CORRECTED VERSION

RURAL AND REGIONAL SERVICES DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the cause of fatality and injury on Victorian farms

Melbourne – 24 November 2003

Members

Mr M. P. Crutchfield  Mr R. G. Mitchell
Mr B. P. Hardman  Dr D. V. Napthine
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Witnesses

S. Pitman, Co-ordinator, Social Issues Committee (sworn); G. Mason, Farmsafe Representative (sworn); J. Weller, Immediate Past State President (sworn) – Country Women’s Association.
The CHAIR – Under the powers conferred on this committee by the Constitution Act and the Parliamentary Committees Act, this committee is empowered to take all evidence at these hearings on oath or affirmation. I wish to advise all present at these hearings that all evidence taken by this committee, including submissions, is, under the provisions of the Constitution Act, granted immunity from judicial review.

I also wish to advise witnesses that any comments made by witnesses outside the committee's hearing are not protected by parliamentary privilege.

I welcome representatives of the Country Women's Association. If you would like to make an opening statement, or make some comments – about 10 minutes or so – the committee will then ask questions.

Ms PITMAN – The Country Women's Association has over 8,000 members right across Victoria. We don't actually have specific figures on how many of our members are active working farmers, but we estimate perhaps 10 per cent. It would have been a lot more in the past. At least half our members are metropolitan members. A lot of our members, as you realise, are older members, but we do have quite a few active farmers on our state executive. If I may, I would like to go through our submission, and then we are happy to answer questions.

Material in this submission has been arrived at through discussion with members – many of whom are active farmers – through reports of farm safe activities and reading of literature as listed in the bibliography and newspapers. We do not have the resources to collect empirical data, so it tends to be anecdotal. Farm fatalities account for a disproportionate number of deaths compared with other industries. One-third of all workplace deaths occur on farms, yet farmers and farm workers make up just 5 per cent of the state's male work force. This information was from the Workcover web site. So far this year in Victoria there have been seven deaths on farms. Four have been due to tractor or bulldozer accidents. This was the Shepparton News of 17 November this year. Workcover claims for injuries probably do not show the full extent of injuries because, most family farms are self-employed and comprise of unpaid family members.

The main causes, as we see them: first has to be the farm tractor and its implements. The introduction of rollover protection bars has seen a decrease in these numbers, but accidents do still occur.

All-terrain vehicles, despite their name, are not all-terrain and are inherently unstable because of their high centre of gravity. They are easily tipped over and require a high level of skill and dexterity to drive them. Frequently they are treated as fun vehicles driven at speed and by children without helmets and safety considerations. In fact, they were originally developed as fun machines but have now become work machines with equipment attachments. For Australia, there were 24 fatalities from ATVs from 1 July 2000 and 30 December 2002. That is an average of 10 per year. There were also about 590 hospital admissions of ATV-related injuries. This comes from the Monash University research team.

Animals are unpredictable and need to be carefully handled. Perhaps we had the same source as the VFF, but a Jersey bull is considered as dangerous as large machinery. Sheep have also been known to break bones when they have charged people.

Farm chemicals, pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers: the actual direct poisoning rates through ingestion is low, accounting for one per cent of hospital admissions. This has come from a working paper on occupational health and safety implications for the regulation of agricultural pesticides. It is actually a paper by Healy and Gunningham. But there is evidence of health problems associated with long-term use and exposure to chemicals.

Child fatalities are mainly due to drowning or crushed by machinery, and also accidents through being thrown from vehicles and utilities.

Suicide: members are alarmed at the recent increase in the rate of adult male farmer suicides, particularly in areas hardest hit by drought and last year's bushfires. Anecdotal evidence indicates there are more suicides in grain and fruit growing areas. Could this be linked to the use of chemicals that cause depression? Many single-vehicle accidents on or near farms could be suicides. More research needs to be carried out.

The matter and type of injuries: tractors cause crush injuries and broken bones. ATVs cause a lot of hand and foot injuries, when the vehicle rolls over and the occupants are thrown off. Often the crush injuries to the chest will lead to a heart attack resulting in the death being classed as a heart attack not an ATV injury. This came from Worksafe recently.
Falls from a height account for many injuries – for example, silos, sheds, large machinery and windmills being replaced by electric and solar pumps. Falls and crush injuries account for some 80 per cent of injuries.

Organic phosphates have been linked to serious illness and suicides, especially shearers. These toxins cross into the brain and cause damage to the neurons, which can lead to depression and illnesses like Parkinson's disease and multiple fatigue. We didn't have any specific research on this, but there has been work done by Professor Behan from Glasgow and work done at Newcastle University, Flinders University and Charles Sturt University. If we had more time, we would have investigated that in much more detail.

Cancers and chronic illnesses from long-term exposure to chemicals: it is very difficult to put any figures on this because of the problems of sourcing accurate data and the long lead time from exposure to symptoms of disease.

Repetitive strain injuries and wear of joints: the shearing industry is linked with bad backs. Farming involves a lot of heavy lifting and physical effort, all of which leads to wear and tear on the body. Long hours sitting on vibrating tractors and trucks have been linked to arthritis. Minor injuries often overlooked but they still impact on a farmer's ability to work. These could include cuts, sprains, and debris in the eyes, et cetera. Two-thirds of farm deaths are young people or older than 55 years of age. So safety awareness needs to be focused on these age groups.

Current programs: the chemical users course is very good for providing farmers with knowledge of safe use of chemicals. They have raised awareness of the chemical issues. They are mandatory before farmers can purchase certain more dangerous chemicals. However, the courses are expensive in terms of farmers' ability to pay for them. Farmers are reluctant to take time off from farm jobs to attend classes. Sometimes the farmer starts the basic course but they do not complete it for all the chemicals. Many who are not using a specified category chemical are not completing the full course, and are thus not aware of all the advice on wearing protective clothing. There is also the assumption that if a chemical is not on the specific list that it is safe. This was the case with glyphosate. However, it was found that solvents in this spray can affect health. The chemical company acknowledged this when they reformulated glyphosate. Advertised as being so because it affected frogs – failing to alert users that people have similar membranes to frogs in their eyes, mouth and nose, et cetera.

All-terrain vehicles: Honda Australia run a driver education program. Unfortunately, farmers don't attend the program, they have told us in their literature, possibly because of the cost of over $100 per day. They explained that people like Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria, DNRE all undertake this course because they are all workers where the boss pays them to do the course. Honda has produced some very good posters depicting safe driving practices.

Farm safe initiatives: increasing awareness of farm safety, risk analysis of hazards on farms, forums and conferences bringing together a variety of interests and organisations looking at farm safety.

The Country Women's Association has long promoted awareness of farm safety issues. Several years ago we conducted a series of farm safety days across the state. These took different formats according to who was organising them. At Bunyip in Gippsland, this event was held in a local primary school. Children were bussed in from neighbouring areas. They were rotated through a series of demonstrations from local chain saw people, the spray equipment and motor mowers, and they all had the safety measure. It was such a successful day that farmers in the area still complain about their children nagging them to use earmuffs and other safety equipment. These events raised the awareness of farm safety issues, although in many cases it was a feeling that maybe they were preaching to the converted.

Shearers: Ballarat University research on measures to prevent back problems. The AWU and Worksafe Victoria have developed a code of practice for the shearing industry. This addresses the cause of injury through better design of workplace systems of work and provides a valuable model.

Scholarships to encourage the study of health and safety issues on farm: for example, last year there were three scholarships offered to CWA members to study occupational health and safety management at Ballarat University. Field days are important for dissemination of information to farmers. They provide the opportunity for practical demonstrations and for questions to be answered.

The impediments, as we see it, towards sustaining improvements that have been made in farm safety: firstly is the poverty of farmers and poor commodity prices. While farmers are under financial stress, exacerbated by drought, safety will have a lower priority. Poverty means making do with older equipment, cutting back on maintenance, doing the job yourself, rather than hiring extra help. Some poorer farmers were unable to take advantage of the ROPS subsidy because they could not afford – or they did not see that they could afford to take up the offer.
Farmers often work alone because the wife is away earning off-farm income. This means that if an accident does occur, there could be a delay in discovery and calling assistance. Frequently, farmers have outside jobs to provide extra income. This means that farm jobs are squeezed in before and after work with all the consequent hazards of fatigue and rushing, with slower reflexes and lack of attention to safety details.

Chemicals: there is a complex regulatory framework for agvet chemicals. At the moment there are over 60 separate commonwealth and state acts, regulations, standards and codes of practice relating to the supply, handling, use, storage and disposal of pesticides. There is a lot of overlap and inconsistencies with different enforcement cultures. With so much fragmentation and complexity, it is no wonder that farmers are confused about what they need to do to comply with safe use requirements for farm chemicals. This is borne out in the work by Healey and Gunningham. There is reliance on changing farmer attitudes and practices with chemicals, but a lack of regulatory incentives for them to comply. Warnings on the label are often written in fine print and complex language. They need to be plain English and easily interpreted by the farmer. The cavalier attitude to chemical safety: "If a little bit is good then more might be better" and the lack of attention to details of the exact amount of spray are you going to need and lack of protective equipment.

Farmer attitudes: there are several things involved here. Perhaps the historical context is important because farms have traditionally been handed down through the generations. Perhaps interest has been a slow acceptance of new ideas and ways of doing things. Farmers have worked independently on their isolated farms jealously guarding their independence from outside interference. The fact that the farm is the home as well as a workplace blurs the usual employer/employee relationship of other workplaces and it makes it hard to apply an occupational health and safety model. Farmers may have a lack of perception of hazards: "We have always done things this way. I don't see a need to change." For example, the practice of farmers feeding out on the back of a vehicle which steers itself in low gear. A cousin told me of his neighbour who had the dog in the vehicle while he is feeding out the back; the dog put his paw on the button, locked the vehicle and it finished up in the creek. So it was an accident – and “Accidents happen to other people; I am invincible” – this sort of thing.

Workcover is under-resourced. Farmers have to comply with Occupational Health and Safety Act 1985 legislation, but the diverse and isolated nature of farms makes it very difficult to inspect farms for breaches of the act. Further, farmers resent the idea of inspectors coming on to their properties and telling them what to do. The difficulty of attracting and keeping doctors and medical services in rural areas is impacting on farm communities. Often they have to travel long distances or wait several days before getting an appointment. So they don't bother seeking medical attention until they get seriously ill.

Financial and social cost: we haven't gone into this in great detail. Every injury or death results in Workcover or social security costs. The cause of any accidental death has to be investigated by the coroner. So you have immediate expense there. The family needs financial support. When a farm is sold following a death or an injury, often a neighbour will buy it out. The family moves out and the community is the poorer. Families do not get over grief; they just adapt to new life circumstances. Communities suffer emotional trauma when a member is killed or badly injured. Sometimes the neighbours will rally around and assist in putting in or taking off a crop. This sort of assistance is only sustainable in the short term. There is an enormous cost in supporting injured workers with Workcover payments. Some people with back injuries receive payments for many years. As it is, many claims are not made because of the self-employed and family structure of farms. So maybe we are not even looking at the full picture.

Moving on to strategies that we feel could help reduce injuries and deaths. The first one is education, which is largely being used at the moment anyway. This is a very broad approach to general safety. The four As of any safety program are attitude, awareness, anticipation and avoidance. So you teach the message in schools. Children can be powerful voices in urging their parents to don protective gear and do the right thing. Also, if you start with children, you are inculcating the message early.

Agricultural colleges: farm safety courses at prices that farmers can afford. And some sort of accreditation for these courses done, and incentives to undertake them so people feel they are actually achieving something.

Forums and conferences: for example, the Farmsafe conference held at Colac in August 2003. These are especially valuable when they involve speakers from different fields. You have local government, Worksafe, farmers, manufacturers, unions and occupational health and safety people. They provide a cooperative approach to problem solving.
Farm apprenticeships need to be reintroduced. This needs to take three years as farming is now a very technical business and requires many skills, including management. The more skills a farmer has, the safer he is going to work.

Organisations like the Country Women’s Association can do a lot to raise awareness of farm safety issues. This can be done at our conferences, at special events, through information provided in our newsletters and magazines. Also by having representatives on bodies like Farmsafe, there is a channel for information sharing.

I haven’t written it down here, but at our conference in Bendigo we also had a stand with Workcover. We distributed their safety messages through that.

Funding for these educational programs could be from grants from government or foundations. Farmers are reluctant to take courses if they have to pay for them, and also if they have to forgo a day’s work to attend. Local government can play a role here in sponsoring farm safety days and forums.

Legislation and regulation: mandatory legislation needs to be clearly set out in plain English with clear guidelines for compliance. Is there a need for a test of competence to use farm machinery? We are just raising the question. Tractors require a licence when driven on a public road. Should there be a licence test to be passed before people drive ATVs? Legislation is an effective way to ensure safe design features of machinery. It sets the standard. It is easier to legislate to ban a dangerous piece of equipment than it is to change the operator’s attitude to its safe use.

Standards should be reviewed periodically to bring them up-to-date with the latest safety technology – for example, safer designs for mounting tractors and trucks to relieve the fatigue of drivers who are climbing in and out all day. Helmets should be considered part of the equipment, which goes automatically with an ATV or a motorcycle. It should be just part of the bike. Rollover protection systems, which include a harness seat belt, should be mandatory for ATVs. I think the research from the Monash University was strongly in favour of that.

There needs to be a review of legislation relating to agvet chemicals so that there is an integrated system of operating principles and a lower number of regulatory bodies. This would make communication of the regulations simpler for all stakeholders, and make for easier checks of compliance. It is noted here that in discussions with farming families, it was made very clear that farmers are fed up with bureaucracy and form filling. They feel that they are being over-regulated. They need permits to lop dangerous trees, to rip rabbit burrows, to bait foxes, to plough paddocks with native pasture, and they have to have their certificates for their farm chemicals. They also have to send in their BAS returns and have all their statistical forms to complete. I think they just feel that they are overloaded.

Adequate farm income and appropriate commodity prices: this is very difficult because it involves international trade deals and consumers paying more for farm products. Farmers often sell their products for little more than the production cost. Making ends meet will always have a higher priority than safety in the short term. Farmers need to be able to negotiate directly with the large supermarket chains to ensure they get a fair and realistic price for their goods. In the legislation for the safe food handling, all the costs of that are being pushed by the supermarkets back down onto the farmers. Drought and lack of financial support has caused much stress in farming communities. It seems that the most competent farmers are the biggest victims.

Child safety on farms: the farm needs to be seen as a workplace. So clear rules need to be established by families about where children can play and the activities that they can be involved in. Most important is the provision of a safe house-yard for children to play in. This yard needs a childproof fence with a self-closing, self-latching gate the same as is used for home swimming pools. This would prevent toddlers from wandering off and drowning in farm dams or being run over by large machinery. This safe play area needs to be of a reasonable size, and placed so that it is easily visible from the house. It needs to include safe and interesting play activities, but not to include structures which can be moved and stacked together so that the child can clime over the fence. It should exclude water, farm vehicles, sheds, chemicals and working dogs. All this comes from the state coroner’s office and the DHS report on Unintentional drowning: toddlers in dams in Victoria 1989-2001. Drowning is the leading cause of toddler deaths on farms. Very few toddlers drown in moving water, the sea or river, because there is a perception that these are dangerous and therefore closer supervision is taken. There needs to be an awareness that still water can be just as dangerous.

Children under 16 years of age should not drive or ride on tractors or ATVs. Helmets should be worn when children are riding horses or bikes. Children should always be buckled up with seat belts. This means no riding on the backs of utes or trailers. We have personally had neighbours whose teenager was killed when she bounced out
of the trailer. Children under 14 years of age who are helping with farm jobs or working with stock need close supervision.

If a mother is needed to help on the farm, then adequate child-care arrangements need to be made with another family member, neighbour or a babysitter. It is not always possible with the mother helping on the farm. While safe rooms in dairies are better than nothing, they are not ideal. The mother will not be able to give her full attention to the task in hand because if she is wondering what the kids are doing out the back.

Protective behaviours: farmers need to be encouraged to develop risk assessments to meet their OHS responsibilities. They need to be aware of potential hazards and develop practical plans and strategies to deal with the hazard. This is the same as when they developed their fire safety plans. It just involves thinking about it beforehand. There may need to be an accreditation scheme for farms. Some firms like Nestle already carry out accreditation for their supply farms. I realise this is for the safety of the food that they are producing. Perhaps when farmers have assessed the potential hazards on their farm, they could set it out on a poster and put it up on the toilet door as a reminder. There is also a place for reminder stickers on equipment and in workshops. Things like “Think safety. Wear your helmet. Bend your knees when lifting”. It might sound trite, but it could also prevent an injury or worse.

There is a need for attention to detail and full concentration on the task in hand. This prevents things going wrong in the first place. Responsible attitudes need to be fostered. Safety is everybody’s responsibility, not just the employer. People need to learn to take responsibility for their own actions. Ageing farmers need to be made aware of the effects of reduced mobility and slower reflexes, for it is the older farmers that account for most of the deaths and injuries.

Chemical exposure register: there needs to be a nationally comprehensive collection of data by product, crop, region and method of distribution to indicate pesticide use in Australia. There needs to be a system for reporting and recording adverse incidents involving pesticides. Without this information, it is not possible to determine the nature and extent of chronic poisoning caused by pesticide exposure. This is the Healey and Cunningham work.

Blood tests need to determine the chemical exposure should be covered under NHS. At the moment they are regarded as screening tests so they are done at the farmer’s own expense. Blood tests should be routinely carried out for those who are most at risk, so those who are using chemicals as part of their livelihood all the time. There are many chemicals that in the past were thought to be safe but are now found to be carcinogenic.

Protective equipment: farmers need to be encouraged to always use protective equipment like helmets, seat belts, eye and ear protection, face shields when welding, full protective clothing when using chemicals. Helmets do not protect heads when they are sitting on the shelf collecting dust. Lastly, there needs to be more funding for research into new technology for agricultural and pest control to replace the use of dangerous chemicals. Also we need to look at easier, safer ways of work practices.

That concludes the report. It is a summary of what we have said. The papers we referred to are in the back. Joy was asked by the coroner to prepare a submission on ATVs and her ideas are included in that sheet.

The CHAIR – That is a wonderful report. Well done. Wonderful! Are there any questions?

Mr CRUTCHFIELD – In here you talked about workshops and farm safety days. How do you actually get to the people who don’t come to those? In some ways we are preaching to the converted. How do you take the next step?

Ms PITMAN – That’s what we have found. At Skipton we decided to have a speaker come up. There was a shearing competition and a wool festival day. So we had the speaker come and they slotted her in between the different rounds of the shearing competition. But as soon as she got up to speak, they all just melted away. How do you get over that hurdle? We don’t really have an answer. We are hoping that the committee who are hearing all these things will have some ideas as to the input of that problem.

Mr CRUTCHFIELD – That’s why we ask for submissions!

Ms PITMAN – That’s why we look at education starting right from the children in school. You look at children in cars; they automatically put on their seat belts. They are harnessed from the beginning in the car seats. They don’t hop in and go anywhere without a seat belt any more. I think that’s where you have to start.
Ms MASON – With our Bunyip Farmsafe, we did try to go to the adults on their farms and we tried everything else but they would not accept it. They will not allow us on their farms, so that is when we went to the Bunyip school. The principal was just overjoyed with the thought. We bussed in about 1,000 children, but they were not from the big schools like Warriwil; they were small outer schools. It still goes on. We are still getting flak from that. The children are continually picking up their parents for doing the things differently from what they were taught. That’s where you have to start. I feel you have to start down at that level, because they are our up-and-coming farmers and the up-and-coming future of Australia, aren’t they?

Ms WELLER – In our area of Rochester, one of our brother organisations, Rotary, run a community safe day which targets not just farmers also safety in the home. It targets right across the community. Of course they target the children as well because they have also found that you get the same people there at the same community functions all the time. You didn’t get to the broader field. But with the schools, you are reaching into all corners of the community and the future of our farming and our rural communities.

Mr CRUTCHFIELD – I know it says several years ago you did that. Why haven’t you continued it?

Ms PITMAN – It was a project that we ran about seven years ago.

Ms WELLER – We were financed by Workcover.

Mr CRUTCHFIELD – But why? It sounds like a wonderful initiative, and why isn’t it statewide?

Ms WELLER – At that stage we were given some funding. CWA are non-government, non-sectarian and non-party political, and we don’t receive any funding from anybody. It is all out of our pockets – tea and scones if you like.

Mr INGRAM – Through the Chair: while I know we should not recognise people from the gallery, I think someone from the back is saying it is money. Would that be correct?

Ms PITMAN – Yes. I guess having focused our attentions on farm safety for this inquiry we will probably go back to our members and say, "Hey it is time we revisited some of these issues.”

Ms MASON – Actually up where the fires have been, we were thinking of running another one up there because things are so desperate up there at the moment.

Mr CRUTCHFIELD – Have you approached Worksafe?

Ms MASON – Worksafe were the original crew that actually sponsored it.

Ms HOWE – Can I just say something?

The CHAIR – I don’t know if it is appropriate.

Ms HOWE – Wellington farm safety action group had a funding submission into Worksafe since last November to develop the children’s primary school project. It is been there for 12 months and is still not funded.

Mr McQUILTEN – I think you should hand this out to all your members; it is a wonderful report, really excellent.

Ms WELLER – It will go in our magazine, which goes to every member.

Ms PITMAN – Some of our members – I was talking about the idea of a chemical register, and they said, "I think you have to be careful there." In discussing that with one of our members who actually had an agricultural crop duster accident on their property and their property was deluged in 24D, she developed chemical sensitivities that still has. This is some 22 years ago. They sought to take legal action against the chemical company, and they actually received death threats. So the idea of setting up a register of adverse effects needs to be done very carefully, because if you have that sort of big vested interests – this is just one case – but it makes you aware there are a lot of big players out there.

Dr NAPTHINE – In your submission you talked about rollover protection systems including harnesses and seat belts should be mandatory for ATVs. In the submission to the coroner you have a slightly different view. Why is that; and what is the current view of the CWA?
Ms PITMAN – The one to the coroner was done some several months ago. Then I read through the Monash University accident research thing; I read through all the literature and I thought they seem to think that there would be benefit in it – not just a rollover bar but a four-point harness that would actually hold the person in. Most of the injuries seem to be when the vehicle tips and the person is caught.

Another thing that Monash University did was some form of being able to push the machine off them when they get trapped underneath, some sort of mechanism for easily tipping the machine back again.

Ms WELLER – Something the statistics do not seem to show is with the ATV accidents, what the person dies of. We are advocating helmets, yet it may not be head injuries that are killing the people if the ATV is sitting on the chest, it crushes the chest and causes a heart attack, or whatever. It is something that probably the coroner will come up in his report. At the present time there doesn't seem to be any firm indication of just what people are dying of when the ATV rolls. Presumably that is how most ATV accidents happen.

Ms PITMAN – Compared with road accidents, it might not – I mean, 10 deaths a year might not seem big in the total scheme of things – but that is 10 families that have lost a loved one. If it is a teenager that is killed, that is a whole life potential that's gone, and if these things can be prevented by simple measures –

Dr NAPTHINE – I know you represent practical farming families and people who live on farms. I was interested in your recommendation about children under 16 not being able to drive or ride on tractors or ATVs, and no riding on the backs of utilities and trailers. I can understand the nature of the recommendation, but can you tell me how you would go as mums implementing that with your young charges, telling them they are not allowed to do those sorts of things seeing the potential enjoyment they get out of it.

Ms WELLER – Well, it is similar to swimming in the dam; it's not on. There are a lot of things parents need to be firm about, and sometimes parents are not as firm as they should be.

Ms PITMAN – A tractor is a working piece of equipment; it is not a toy. Children under 16 haven't got all the necessary skills; children under 16 can only focus on one thing at a time basically. They cannot be thinking of all the separate things that you have to think of when you are driving a huge piece of machinery.

Ms MASON – But we are sort of past that stage; it is our grandchildren who are going to be sitting on the back of trailers. So we really need to be pushing it into our own children. How we are going to do that overall, I think it is just up to word of mouth, unfortunately. As CWA members, we are hoping that we can convince our members to go back and tell all their families.

Ms PITMAN – Talk to their families.

Ms MASON – Talk to them; never tell.

Ms PITMAN – Encourage.

Dr NAPTHINE – Can I just change tracks? One thing you raised in a couple of points is medical services in country areas. Many of our rural hospitals don’t have funded accident emergency services; they rely on the local GP to come and assist the nurses with accident emergency services. Do you have any comments about the availability of accident emergency services in our rural hospitals?

Ms WELLER – No, but I have not had the personal experience of having to be there, thank goodness. But I do know in my own area we are served by Lockington Bush Nursing Centre and a district nurse there, who is quite competent at most things. But due to funding cuts, he is not available at weekends or after 5.30 at night. So if you are going to do anything you do it between 9.00 and 5.00 and don't do it at the weekends otherwise you have to call Echuca or Bendigo for an ambulance or doctor. Or preferably take the patient to them. Those sort of simple funding cuts – it might only be once a year they are required, but when they are, it is usually an emergency. It is something we live with, unfortunately. It is like down here you expect an ambulance around the corner in 10 minutes. In the country, we think if we get it in half an hour we are very lucky.

Ms MASON – In a lot of the figures we get, we don't just get farmers that go into the ordinary doctor with a cut hand from a saw on the farm – or as I think Sue mentioned, the dust or chemicals in the eyes are not calculated as part of farm injuries. They are sort of ones that we don't see or hear about, which is something that probably would be worth looking into if doctors were willing to keep statistics along that line.
The CHAIR – Any further questions?

Dr NAPTHINE – I just want to point out that both the CWA and the VFF believe if we replace Jersey bulls with artificial insemination it will solve a lot of problems!

Ms WELLER – As a dairy farmer, that has lowered the incidence of unsafe situations.

Mr INGRAM – As you are representing areas other than farming and we are looking at comparing like industries with like industries – timber industries and fishing industries; do you have a view on how you prevent some of the accidents in some of those industries? How do you compare them to farm accident injury?

Ms MASON – If you are looking at water, we haven't looked at any percentages of what has happening on water. I think with the summer coming on that is critical.

Ms PITMAN – Looking at the joint report put out by the coroner – Marine Safety Victoria and DHS into recreational boating.

The CHAIR – But we are not looking into –

Ms PITMAN – Yes, I know. But the main thing that came out of that report was that had they been wearing a life vest, they probably would not have drowned. The problem there was to design an adequate safety vest that would have the acceptance of the boating fraternity that they would actually put it on. I don't know; fishing industry fatalities don't feature that much in the media, do they?

Ms WELLER – As far as injuries in the forestry industry goes, I don't know that the injuries are as high in the forestry industry sector as it used to be. There seemed to be a lot of injuries from falling trees. I think again it is an awareness program and the people who are doing the job need to be competent and need to be aware of the dangers and be on the ball.

The CHAIR – Thank you for your submission and taking the time to present it to us. I think there is a lot of food for thought for us. If there is anything further you would like to say later on, we would be happy to take that on board as well.

Ms PITMAN – Thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to think through the issues.

Witnesses withdrew
Committee adjourned