact may prove to be wildly wrong. They usually have; with crocodiles they proved to be wildly wrong. The answer to that, instead of accepting that and learning from it, has been, 'Ah, but crocodiles are different!' So we start with another animal and we have to go right back to the start again. If crocodiles had failed, everyone would be saying that they told you so. But because they turned out to be remarkably successful in Australia, and globally, everyone said, 'Crocodiles are different. You cannot use that information when you start talking about sea turtles.' If you want to believe that, you can.

CHAIR—The jury is still out on that. I think they are a bit different, but I am willing to be persuaded.

Dr Webb—I will persuade you.

Senator O'BRIEN—They are certainly different to whales in terms of their breeding capacity.

CHAIR—My concern is more about using arguments about crocodiles, or even kangaroos, when we are talking about small marsupials in Australia that are very endangered. I just wonder whether commercial utilisation of them would bring any benefits from a conservation point of view. That is the question in my mind.

Dr Webb—It is a good point. There are certainly animals for which there is no real recognised market of any consequence today. But in terms of whales and crocodiles, I would not say they are so different. They are both big animals. They are both aquatic animals. The adults take a long time to mature and you need to monitor the adult populations. There are wild harvests of adult crocodiles. There are wild harvests of adult whales. As long as the harvest is within levels that is sustainable, then they are very, very similar. It is not so much the matter of eggs—there are plenty of harvests of crocodiles in the world that are harvested as adults.

Senator O'BRIEN—I was thinking about the rate of recovery; if you really hoe into the wild population, the rate of recovery seems to be slower.

Dr Webb—It would be interesting to check, but the rate of recovery of minke whales I would say is pretty similar to the rate of recovery of crocodiles. You could check it—the data are there. Again, it is a matter of a lot of misinformation about whales.

CHAIR—Staying with the philosophy, one of the big problems in the philosophical debate is that, whether they argue that way or not, people do in fact make distinctions between the value of different animal species. It is often to do with their cuddliness. Baby seals are much more cuddly than crocodiles, for instance, or hyenas in your example.

Dr Webb—It is very true and you can understand it. Let us face it, with the impact of television on this issue, especially with people now locked in cities where they are really dissociated a lot from what is going on, you do have a tricky problem. This cuddliness is a very powerful image and always has been.

CHAIR—It sure is.

Dr Webb—But when it comes to the clever country that is trying to promote innovation, science and objectivity, we should be smart enough to get over it and be pragmatic, honest and open. If people do not understand, the problem is that we are not spending enough money educating them about it. Everyone recognises the power of this colourful, cuddly image—and it has got nothing to do with conservation at all. We all recognise it. Why don't we do something about educating the public about it? It is causing us untold problems and costing us millions and millions of dollars. Maybe that one single problem is of more economic significance than we realise.

CHAIR—Have we canvassed with you the whole issue of export of live animals?

Dr Webb—No, it has not been specifically brought up. I do not have a problem with export of wild animals if it is controlled in the way that we would control anything else. We even control the export of sheep. As long as it is under controls, and the wildlife has been legally produced, I do not have a problem with the concept of exporting it. But I do not have a problem with people having a pet bird either. I think it is probably good for the people. Some people clearly have a problem with that; I do not. I would rather see them have a pet bird and Australia get something back for it, than for them to have a pet bird and someone else get something back for it.

CHAIR—There is also the debate about whether or not we would be better having native animals as pets than dogs and cats, for example.

Dr Webb—That is an interesting argument. I cannot see, superficially, what is

wrong with increasing the diversity of pets. Maybe it would make people more interested in wildlife generally if they were brought up with wildlife, as we once were in many places. Even people in the cities would bring back a baby kangaroo or something from the country, but not today. People are so isolated from wildlife today and are then expected to make rational and informed decisions on it, which is very difficult. So I do not have a fundamental problem with that. It is something for experimentation. Maybe it would be beneficial, maybe not.

Senator FERRIS—I am interested in the second sentence in your general introduction. I will read it so you do not need to dig it up. You say:

Australian wildlife legislation . . . is so restrictive and outdated that it is preventing conservation being achieved and contributing actively to the continuing loss of biodiversity.

Could you explain that a little more and, in particular, could you make any suggestions for changes to the federal legislation which might address your statement about the ‘continuing loss of biodiversity’?

Dr Webb—Firstly, we have incredibly strict wildlife legislation and we have tiers of it—at state, territory and federal levels—so we have more than enough controls. In my opinion those controls are so complex and it is so costly to find any way of doing anything against them that most people just walk away from anything with wildlife. People think: why persevere? Why not just chop the trees down and grow sheep? At least then you do not have to contact 35 people to sell the product. They are incredibly restrictive and they were brought in at a time when the philosophy was very different from what it is today.

In terms of actively contributing to the continuing loss of biodiversity, there is one very clear reason: because it has prevented any option of most landowners being able to use native animals, or native habitats in particular, for commercial benefit. Nowhere can you see this more clearly than in the wheat growing areas where, when I was a child, everyone had patches of habitat where the kangaroos used to live and they had dead trees throughout the paddocks. Now, everything that harbours kangaroos is chopped down, for obvious reasons, and every tree is chopped down if it is in the way of the bigger and bigger equipment that they need to try and make farming economic. It does not matter if it has the nesting hole of a black cockatoo.

What we have done with this legislation and its restrictive nature is remove any ability for landowners to be able to value wildlife economically. It will get worse, not better, as rural incomes continue to slide, relative to wages in other sections of the community.

Senator FERRIS—That point was poignantly made this morning when a previous witness pointed out that you can send a black cockatoo overseas if it is dead and stuffed,

but not if it is alive.

Dr Webb—As I say, clever country!

Senator FERRIS—At the bottom of page 2, in the recommendations—and Senator Woodley addressed them briefly—you make a couple of suggestions but you do not actually mention any of the particular wildlife you would like to see incorporated in that experiment. Could you be a bit more specific about that?

Dr Webb—Politically, I think you are not going to be able to get a major change in attitudes within Australia overnight. It has to come slowly—just with the number of people who have got to learn about it; it is a learning experience. The only way that you will be able to advance this area sensibly and get Australia on the path of approaching this whole issue objectively, scientifically and logically is to set a huge chunk of land aside and then start to bring in biologists to study whatever species are there—the lizards, snakes, and whatever else there that may be a market for from that area of land—and with federal government assistance, help and goodwill start to learn what we can use sustainably and what we can market where the demand is. We can at least try to run that as a management experiment.

In the end people may predict, as they did with crocodiles and most other things that have been successful—and probably electricity and various other things that are disastrous—so that you will know. The debate suddenly starts to pale into insignificance because facts are appearing. You suddenly find you can harvest so many of these animals without there being an impact or, maybe, you will find the opposite.

In fact you must be very careful with some of these animals. What happens when you take domestic animals away from some of these habitats? In other words, you can get the experimental evidence that you need and you would have something to stimulate the interest in marketing that it must go on with. You cannot run this stuff independent of experience and knowledge of that market. So it would be an experimental start. If it did not work, okay, you would have strong evidence not to proceed. If it did work, you would have strong evidence because, maybe, you could take some quite vast areas and make more money out of wildlife than you could out of domestic stock.

Senator FERRIS—Did you have a mind that that might be a national park?

Dr Webb—No, definitely not a national park. The one that we do not want is a national park. You want to get some agricultural land—cattle stations or something. You do not want a national park because what you are trying to demonstrate is that by using wildlife, Australia could effectively double the area of habitat in Australia that is maintained in a natural state. We are not doing that at present. We are declaring national parks—

Senator FERRIS—We are certainly not doing it in the national parks.

Dr Webb—No, and they are costing us hundreds of millions of dollars to maintain.

Senator FERRIS—I was interested in the other statement you made and if you could I would like you to explain that. You said that scientific consensus could not be achieved on any single conservation issue.

Dr Webb—It never will. It is the very nature of science. Science recognises no truth: there is no single pathway. Again, it is an area where the public is totally misinformed. They think that scientists get in a room and all come out and agree with one conclusion. It shows a complete lack of understanding of what science is about philosophically and in practice. Scientists will never agree on anything. You cannot get scientific consensus in anything other than the broadest issues, such as that the sun will probably come up in the morning. You do not need to be a rocket scientist to work that out. It is something that people must understand. All the time we see this—‘our scientists’.

Are they good scientists or bad scientists? Scientists are nothing special. There are a whole range of them. I am not convinced that Australian scientists, including me, are all that hot on a world scene. I think that there are lots of mediocre scientists in the country working on pretty critically important problems. I am not sure that it is best for Australia.

Senator FERRIS—It probably goes to show that you can use statistics for anything you want. I found your submission very thought provoking and, just for the record, I wonder whether you could tell us how you came to be in the business that you are in and what you have done in the past that led you to this business.

Dr Webb—I started off at the University of New England in the late 1960s—you get passionately interested in research—mainly on reptiles. I graduated with a PhD. By that time I had already been very active and I had published a lot of papers. I like research. I like being on the cutting edge of knowledge and I like to be faced with complex problems.

The first job I really had was with the University of Sydney under Professor Harry Messel who had a program up here working on crocodiles. I was basically the first biologist on that program. That put me in—

CHAIR—You occasionally write a little like Harry Messel. Maybe he writes like you.

Dr Webb—Yes. He is a complex character but there is a lot to learn from him, I think. I worked out in Maningrida for 1973, 1974, 1975 and 1976. I worked largely in the

field pretty well all the time and formed a very close relationship with Aboriginal people. I was doing research on crocodiles and by that time the pressure was not on for management. But even at that time certainly the relationship with Aboriginal people was based on the idea that eventually the crocodile resource there, that they really had been so involved in from the earliest days of research through all the monitoring that goes on, would be a resource that they could use.

After that I left the University of Sydney and I worked briefly with the Australian Museum. I did not really want to get into a government department or be employed by government, because I do not like to be muzzled—as you have probably noticed. The problem in this area is that everybody is muzzled. Everybody who knows, the professionals, all work for government and they cannot tell you. They tell me but they are not going to tell you as bluntly as I can.

I started then working under contract, so if people wanted us to work on things they could pay us to work on them. I had a very, very close relationship with the Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory until about 1990, when some problems started to develop. At that time we really started to work internationally much more, and now we are brought in on big problems internationally. We are working in Cuba continually on sea turtles; we work in China, Thailand, the Philippines, Japan and Singapore—on different issues. We get brought in in Indonesia.

Believe me, it is not a lucrative industry. We are flat out trying to work out how to make it work but we have been able to set up something privately that pursues research, can pursue research and can operate fast. People sometimes do not like it. It is an unusual thing. We used to publish a lot of research; we do a lot now but do not publish anywhere near as much because it takes so much time. But it has been an interesting exercise. Australians can do it.

Senator FERRIS—You are obviously very well qualified to make the observations that you have. Thank you.

Dr Webb—I think so. I have spent half my life working on these issues in different contexts.

Senator FOREMAN—You mentioned that legal trade does not stimulate illegal trade. Would you like to comment on that?

Dr Webb—Yes, I would like to comment on that. One of the biggest arguments nationally and internationally when the Northern Territory tried to move ahead with its crocodile program, with us pushing it as hard as we could, was this argument that legal trade will stimulate illegal trade. It is a most unusual argument economically; it does not make a lot of sense, for obvious reasons. With crocodiles that argument was put forward very strongly, and now it has been tested, basically.

Legal trade is now heavily promoted by conservationists. The crocodile specialist group of the IUCN has something like 300 members, and they are very strong supporters of sustainable use. They had a major turnaround, mind you. They were highly protectionist and then gradually they had to turn around because, as crocodiles are recovering around the world, they start to eat people. Tanzania lost 140 people or something last year to crocodiles, and that has become serious stuff. It worked.

We do not talk in the crocodile field about the industry—the tanners, the manufacturers, the craftsmen and the skilled workers—as the enemy or the horrible people. They are in together with us, side by side. Zoologists, conservationists, wildlife managers, national parks people, rangers, everyone works together. It is very, very successful. The illegal trade in crocodile skins is at the lowest level it has ever been, partly because the legal trade is operating in such an atmosphere of international cooperation and respect. There are some savage lessons from it, I think. It does not mean it is always going to work but I suspect there is a principle.

As to this concept, the Humane Society of the US is a very strong animal rights organisation. They are continually trying to speak against any trade. What they are saying is no trade—no use; we should all become vegetarians. I do not believe it. Test it and see. Illegal trade in Australian birds would diminish to minuscule levels if Australian birds were available legally. Even if we could pick up the ones on the road that we have killed and stuff them, we might be able to do something. We could revive them. We kill plenty of them.

It is not the matter of killing that is the problem. It is a matter of the clever country being faced with the technical problem of working out how to do it. Once we have got over the philosophical hurdle and worked out technically how to do it so that it can be sustainable and the rewards be equitably set—and we have plenty of people who can do that—I think we will find immediately that the illegal trade will just disappear. The captive breeding of these animals is much more expensive, in the end, than being able to get them from the wild, as it is with crocodiles.

Senator O'BRIEN—I want to take up on that last point about captive breeding. It seems to me that if we are going to allow the export of wild animals, birds will be the first species used. We had some evidence about emus. There are perhaps two million emus in the United States and yet we do not seem to be able to get a viable industry running here. I do not think there is necessarily one in the United States either but that will inevitably create populations of our native species in other countries and potentially dry up any export markets we have. Is there any reason we should be cautious or concerned about that trend for the future if we are going to develop this for economic purposes?

Dr Webb—There obviously is in the long term but the emus are the classic case. Emus are in hot demand in the US; they are \$30,000 to \$40,000 a pair. If we were really the clever country, maybe we would have exported a few thousand and got some revenue

back, but not us. Now we have got nothing out of it and there are too many of them in the US. We have got our farms stocked up and are trying to work out how to solve the marketing problems with emus. The marketing problems are not always easy. I think at the start of my submission I said that the marketing is a key area here. With a lot of wildlife products that we could use, innovative marketing is required. The market for emu oil is well established but the market for skins probably lies in high quality domestic products rather than international products.

But I do not see how you can stop it; that is the problem. This is what has happened all the time. The US has the birds of every country and now they have brought in their bird act and believe me, all the aviculturists have been helping them do it. Now they have closed off the border, they have ensured that the countries of origin will get nothing from the whole program and the price goes up and everyone captive breeds. I am not against captive breeding. I think it is a marvellous thing but it does not have the conservation value. You have this exact situation: they have the birds there and we are getting no value from it here. In the end, you are still going to have to be competitive. But with a lot of wildlife we can be competitive. Black cockatoos I think are an example where you can be competitive. I would be very cautious about all these arguments about the cost of producing a wild bird compared with one captive bred. Test it and see. If you want to see if there is a market for wild birds, test it and see and then make your decision. Do not do it on logic because the market is a funny place. You might find that we could continually supply those animals much cheaper than the captive breeders could. They will all then try to breed them but they still will not be able to breed them as cheaply as we could do it.

The market for wildlife is not going to go up, hit one level and stay there constant forever. The market for nothing does that. You have to be continually innovative and changing or improving your product. Some products may come in and go out but that is the market for everything. That is economic development. You do not suddenly make the light globe and it stays there. Wildlife is no different in my opinion. There are risks but they are not astronomical risks. They are risks the world is used to.

Senator O'BRIEN—One of the arguments that is put is that eventually you no longer have a market for a species. Does that mean that it goes into decline and that it is going to be replaced by another species we see as a market?

Dr Webb—No, I do not think it does. Innovation is an amazing thing. We have a whole committee somewhere set up pursuing it. I do not know whether we are achieving anything. But people become innovative. If you go to the Louisiana area, you will see an example where many areas of their swampland are maintained as swampland, because they make more money from the ducks, the crayfish, the alligators, the frogs and the crawfish—they make more money from that than they do from converting it to agriculture.

Sure, everyone decides not to wear fur coats, thinking they are helping

conservation. The price of nutria skins goes down, it is not economic to hunt the nutrias, the nutrias start eating all the swamp and then everything else starts to suffer. So they have to continually adjust and address things, or they overproduce alligators and crash the world market for a while. Nothing is constant.

Wildlife industries are no different from any other industry. If they are not managed properly, they are going to collapse. If the business side is not run properly, it is going to collapse. It is complicated business and it needs to be developed by professionals. It is not something that, in my opinion, is actually lucrative. If people think it is lucrative, they are having themselves on.

Most of these wildlife industries need to be very carefully put together. They are complex. If you want a venture to get involved in, get involved with sheep, cattle and pigs where there is a 10,000-year history. You get involved with cassowaries or something, believe me, there is no reference book that you can go to; so it is far riskier. It is the nature of development. Australia is a great country. It has great science expertise and we can solve these problems. We should be doing it. If we cannot do it, then we cannot help the rest of the world, let alone ourselves.

CHAIR—I think our time might have expired. I wonder if Michael wanted to add anything. He has been very patiently sitting here, or are there any final comments that either of you want to make?

Mr Vardon—There is nothing in particular, but one of the things that people do not do is associate eating a lettuce sandwich with killing wildlife, but it sure as hell does—the wheat needed to make the bread involves the clearing of the land, or the oil for the margarine; all that sort of thing. Whereas if you see a kangaroo steak on your plate, you think, ‘There’s a dead kangaroo and its mother had a joey in it when it was shot,’ so there is some powerful imagery.

People just do not make the logical connection between cleared land, destruction of wildlife and destruction of habitat. Very clearly, the destruction of habitat is what we are trying to arrest. There are some very good examples in Australia and overseas where habitat destruction has been arrested through the commercial use of wildlife. It is explained perhaps a bit more fully in my submissions and also in some of the references I have supplied there.

Dr Webb—Can I just add that, when you were chasing that data on Aboriginal income for crocodiles, Michael went out and got some data sent in. As Peter Cooke explained, in the last few years, instead of all the money going straight into the NLC and being distributed, some of it goes straight to the councils. For example, in the Arafura Swamp area they instigated their own incubation and the selling of hatchlings just before the 1995-96 season and in that season they brought in \$190,000. Nesting all over the territory goes up and down, and nesting was down last year—they brought in \$108,400.

In Maningrida nearby, now that they have brought in an incubator facility, their income this year from eggs was \$78,150. The previous year when they were just selling eggs, their income probably would have been about \$8,000 to \$9,000. So the stages that Peter was talking about, from getting the first stage right and then going to the second stage, give you more responsibility and give you more investment and everything else. But the income generated is certainly seven or eight times as great and it would have probably paid for the infrastructure costs in the first year, which is pretty remarkable in business.

Senator FERRIS—And have you any idea of job numbers?

Dr Webb—In those areas there would not be many people actually employed doing those things, because when the egg harvest was done it would only involve a helicopter arriving there and one or two people working with the team while they collected the eggs. It may be a week's work three or four times during the season. Now, with the collection and incubation, a couple of people may be involved at each place for the whole incubation period, because they take 90 days to incubate. Incubation starts from about November and goes through to about June. It means a couple of full-time positions. But the money coming back into the communities and its disbursement amongst the people on the basis of a whole bunch of considerations, many of which are traditional, is a pretty important event.

CHAIR—Thank you very much.

Luncheon adjournment

[1.37 p.m.]

MILAYNGA, Mr Peter, Chairperson, Murwangi Community Aboriginal Corporation, Murwangi Station via Ramingining, Northern Territory 0822

MILLPURRURR, Mr George, Executive Member, Murwangi Community Aboriginal Corporation, Murwangi Station via Ramingining, Northern Territory 0822

WILSON, Mr Rydal Arthur, Manager, Murwangi Community Aboriginal Corporation, Murwangi Station, via Ramingining, Northern Territory 0822

CHAIR—We welcome members of the Murwangi community. We would be very happy if there are things you would like to tell us to start with, and then we can ask some questions and start to get some understanding that way.

Mr Wilson—I will submit the photos first. We have got some photographs here. There are some titles underneath the photos which are self-explanatory I think.

CHAIR—This photo shows your crocodile egg incubator?

Mr Wilson—That is right. The shed is not completed yet because the season came on early, but the income from the previous season bought that incubator. It is one of the better incubators that exist. The income from the crocodile eggs built the shed as well.

CHAIR—And then your meatworks is at the back here?

Mr Wilson—That is right, yes.

Senator FERRIS—Are you saying that the income from one year paid for the infrastructure here?

Mr Wilson—The shed and the incubator, not for the abattoir.

Senator FERRIS—Sure.

Mr Wilson—It is quite important that the incubator is low maintenance. It has a digital controller that runs it and adjusts for humidity, so it saves labour in that sense.

Senator FERRIS—It has its own generators, by the look of it.

Mr Wilson—We have a small generator that we run during the night. To save money we switch the main generators off at night if we have not got meat in the chillers. With the whole crocodile operation, the incubator is probably one of the most important pieces of equipment because generally when the swamp floods it drowns, say, 95 per cent

of the eggs, so they do not hatch anyway, and so at a later date we could always release hatchlings if we wished to.

Senator FERRIS—What are the small trees you have growing there?

Mr Wilson—They are mangoes.

CHAIR—Bowen mangoes, I hope.

Mr Wilson—They are a commercial variety.

CHAIR—Do you want us to keep these photographs?

Mr Wilson—Yes, you can keep those.

CHAIR—That is good. The committee is happy to receive those. We may even be able to publish a couple of them in our report.

Senator FERRIS—It would not be a problem if we wanted to do that?

Mr Wilson—That is all right.

CHAIR—Do we have a written submission from you?

Mr Wilson—Yes you do. There is something else that perhaps you might want to look at. It is a safari report actually, but it is about the Nile crocodile in Tanzania where 100 were allowed to be taken for trophies. They are in appendix 1 on the CITES endangered species list, while we are in appendix 2. They allowed the 100, and Australia supported that or did not seek to not support it. You could photocopy that report, but we need it back.

CHAIR—Thank you. We will include that as one of the documents we receive. Would you like us to ask you questions, or is there anything you would like to tell us about the operation?

Mr Wilson—Do you want me to go through it or read it?

CHAIR—We have it in front of us, so there is no need to read it.

Mr Wilson—Okay. You can just ask questions. Something I should point out from the beginning is that our aim in utilising wildlife is that, as you are probably well aware, it comes naturally to Aboriginal people, it is something that they can be very much involved in without any training and it can be on an irregular basis, so it works quite well for us. They have innate skills already, especially the older people, and it is an opportunity.

CHAIR—You are out near Ramingining?

Mr Wilson—Yes.

CHAIR—I have been there. It was many years ago, when the community was first being established.

Mr Milaynga—It was very small.

CHAIR—Yes, it was.

Mr Milaynga—It is very big now.

CHAIR—I flew in there and spent a day. It was not long enough. It is a nice community.

Mr Milaynga—Thank you.

Senator FERRIS—Could you tell us a little more about how you manage the trophy numbers and how you go about selecting who shall come and take the trophies? Do you have your own database there that manages the overall dynamics of your station property or do you send the information back to National Parks?

I am particularly interested in the issue of trophy hunting and how the community uses the money. You have already said that it has gone towards the incubator, and so on, but do you have other priority projects that you are going to put that money into as a means of self-improvement or is it a general revenue issue?

CHAIR—Perhaps you could start by telling us a bit about how the trophy hunting got started, how it operates and what you do with people? If I wanted to go there, what would happen if I turned up and said I wanted to go and hunt a buffalo?

Mr Wilson—You would be told the costs, you would be told what it involved.

Senator FERRIS—How would you decide how many you were going to offer?

Mr Wilson—To shoot buffalo? As many as he wanted to buy. The buffalo is there—we have quite a lot of buffalo; we have only been doing it for two years—and it is whether he is after a specifically large trophy or a small one, how fit he is and those sorts of things. We operate fairly differently. We have a boat and we do tours of the wetland. It would depend on what else he was interested in and how long he wanted to stay.

We would also ask about experience with hunting and shooting. Usually on the first day you have a shot at the target. We see what sort of person you are, how close you

have to be. What it comes down to, in the end, is that you just pull the trigger. Without taking anything away from these people, it depends on your experience. In the end, most of the actual hunting is done by the guide or the people who do it regularly.

Senator FERRIS—What does the hunter take away? Do you keep the animal for the community's food supplies?

Mr Wilson—If the meat is acceptable, we use the meat and he usually takes the horns and the cape. The cape is skun out, the ears are turned inside out, it is packed with salt and sent to a taxidermist, and the head is—

Senator FERRIS—So the price they pay entitles them to do that?

Mr Wilson—That is right. The trophy fee is \$1,000 for buffalo.

Senator FERRIS—Each year, do you look at the number of buffalo you have and decide that, say, this year you will offer 20?

Mr Wilson—No.

Senator FERRIS—How do you go about deciding on the numbers?

Mr Wilson—It is a time frame that determines how many hunters we have with buffalo. We usually only limit it to five or six hunts a year, which is fairly exclusive I guess. We are fully booked this year and we have a few hunts for next year. So the numbers are not a problem. With crocodiles it is a different matter altogether, because there are only so many large males, but the buffalo situation depends on how much time we have got.

Senator FERRIS—What sort of people are they who come? Are they Australians?

Mr Wilson—A lot of them are Americans. Generally, the people taking a crocodile would be people from overseas. They would want to export the hide and the head for a trophy.

Senator FERRIS—Is that a difficulty?

Mr Wilson—It is at the moment because it says that recreational hunting of crocodiles for a profit is prohibited, so that would have to be changed. They could not take it out of the country.

Senator FERRIS—Would you support a change to the legislation to allow that?

Mr Wilson—It would not be a matter of changing legislation. It would just be a

changing of that declaration, because with the new legislation I think we can take a specific number of crocodiles from the wild now. We would support it in that, provided we met a certain criteria, we would be happy to promote the fact that we have a management program in place and we have the ability to release hatchings back into the system. We have a theory that in our wetlands there is a high survival rate of hatchings, higher than normal once they do hatch, but what keeps the numbers down is the total flooding and sudden flooding of the wetlands.

Senator FERRIS—Can you explain to me how the future income is to be used? Have you got a set of priorities for funding from this revenue or is it going to go into general administration?

Mr Wilson—The majority of the trophy fee would go back directly as income to the prime operator, who would be George Millpurrurr and his extended family. Fifty per cent of that would go back into the station general infrastructure and the daily rate would go directly to the station operations.

Senator FERRIS—How important is this income likely to be in the overall profitability of the station in relation to, say, running cattle or any of the other operations?

Mr Wilson—Singly it cannot be considered as crucial, because we are only talking about three or four animals—something very exclusive, very large crocodiles, many that probably do not exist any more on pastoral properties because they have already been shot, because cattle have priority there. So singly, no, it is not so important. But to the general progress of the station it is practically essential: it is something that Aboriginal people can be very personally involved in, because many people there have limited work skills and training, and it provides a direct income from the land for them. As a whole, as a part of the general operation, it is practically essential. All these things, like crocodile egg harvest, become essential to the whole operation.

Senator FERRIS—It is just so interesting to me to see that you have been able to strike the balance between the traditional operation of traditional land and being able to use some of the product from the land to sustain the community. Clearly, that is a balance that we are going to be looking at in relation to other areas in this hearing as well.

Mr Wilson—Yes, it is progressive.

CHAIR—If I were coming out to shoot a buffalo, what would you do with me? Would you supply me with a rifle and would we go in a four-wheel drive? What would happen when I got there? You would have to make sure I could shoot, first, wouldn't you?

Mr Milaynga—You would have to be a good hunter.

CHAIR—Would I bring my own rifle?

Mr Wilson—Generally, yes, something you are familiar with. You require that they can shoot fairly straight.

CHAIR—They need to tell the difference between a buffalo and one of your cattle, I imagine, too. George makes sure of that, does he?

Mr Wilson—I generally run the safari operations; George and Peter are responsible for all the crocodile operations. The hunters can be difficult to manage sometimes and it would require me to be present.

CHAIR—Have you got barramundi on the station too?

Mr Milaynga—Some. Last time George went out there, they got some barramundi.

Mr Wilson—He is talking about the whole area of the crossing and everything, not just the homestead area.

Mr Milaynga—Yes, plenty.

CHAIR—Plenty of barramundi?

Mr Milaynga—We have got a really big swamp.

CHAIR—Do people come there fishing for the barramundi?

Mr Milaynga—You mean white or black?

CHAIR—White and black, both.

Mr Milaynga—Yes, plenty, white and black.

CHAIR—I would be more interested in fishing for barramundi than in shooting buffalo. So if I come it will be barramundi.

Mr Milaynga—For you.

CHAIR—For me.

Senator FERRIS—Do you have lodge accommodation? When the people come to stay, how do you accommodate them?

Mr Milaynga—We have got a small accommodation there, Murwangi Station. It is

not big but it is a good facility, enough to run you there. I think people pay for that.

Mr Wilson—Yes, it is part of the daily rate.

Mr Milaynga—I do not know how much they pay. Ask Joe.

CHAIR—How much do they pay, Joe?

Mr Wilson—For fishing it is \$350 a day per person. The buffalo hunting varies from \$500 to \$700 a day, depending on whether they are taking trophy animals or cull animals.

Senator FERRIS—And you are booked out this year?

Mr Wilson—Yes. We have done three buffalo hunts already and there are another three to do.

Senator FERRIS—And they are all booked?

Mr Wilson—That is it, yes. One of the reasons we started this buffalo hunting was to provide an income for people with buffalo and no cattle on outlying areas. The people in Gatji swamp in particular do not get an income from cattle or crocodiles.

Senator FERRIS—Do you run any cattle?

Mr Wilson—We have 2½ thousand head on the station itself, behind wire. We have probably got access to another 1,000 feral animals.

CHAIR—Do you export?

Mr Wilson—No. We have just been building the herd up for local consumption.

CHAIR—So can you use the abattoirs to slaughter cattle as well as crocodiles?

Mr Wilson—Yes. It would be primarily for cattle. The slaughtering of crocodiles is still very early. We hope to take 50 this year as a trial harvest of certain animals.

Senator O'BRIEN—I was interested in the proposal to harvest the crocodiles from the wild. I think you have just said that you are planning to take 50. Do you need approval for that?

Mr Wilson—Yes. It is not in writing yet. We were told that it is subject to a survey. We already have five years of records on nest sites and numbers—there are probably more nests per square kilometre than anywhere else in Australia—but we would

need to do a spotlight survey and then take a limited number.

Senator O'BRIEN—What size crocodiles will you be looking for when you take the 50? Is there a specific size group?

Mr Wilson—Probably two to three metres.

Senator O'BRIEN—Male only?

Mr Wilson—We do not know yet. We are not sure. When we are egg collecting we regularly see dead crocodiles that have been killed through fighting—territorial.

Senator O'BRIEN—Is there any plan to not only grow hatchlings but grow crocodiles, farm the crocodiles, grow them to a metre and a half or two metres in length for slaughter?

Mr Wilson—Yes. We are pondering now what road to take, because we realise that the hatchling market may be limited—the demand may fall, the price may fall. There are some considerations. We have an abattoir, so we can access cheap meat to feed them. So we are considering it. We even consider an experiment of just simply releasing hatchlings. We are told that because of the predators it would be inconsequential, but we would like to see that proved, to record. Maybe we would completely harvest a billabong of certain crocodiles to minimise their eating the young ones, and release them at a certain time of the year. Maybe we would measure how many were taken in the first year, if there was some way of recording that.

Senator O'BRIEN—It would be interesting.

Mr Wilson—It would be at low cost, because the swamp is very abundant in food by the nature of that particular area. It was not damaged by buffalo like these other areas in the western part of the Northern Territory.

Senator O'BRIEN—I understand you would raise about \$50,000 if you were allowed to cull crocodiles from the wild.

Mr Wilson—Possibly, yes. This year it would be an experiment. It seems we have the opportunity to sell the meat as well. We have been offered a price for that. We have been offered a set amount for the hide as well. It would be an experiment.

Senator O'BRIEN—It would be interesting to experiment with the process of releasing hatchlings into the wild and then, provided you were able to harvest them later, supplementing their feed with your abattoir.

Mr Wilson—Yes.

Senator O'BRIEN—Is there any support being given to the community from outside to achieve those sorts of aims—apart from yourself—or are these initiatives internally created by the community and pursued by the community with the necessary approvals from outside?

Mr Wilson—Are you talking about the Ramingining community?

Senator O'BRIEN—Yes.

Mr Wilson—Murwangi is made up of 30 different land owners as separate from Ramingining community. Perhaps if we involved Ramingining community it would not be successful because of traditional difficulties that date back to the trading days. The reasons that it has worked is particularly because of one family. It has been very strong and very supportive, otherwise I would not still be there either.

Senator O'BRIEN—How long have you worked there?

Mr Wilson—I have worked there for 10 years.

Senator O'BRIEN—I was asking what, if any, assistance you got from outside to pursue these projects?

Mr Wilson—We were initially given \$20,000 from ATSIC for an incubator and a feasibility study. That was the financial support for crocodile resources. We were given support by Graeme Webb's organisation, and now we are seeking support from parks and wildlife in this harvest.

Generally, this release of hatchlings would be our own internal decision. We would see that as being viable in a situation where the price of a hatchling dropped and we may rely more on taking larger animals to compensate for that drop in price.

Senator O'BRIEN—You said you were contemplating farming them to a larger size anyway, not just releasing them but using the waste products from your abattoir to feed them.

Mr Wilson—We would probably consider applying for a licence in the Darwin area and flying the hatchlings in and growing them here, and back loading the barge with meat to feed them. We have a guaranteed supply of hatchlings. We have a supply of food for them. It seems we would have a long-term market for them. People have already talked to us about deals. Long-term it may be an option that we should take. But, because of logistics, we would be better off having a small abattoir in here and a farm in here.

Senator O'BRIEN—In the Darwin area.

Mr Wilson—Yes, because of the freight cost of, say, export meat—sending export meat out.

Senator O'BRIEN—Are there any accredited abattoirs in Darwin? I imagine there must be.

Mr Wilson—For crocodiles, yes, I believe there are. It would not have to be a big abattoir.

Senator O'BRIEN—You allow people to fish the barramundi. I take it that you charge them money for access.

Mr Milaynga—No. Some of them get hungry. If you are there in a remote community, like if the starving guy out fishing has some barramundis for food, that is okay. At least just be careful of the sacred sites. Just go fishing, get something for eating or whatever, and go back. We do not charge them.

Senator O'BRIEN—What if I wanted to go fishing?

Mr Wilson—You would be charged a daily rate.

CHAIR—Charge him! We have got a couple of senators who are very keen fishermen.

Mr Milaynga—He is the government. I don't want to charge him!

Senator O'BRIEN—So sporting fishermen and women would be charged. Would that be just a daily accommodation rate or what?

Mr Wilson—For a boat. They would hire a person and a boat from us as well, and they would be taken there. We have only done it a few times so far, it is still small, but we access the tidal area with an air boat. There is a lot of wildlife. It is quite unique. As you are probably aware, it is listed as Australian heritage.

Senator O'BRIEN—I think you said something about \$300 or \$350.

Mr Wilson—It is \$350 a day, per person.

Senator O'BRIEN—Does that include accommodation?

Mr Wilson—Yes, accommodation and food. It would be a minimum of two people. But generally white people who service the community can walk down, or they drive to the particular fishing area and fish. Provided they do not cause any problems there is no problem with that. People who are living and working in the community can

do that.

CHAIR—Have you fished for barramundi, Senator O'Brien?

Senator O'BRIEN—No, I have not fished for barramundi. You are thinking of Senator Murphy.

Senator FERRIS—There are not many barramundi in Tasmania!

CHAIR—I have fished for barramundi at Aurukun, great fishing. We are obviously interested in barramundi!

Senator O'BRIEN—It is interesting because it is another utilisation of a wildlife resource. Is barramundi one of the taboo areas, excluded from our discussion?

CHAIR—No.

Mr Wilson—Most of the ones that are caught are then released. Some are eaten but most of them are released.

CHAIR—They are wonderful eating, too.

Senator O'BRIEN—Do you think there is scope to increase the revenue from that activity?

Mr Wilson—Possibly, but it would lose acceptance. I guess it amounts to how many people—strangers—the landowners and the people that use that area can stand to see. It is a relatively small area that we have access to, that anyone has access to. That is the nature of a swamp; it is so heavily forested that most of the crocodiles there have never seen a person at all. The wetlands are even wetter than Kakadu wetlands and there is just limited access. Even with the air boat it is limited to an area of only seven kilometres by 15 kilometres. It probably could not take that many people.

Senator O'BRIEN—Is there a particular time of the year?

Mr Wilson—There is, yes. Generally it floods in, say, January and it is wet enough to access, reliably, through to the end of July.

Senator O'BRIEN—It is all very interesting and it sounds very positive.

CHAIR—We would encourage you, and we will have to look into the whole crocodile issue.

Senator O'BRIEN—There is one other issue. Are the mangoes just for the

community's consumption, or do you plan to sell them?

Mr Wilson—They are for sale, yes.

Senator FERRIS—Before you came up with this management system, were crocodiles a problem for the community? Did you lose any people to crocodiles?

Mr Milaynga—No.

Mr Wilson—Did they eat people?

Mr Milaynga—No.

Mr Wilson—In the old days they did, though?

Mr Milaynga—Maybe, yes. They are just talking about way back in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. Three people were eaten by crocs.

Mr Wilson—Until we began the egg collection, we would have problems with them eating cattle and horses. I would talk to George and he would come down and he would take, sometimes, 60 out of the billabong at the front of the house and the swamp would flood and the next year there would not be any difference in numbers. Not many people have seen the swamp or are aware of it. It is probably having a lot of attention drawn to it now with the heritage listing.

CHAIR—I did not see it when I was at Ramingining. How far is it from the community?

Mr Wilson—Thirty kilometres south.

Senator FERRIS—Are you a scientist? What is your background that has taken you up there and kept you there for 10 years?

Mr Wilson—I was a stock contractor. I used to muster buffalo and catch feral bulls and I took on a contract there in 1986. I was only going to be there for two years.

Senator FERRIS—And you are still there?

Mr Wilson—Yes, it was very challenging. It was very isolated then; there was little attention. There is a lot of potential there if it is managed properly. I am sure there is a balance.

CHAIR—Is it within the Arnhem Land area?

Mr Wilson—Yes.

CHAIR—All right. I think that is all the questions. Thank you very much. It is very interesting. It is a pity we do not have a few days to come out. That would be very good for us. We will talk to the lady over here who arranges our travel and next time perhaps we should come out. Is there anything else you wanted to say?

Mr Milaynga—You can catch a large crocodile with my dad.

CHAIR—Yes, by the tail. Thank you very much.

[2.14 p.m.]

READER, Mr Phillip Roy, Owner, Northern Territory Cockatoo Breeding and Research Centre, 2/60 Aralia St, Nightcliff, Northern Territory 0810

Thank you for coming, Mr Reader. We have your written submission for which we thank you.

Mr Reader—I am also speaking on behalf of Mr Peter McGrath for the Northern Territory Parrot Breeding and Export Centre.

CHAIR—We believe he is not well.

Mr Reader—He may be interstate.

CHAIR—We have read your written submission but if you would like to make some comment or an opening statement, we would be very happy to hear that and then we will talk to you.

Mr Reader—My submission that I put in was short and sweet. A lot of other people have covered many of the objections, given what I have read in the *Hansard*. I will give a brief overview of what we have been about. I am an aviculturist first, with a love of birds. We were given the opportunity about eight or 10 years ago, in conjunction with the Northern Territory Conservation Commission, to take from the wild 50 red-tailed black cockatoos down in the Tortilla Flats region of the Northern Territory, which is about 80 kilometres south of Darwin. These birds were creating a problem at that stage for rice farmers, and the birds had been shot previous to that.

There were so many birds there. I could not count the number of birds but it was something like a scene from Hitchcock's movie *The Birds*. There were between 5,000 and 15,000. The birds were taken from the wild. We tried to take mainly young birds. Out of the 50 birds that we did take, we ended up with a few extra male birds. From 98 per cent of those birds we have bred in a captive breeding situation.

With all those birds we have done hand raising, which is labour intensive. The birds are taken from the adults at approximately five days old and hand raised. They have all been close banded, which is a stainless steel ring which we have imported from America with a numbering system on it. The only way it can be removed, if they have to be cut off, is with bolt cutters. These rings can only be put on the birds when they are under 21 days old.

Also, the birds have been microchipped in conjunction with the NT Conservation Commission. We have also done DNA profiling of the birds. I did make a mistake there. It was not Murdoch University, it was Curtin University that carried out the studies for us.

A profile has been kept on file at the university in regards to any parentage discrepancies. This was not a requirement under the conservation commission act or anything like that for us to do this, we just carry it out. If the chance ever did come forward in regards to exporting these birds, we would satisfy certain CITES and other countries' regulations in regards to these.

As I said, the birds, when you hand raise them, do take between eight to 12 months, and it is labour intensive to actually raise the birds. As previous speakers have said about taking the birds from the wild, or young ones from the wild, it is not just a simple process of bringing them back and then selling them. It is labour intensive. For example, you virtually start at 6 o'clock in the morning with your first feed and the last feed of a night can be at 2 o'clock in the morning. There are certain heating requirements that are required for the birds. There is also sterilisation. They are treated exactly the same way as you treat a baby. There is no difference with sterilisation and cleanliness of the area that you have them in.

We do not keep them in cages. When people refer to a cage, it conjures up the picture that they are kept in cocky cages. They are not. All the birds are kept in aviaries and the aviaries are six metres in length, 2.4 metres high and approximately 1.5 metres wide. We try and give them exactly what they do get in the wild.

I live on five acres and we do a lot of study in regards to what the birds eat, especially at this time of year when we have our fires and that around the area and we do get a lot of cockatoos migrating into the area. In the burnt areas they eat a lot of nuts and seeds that become available or are seen by the birds. We try and provide that. They eat acacias, and there are certain other native nuts and branches that we give them. As I said, it is labour intensive in regards to the young ones. It does not matter whether they are taken from the wild or captive bred.

I was recently in America and I tried to ascertain prices. A couple of years ago we sent out faxes while we were waiting for this type of situation with the Senate. We wanted to find out what type of birds overseas people were after, and also prices. I received no replies. I sent about 30 out and received no replies from any of the prominent breeders. Then it was brought to my attention by Dr Grahame Webb that I would be setting off alarm bells in regards to smuggling, as if I were trying to illegally send birds out of this country. That is one of the reasons we did not receive anything. Recently, while we were over there, the figures that we got back from aviculturists over there were for prices between \$US15,000 and \$US35,000 for a pair of birds.

The species of bird that we have here is called *Macrorhynchus magnificus*. That is the territory red-tailed black from the northern region, which goes right across the Top End of Australia. That was another reason we were permitted to trap the birds originally, because of the purity of the birds throughout Australia and amongst collections. There are up to five or six different species of the red tails and a lot of people do not know the

direct genetics and parentage of a lot of the birds they have.

I tried to export some feathers recently from our red-tailed blacks. They moult every year and they do have some beautiful feathers, if you have seen the males. I wanted to bring along a couple of subjects here today—expert witnesses!—but I think they would have chewed the microphones and a few other things. These are hand-raised birds that we still have.

CHAIR—We saw some in Brisbane.

Mr Reader—They are great companions. They would have chewed the microphones and a bit of the woodwork also. But to try and export the feathers there were problems I had to go through to try and get them out of the country. They required a DNA profile and all of that, and the costs to get that carried out outweighed the whole process.

I was also involved in the working party approximately four or five years ago which was a forerunner for the draft strategy for the wildlife management of red-tailed blacks. The environment centre was invited—they had a position put aside for them on the working party—and they declined to be involved at that stage too. Everything has been done in conjunction with the conservation commission with regard to public hearings; they have had their opportunity to become involved in it and it seems that a lot of times there is stumbling block after stumbling block thrown up amongst them. That is why, as with a lot of aviculturists, I am always very afraid—and I subscribe to a lot of journals throughout the world—of saying that I am an aviculturist and advertising what I do carry out. I am very scared as regards animal liberation groups. I had a lot of my birds let out a few years ago by someone—persons unknown. A lot of these birds, once they are captive bred, will not survive in the wild. They require whatever I can provide for them.

CHAIR—That is very good. Thank you.

Senator O'BRIEN—How old were these cockatoos when they were taken?

Mr Reader—That was very hard. We took the birds and there were problems that happened with regard to the ages of the birds. We did not know what the ages were. There is no way to actually guess the age of a bird.

Senator O'BRIEN—How did you catch them?

Mr Reader—We caught them with a mist net. We used to set up approximately at dawn and we would be there the whole time. They were not that easy to catch. We caught them in rice bays where they have been harvesting rice. What happened was that the birds just flew along the paddock. There were quite a few of us there to take them out—they would have only been in the net for approximately 30 seconds. They were taken out and

put into holding aviaries. Then we ran a regime of worming the birds and there were anti-stress and a lot of other husbandry things that we carried out. As I said, there were no losses with any of those birds at all.

Senator O'BRIEN—How long did it take them to adapt to captivity?

Mr Reader—They were actually feeding on rice in that area. We ran them as a quarantine program; we did not introduce them to any of the aviaries. We held them at the residence of one of the aviculturists and they were kept there for six weeks. They were monitored for a variety of worms, parasites et cetera. They were kept there and fed rice. We took rice from the area. We introduced them to nuts and everything like that. It did take a while. A lot of other aviculturists throughout Australia said that they would only eat sunflower seed. We have them eating almonds, a lot of the wild foods that we give them, vegetables et cetera, so they will adapt.

Senator O'BRIEN—I presume that these birds are not intended to be sold in Australia.

Mr Reader—We have put up a tender system because of the purity of the birds, the first of this direct species being available on the market. For 4½ months we were receiving up to four calls a day from people within Australia and, because of the magazine I advertised through, we received numerous calls from overseas, with inquiries about the birds from European countries. Again, no figures were forthcoming about what they wanted to pay; they were just inquiring about the availability of birds. The market within Australia is limited. We sold a pair of birds last year to Kuranda aviaries in Cairns. They were hand-raised birds. They have sold for \$5,000 a pair and the price has now dropped dramatically.

Senator O'BRIEN—Are these birds only sold in pairs?

Mr Reader—No, they are not. We cater not just for aviculturists. I would prefer a lot of these to go, to start with, to breeding situations, but you do cater also for the pet bird trade. With regard to America you are talking about a population of about 270 million people. Just to see what people will buy there and the service that is carried out in the bird trade in America is mind-boggling. It is treated exactly like a hospital or an adoption agency. They actually get out adoption certificates for their so-called baby. Some of the breeding centres look like hospitals with big viewing windows where they can come and view their so-called babies, and hand raise or help feed the babies. It is a very big market. As Dr Bill Freeland said, it will take many, many years to saturate the market because you are not only supplying for aviculturists, you are supplying for Joe Bloggs down the road who just wants something unusual.

Senator O'BRIEN—Would it be viable to take birds from the wild and sell them for domestic use?

Mr Reader—I had input into the draft policy that was put out recently. I was against taking adult birds from the wild for the pet trade. For specialised aviculturists, who have the time and who understand the birds, I cannot see much of a problem—within the domestic market, that is.

My thoughts are that only eggs and juveniles should be taken from within the logs or nesting sites, not from out in the field. Our idea behind that is that there is less stress for the bird. As I said, you do not know sometimes what the ages of the birds are when you take them from the wild, out in the field, if they are caught in the nets. But we have proved, in our situation and with fellow aviculturists, that by taking an egg from the nest, from your own breeding set-up, the bird will usually go down again within two weeks. So it is a form of farming. We do not take them continually, so you are not running them like a battery hen or anything like that.

What some members have been doing is just taking one egg and letting her raise the next one. They usually lay one egg—this is with the species up here—and they look after that bird for approximately 12 months. Then she will lay again in the following year. They stick together as a family unit. The young one does stay with the adults for a couple of years at least.

Senator O'BRIEN—These birds naturally live in a fairly warm climate. Do they adapt to cooler climates? You are talking about sending them to, say, the United States.

Mr Reader—Yes, they do. A lot of the Americans actually keep their so-called pet birds as a member of the family and they are kept inside the house. Because we are talking about birds that are not cheap—they are an expensive commodity—aviculturists throughout the world will have heated cages and everything you can think of to supply comfort for the birds. If the birds are not happy they will not breed. As I said, the macrorhynchus, the red-tailed species that is up here, does survive down south—a different species again.

Senator O'BRIEN—How far south?

Mr Reader—They are all throughout Australia. We have different species of red-tails throughout Australia. We have ones down in the Alice Springs region which are a little bit different from our Territory ones. The Northern Territory ones are the biggest ones in Australia. We have other ones down in Western Australia which are the smallest ones of the lot. There are big size differences and visual differences amongst the birds.

Also, everyone thinks the old galahs are the same throughout Australia. They are not; there are differences in those. Aviculturists throughout the world would pay big money for the difference in the galahs. Our galahs up here are smaller, they are a lot paler in colour. They are a species called the kuhli. They are in demand because not many aviculturists have had the availability of these birds, and the same goes with our sulphur-

crested cockatoos et cetera. There are differences in our birds throughout Australia.

CHAIR—In your submission you say:

By opening up controlled exportation of Australian Birds it would dramatically decrease the smuggling of our wildlife plus earn export revenue.

This is a position that has been put in a number of places, and certainly it is of interest to this committee even though it tends to be a little bit on the edge of our inquiry. Are you aware of smuggling within the Northern Territory?

Mr Reader—Not through the Northern Territory. We hear whispers. An example I can put up was in the *Australian Bird Keeper* magazine. Our red-tail or red-tail black cockatoos are predominantly black with red tail—that is for the adult male; females and juveniles are actually black with a speckling throughout their body. There was this mutation that was actually seen in the wild; it was a pied mutation. There was a lot of white throughout the whole body. It was publicised in the magazine that this bird was in a certain region of Western Australia and over a couple of months—this magazine goes throughout the world—that bird disappeared. I am not saying that it was taken by a hawk or it was trapped, but the bird disappeared. You are talking, with something like that type of bird, of many thousands of dollars. It does not matter whether you are a collector of stamps or a collector of whatever, some people will pay anything to get a hold of something they want.

CHAIR—You say:

To say in this day and age that exportation can not be controlled is a fallacy.

You are talking about the ringing of the birds and the DNA microchip—

Mr Reader—That is correct, yes.

CHAIR—That ensures that—

Mr Reader—As I said, the stainless steel ring—and it is an enclosed ring—can be put on only under 21 days of age. You have to fold the toes back—it is not painful for the bird or anything like that—to actually slip it onto the bird's leg. We have a numbering system—I will have my business name or initials placed on the ring plus a number—so we can cross-check it.

The microchip is also placed into the bird; and we have done that in conjunction with the conservation commission, and we have the DNA profile. The profile can be kept for as long as you like by an independent body, the Curtin University. If there are any discrepancies with regard to the parentage or if someone wants to pull a swift by saying,

'I bred this'—and cases have been proven now amongst aviculturists where they have said they have bred it—a DNA profile can be carried out and proved they have falsified records. We can tell when the birds have been taken from the wild.

All of these types of things will stop. I am not saying that it will ever get rid of smuggling because some opportunists will try to do something illegal, but we have tried to cover every loophole we could with regard to answering critics as to how you stop this and stop that and how you can fail-safe the system. I do not know what else we can do. I am all ears to any other ideas that do not endanger the birds.

CHAIR—What has been done sounds pretty sophisticated to me. I am just a layman. In terms of control of illegal activity such as that, is that part of the duties of parks and wildlife or police in the Northern Territory, do you know?

Mr Reader—We have got a very good working rapport with the Conservation Commission up here. Most of them do not suffer, as a lot of aviculturists interstate do, with the jackbooted gestapo activities that some regulatory authorities seem to carry out. We have a good working relationship with the Conservation Commission up here. They are willing to try things. They got criticised here eight years ago when we took the 50 from the wild. All these types of things were coming up from interstate: 'All you are doing is opening the door up for illegal trade.' Well, it is proven that that is not the case.

CHAIR—None of the ones who were here today had jackboots on.

Mr Reader—No. As I said, we have a very good relationship with the Conservation Commission. We work hand in glove. We do have input in regard to working plans, et cetera.

CHAIR—I do not know if it is a fair question to ask and you certainly do not have to answer any of our questions, but are you able to tell me the average retail price for a pair of black cockatoos in Australia?

Mr Reader—As I explained before, the last pair I sold last year was for \$5,000. That was for a pair of birds. The price has gone down dramatically. I have not sold any this year—I have kept some of my birds—but I have heard it has gone down dramatically this year. As I said, there is only a limited market within Australia.

A lot of our birds seem to do cycles. For example, there is a hooded parrot here which is endemic to the Northern Territory; it lives down in the Pine Creek region. It nests in termite mounds, the same as the golden-shouldered parrot from Queensland. Approximately two or three years ago, you could not buy them for under \$500. Now they are around for about \$60 a pair, I think. So everything seems to do a cycle. But when you are starting to ask the money that is demanded for the red-tails, you are only supplying or looking at a limited market here within Australia.

Senator FERRIS—You have partially answered the question that I was going to ask, but I will ask it again just in case there is anything that you want to add. The argument against the export of Australian native birds is that it will not do anything to change the culture of smuggling and the price of birds on the black market. Clearly, the leg ringing and the DNA testing mean that it would be possible to have a regulatory environment for the export, but do you have any other comments to make on the argument that goes along the lines that the illegal smuggling trade will continue and the legitimate export will not affect that?

Mr Reader—I think it will affect it. You are supplying a market of people that want an object. As I explained before, whether it be snakes, lizards or whatever, if someone wants something they will pay whatever it takes to get it, one way or another. By actually allowing legal exportation of the birds—our doors have been closed here so many years and the comments that we get overseas are that it is one of the most stupid laws; people ask why we do not do it, why we cannot legally export the birds—you will reduce dramatically the aspect of the smuggling of these birds. As I explained, I do not think you will ever stamp out smuggling, but you will reduce it dramatically. You will always find that someone will be an opportunist and will take something they should not be taking.

The ones that we hear about these days in regard to the smuggling are eggs. Apparently, a lot of people do not smuggle out live birds; they take them out as eggs. Customs occasionally make arrests in regard to people smuggling out eggs; some of those people can have up to 100 or 200 eggs on their bodies. They are quite easy to hide. It is easy to travel the distance between one country to another: they will be, say, in the United States, having flown from Sydney within 13 or 14 hours, and the body heat regulates the egg temperature.

Senator FERRIS—You say that they are easy to carry, but I would have thought it would be pretty difficult to carry so many eggs without breaking them.

Mr Reader—Just from some of the ones we have seen and what Customs have put out, there are actually women placing them in their bra. I suppose if one lady goes from a size 32 up to a size 48, it may be a bit of a give-away, but somewhere on the body—

Senator FERRIS—You wouldn't want a rough flight!

Mr Reader—You might have scrambled eggs at the end. We have heard that it is not only the eggs but also people smuggling snakes. It is just some of the body—

Senator FERRIS—No, I draw the line at that.

Mr Reader—I will not say where they are secreted, anyway. We see it through Customs, and they say that they get only a small percentage of smugglers. So we do not

know; that is what I alluded to at the bottom. Let us take it out through the front door, not the back door, where someone else reaps all the work that we do within Australia and the conservation advantages that we did have with the birds. As I said, it will dramatically decrease the amount of smuggling in regard to the birds. People do want our wildlife—and not just birds.

Senator FERRIS—And they want them in good condition.

Mr Reader—That is right. We have an onus. I would not sell any of our birds in that way, because it represents what comes out of my place. There are always people who say that amongst aviculturists there are quite a few dodgy ones who will sell you a bird that they say is two years old when it is 20-something years of age. I am trying to start a business in regard to that. I am starting from scratch—all I am using is my expertise to set up the situation. It is a long, long process and, as I said, I am trying to build up a reputation for selling quality products, if you like to call them that.

Senator O'BRIEN—Who should be licensed to take eggs or young from the wild?

Mr Reader—I have read Grahame Webb's *Sustainable utilisation of wildlife*. It can be Aboriginal groups, it can be land holders. I must say there is not much known in regard to where red-tails breed, but we see it still up here now that farmers will go and clear 100 per cent of their property to grow something, whether it be \$1,000 worth of rice or whatever. But they have had the opportunity, by leaving a few hollow trees, of selling something worth many, many times more than that.

I say this again: when we were down at Tortilla Flats, where they were actually shooting the birds because they were getting into the rice crop, I asked one of the small land holders down there what the price of their crop was. It was worth \$10,000, he said, for the area he had. There was enormous tourist potential of that area, of what he had there, because he had thousands of red-tailed black cockatoos; there were a couple of hundred brolgas, there were finches, hawks. It was a mecca for birdwatchers or just any tourist to come and photograph the area. It was just beautiful in regard to the birds and the wildlife living there, and the potential he could have made out of utilising what he had there—not by the traditional farming method but through eco-tourism—was enormous.

Senator O'BRIEN—Suppose ultimately there was a change to Commonwealth legislation and you were permitted to export a live bird or pairs. Are there any restrictions in existence in the United States or Europe as to the importation of those birds?

Mr Reader—Yes. I know that a lot of this work comes back to a lot of animal liberation groups throughout Europe. They have actually lobbied airline companies not to carry wild, trapped birds. Again this is subsistence level for a lot of the people throughout Africa in regard to African grey parrots and a lot of other birds, which were their livelihood. They cannot ship these birds out any more, because of the power of the animal

liberation groups throughout Europe. They have actually forced it onto airlines not to carry these wild, caught birds.

Within America I know there are changes in their CITES act over there in regard to certain birds. There have to be some changes that will happen over there, and apparently it is in process now. But in the market, as I said, in America, Japan, you are talking of millions and millions of people in regard to what is available.

Senator O'BRIEN—So there is no restriction on getting into America?

Mr Reader—There is at this stage in regard to the birds. I am pretty sure you are not permitted to ship in wild, trapped birds. I am pretty sure you can get captive birds in, but there are changes with the CITES agreement or something they had over there in America. It was explained to me by a gentleman in America, 'You have a lot of trouble trying to import birds into America.' So we will just have to wait and see what they do change over there.

Senator O'BRIEN—I suppose it is critically important, if ultimately you do get the go-ahead to export them, that there are actually countries that you are allowed to export to that have the capacity, the financial resources, and the market for the birds.

Mr Reader—Yes.

Senator O'BRIEN—Is it possible to get any more concrete information about access to markets?

Mr Reader—I can go through with the Conservation Commission and through Dr Webb. He is more across the board of what the legalities are with them. It is a minefield in regard to CITES and all the rest of it, plus the legislation that they have in place over there. But I can access that information.

Senator O'BRIEN—That would be good. Thanks, Mr Reader.

CHAIR—Phil, I guess you have read Peter McGrath's—

Mr Reader—I have only read part of it, to be honest.

CHAIR—I will just see whether you would like to express an opinion on this bit. He is talking particularly about habitat clearing as being a very big problem for maintaining black cockatoo numbers. He says that really, without some financial incentive for protection of habitat, it simply will not happen because land-holders will continue to clear. Is that your opinion?

Mr Reader—Yes, I quite agree with that. That goes in regard to *Sustainable*

utilisation, written by Dr Webb again, in regard to that. His words are, I think, that anything has virtually got an 'intrinsic value'. If we retain a kilometre of scrub or what might look like dead trees, et cetera, something lives in it. We seem to go the other way all the time. As I said, we see in a lot of the areas up here that 100 per cent of the land is cleared for crops or mango plantations. Then we have the problem of the farmers complaining because all the birds are coming in and feeding on the trees, on the mangoes. Rambutans is another one up here, where the lorikeets come into them into regularly. What they have done is actually cleared all the land, all the natural food sources which they have been utilising for many, many years. And the next best thing is some juicy rambutans. It does cost a lot of farmers up here, who have to actually net acres of land to keep the birds out.

CHAIR—Peter sets out a way in which harvesting from the wild and protection of habitat, et cetera, could be done—it is very useful for the committee to have that—in which there are predetermined royalties, harvesting from particular areas, et cetera, which I think is useful. I presume we can just take that on board as being one way of making this happen but ensuring protection as well, ensuring a conservation value.

Mr Reader—I think a lot of that goes hand in glove in regard to the crocodile industry, where they pay royalties, and conservation, as previous speakers have said, in regard to the swamps, et cetera. I think it goes hand in glove.

CHAIR—There being no further questions, we thank you very much. It is difficult coming at the end of a long hearing like this. Your evidence has been quite unique but has added to the previous evidence we have had. So we thank you once again. It has been very useful, I might say; today's evidence has been very valuable to this inquiry.

Committee adjourned at 2.49 p.m.