



Kristin Murray
Executive Officer
Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee
Level 8
35 Spring Street
Melbourne Vic. 3000

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Dear Kristin

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY – FATALITIES AND INJURIES ON VICTORIAN FARMS

The Ouyen Farm Safety Expo Committee conducts an annual three-day event on farm safety education and awareness for children supplemented by a session for families. Ouyen is a small rural community situated in the dryland farming (predominately cropping) region of the North West Mallee.

This event has won several awards including: -

- 2003 National Safety Council of Australia/Telstra Award of Excellence for Farm Safety - Best Practical Strategy to Reduce Risk in Rural Industries.
- Vic. Farmsafe Alliance Jack Dawson Perpetual Trophy for the Most Active Farm Safety Action Group 2003
- Mildura Rural City Council Community Event of the Year 2002
- Finalist in Worksafe Victoria Awards 2003 for Best Strategies for Health and safety Management

The organising committee takes great pleasure in offering this submission into your parliamentary inquiry.

Yours sincerely

Kathryn John
Chairman
Ouyen Farm Safety Expo Committee
27 Thorne Street
OUYEN VIC 3490
Ph. 50921059
e-mail ikjohn@iinet.net.au

"The Governor in Council, under section 4F of the Parliamentary Committee Act 1968 requests that the:
Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee of Parliament inquire into, consider and report to Parliament on:

1. The main causes of fatality and injury on Victorian farms and other primary industries compared to other jurisdictions.
 - ❖ Fatigue due to long hours of physical work especially during the busy periods on farms i.e. harvest and cropping.
 - ❖ Farms are generally places where families live, work and play and this mix of activity leads to a greater potential for accidents
 - ❖ At times, a lack of awareness of appropriate farm safety precautions
 - ❖ Inappropriate safety mechanisms on farm machinery that do not allow for safe use of the machine along with practical, adequate and effective application to a particular job. This is a design and engineering issue and often exacerbated by the cost of the equipment.
 - ❖ Stress
 - ❖ The nature of farming with large complex machinery, the unpredictable nature of animals and working alone in an isolated area.

2. The matter and type of these injuries compared to other industries and jurisdictions.

N/A to this particular submission

3. Current programs and initiatives designed to improve OH&S on Victorian farms

The Ouyen Farm Safety Expo

Background

A dedicated group of concerned and enthusiastic people in the Mallee community of Ouyen has created a unique and award winning event to address the issue of a high number of incidents, injuries and deaths to members of their dryland farming community and industry.

It is important to educate children, and their families both farming and non-farming to create safe farms and farming practices so that a future generation of farmers are well versed in the dangers of living and working on farms.

Aims

- to implement an education process and awareness campaign primarily targeting children, to avoid the economic and social disruption to farming families, their communities and industry caused by farming accidents.
- to encourage a cohesive approach to community issues such as farm safety where the community takes responsibility for addressing its own specific needs and has ownership of the approach taken to do so.

Expected Benefits

- Children living, working and visiting on farms will be aware of farm safety issues and will share this knowledge with their peers and families
- Lowering of the social and economic cost of farm accidents to the family, community and industry
- Children learn correct procedures and avoid the need for retraining later in life.

The Event..

is held on a working farm at Timberoo via Ouyen. In 2003, over 500 children, 80 teachers and helpers attended the three-day event from 22 schools within a radius of 100kms of Ouyen. Year 8 (14-15 years) students attended the first day and Year 3 (8-9 years) students attended the subsequent two days.

Workshops are held during the course of the day and the students are rotated through a selection of five of the 20+ practical and interactive workshops on offer.

"Sample bags" with safety messages are provided to each child. The content for these is collected over a twelve-month period and collated into the bags by students of the local Secondary College.

A program that fits the Curriculum and Standards Framework of schools is offered into the participating schools before the event and some schools use the contents of the sample bags for further lessons after the event in their normal school program. This is part of a general awareness campaign of farm safety aspects that is ongoing in the lead up to and during the event. Signage, shop window displays, advertising and promotion are also considered an important part of this general public awareness campaign.

A logo and the colours of black and orange are now well known throughout the region as synonymous with the EXpo.

Children's safety was assured during the event with a committee member designing and implementing an Emergency Management Plan (EMP) in the event of any incident.

A "Farm Safety Evening for Families" complemented the day sessions for children. This allowed adults and other children to participate in the interactive workshops. A farm safety message is delivered by previous victims/survivors. This is a powerful means of educating farmers and others to the devastating impact of a farm safety accident or death.

Evaluation of children, parents, teachers and presenters is undertaken after the event.

Workshops

- were held in a range of areas focussing on: - ATV's, off-road bikes and vehicles, first aid in isolated areas, fires, safety around large machinery, basic driving safety in an old farm vehicle, safety around guns, snakes, sheep, water, buildings, horses, silos, chemicals etc.

Sponsorship and Support

Considerable funding is required to stage the event (\$16,000) and this is received through grants, sponsorship and donations collected in the twelve months leading up to the Expo. Partnerships with the local community, businesses, organisations, VFF, State Government agencies, local government and health services is paramount to successfully conducting this event.

Over 400 hours of volunteer assistance was tallied during the week of the 2003 Expo showing great support for this particular farm safety campaign in this community

A CD-ROM on organising such an event is currently being produced. This has been undertaken by the Committee and reliant on successful funding submissions and fundraising by volunteers.

4. Any impediments to sustaining improvements in farm safety.

- Adequate funding and support for educational and awareness programs such as the Ouyen Farm Safety Expo and the CD-ROM.
- Limited use of technology for education purposes to encourage safe farming practices e.g. internet, CD ROM's, DVD etc
- The average age of farmers and available affordable safety mechanisms
- Design of farm machinery that is both safe and does not impede its suitable effective use.
- Lack of consultation during the design process between those who utilise the machinery and the manufacturers esp. of imported machinery
- Isolation of rural properties, inadequate communication technology and road infrastructure for prompt response of emergency vehicles to an incident
- Lack of practical, interactive and meaningful education and training for farming families such as access to events like the Ouyen Farm Safety Expo. Often programs that are funded are not the preferred method of learning for farmers.
- Perception that measures used to improve farm safety are punitive, expect onerous documentation and intrusive.

5. The financial and social cost of death and injury on Victorian farms.

There is no doubt death or injury on farms has a huge impact on the victim, their family and their community. This is in dollar terms but the emotional and social impact is equally devastating and can only be measured in a quantitative manner. Loss working hours for the victim, and/or the family as they take on a carer role equates to loss of income. A community will rally behind the victim or his or her family and attempt to pick up the workload but this is something they can only undertake for the short term. Rural communities are traditionally close knit and emotionally a community as a whole grieves for the loss of one of their own. This can bring a whole community to a standstill, impede its well being and vitality. Often it seems that after a farming accident, those directly involved face a higher risk of becoming socially isolated and fragmented with ongoing issues such as marital problems especially if the incident involves a child. The impact can be far reaching and long term as families may leave the community.

6. The need for further strategies to reduce the incidence of injury and fatality on Vic. farms, what form the strategy should take and whether they are best developed by govt. agencies, industry bodies, worker reps or a combination of these.

- These are best developed with a combination of input from farmers, rural community members and industry bodies. It is important that rural communities and the industry is encouraged and supported to create solutions to this issue of farm safety.
- The Ouyen Farm Safety Expo is an example of an event created by a community to address their own situation and needs that is both successful and has impact. It offers a practical and interactive means of learning about farm safety that suits children and the farming community. Evaluation of this project is indicating that by educating children, there is a heightened awareness of farm safety issues throughout the community and change is being implemented on farms and households locally.
- Manufacturers need to work with those who use their equipment to best create safe and useful implements that attain national safety standards before they are sold.
- Current personnel involved in safety to work side-by-side with the farming community in a non-threatening proactive role.