

CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

RURAL AND REGIONAL SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into cause of fatality and injury on Victorian farms

Horsham – 11 March 2004

Members

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Mr B. P. Hardman
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Witness

Mr M. Blake, Farmer.

The CHAIR — We have some time set aside for anyone who would like to make some comments from the floor. I wish to advise all present at these hearings that the evidence you give us is, under the provisions of the Constitution Act and the Parliamentary Committees Act, granted immunity from judicial review, but obviously any comments made by witnesses outside the committee's hearings are not protected by parliamentary privilege.

Please make your comments brief. I know you have a couple of issues that you are very keen on, and your comments will be recorded and sent to you in a transcript. You will be able to correct any obvious errors of fact or grammar, but not matters of substance. Please give us your full name and address.

Mr BLAKE — Michael Blake, Ballyglunin Park, PO Box 56, Hamilton.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Michael. I advise committee members that Michael has put in a written submission to us.

Mr BLAKE — I put in a written submission to you for two reasons. I have worked closely with the late Eric Young and Ron Ruff in promoting farm safety from a farmer's point of view. Ron asked me to put in a submission from the farming enterprise, and I also sit independently on the steering committee of the Victorian Farm Safety Training Centre. I have presented a few recommendations based on my farming outcomes, but even sitting here today the thing that I have become very conscious of is the difference between being proactive and reactive. In my organisations we have always had a very proactive attitude to farm safety and occupational health and safety. In the course of developing that proactive system Eric and Ron approached me to present my manual on safety, which subsequently became the standard for the Safetymap farms program and won a Victorian Workcover award in 2000. That has all been documented.

Even here today the part that presents itself most is that most people are using the terminology 'You have to' rather than 'You can', and that is a stance that we use constantly in our farming enterprise. We say, 'You can do this' and not, 'You have to do this'. As a result of that, just on a commercial basis, we have a waiting list for casual and full-time employment. We have negotiated insurance rate reductions based on risk management. We have negotiated bank interest rate reductions, and the philosophy of tour groups is enhanced. We are a preferred supplier by all of our commodity brokers, and they are positive about it. What I am trying to say here is that these are things that, given a positive rather than a negative stance, people can achieve.

In my presentation basically there are three areas I was concerned about. One is that I work with a lot of apprentices, both in their training and their on-farm work. I see them as extremely vulnerable on the farms that they go to. I have heard even here this morning that the training and delivery of occupational health and safety between the institutes that deliver it is quite different. I have had the opportunity to have apprentices at two different training institutes both doing the same outcomes. One institute gives the short course and the other gives the higher priority. That was one of my recommendations, that a standard of delivery across all OHS training to apprentices has to be recognised.

The second one is the Victorian certificate of applied learning, where I have vocational education students come in as well as university graduates coming for experience. They need to have a training module. I deliver a day training module for university students, but VCAL students come in groups. They need to be protected as well.

The other area is the residual currency devices implementations and recommendations. I felt that that was a very easily installed operation that would safeguard all personnel working on farms. It is mandatory in new building establishments, and I cannot see why it cannot become mandatory for agricultural farming enterprises. Basically they are the recommendations that I put to this committee.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Michael, for taking the opportunity of using the comments from the floor, and thank you for your submission and recommendations as well.

Witness withdrew.