RURAL AND REGIONAL SERVICES DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the cause of fatality and injury on Victorian farms

Melbourne – 24 November 2003

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A. Sullivan, Victorian Farm Safety Training Centre, University of Ballarat (sworn).
The CHAIR – Welcome, Andrew. I thank you very much for coming along.

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. This is an all-party committee inquiring into the cause of fatality and injury on Victorian farms. Thanks again for giving us your expertise again today. I know from listening to you in Waramang (to be verified) a couple of months back, you will have some really good stuff to offer, so I am looking forward to your evidence.

The CHAIR – Can you please give the committee your full name and address.

Mr SULLIVAN – Andrew Peter Sullivan; Ditchfields Road, Navigators, via Ballarat.

The CHAIR – Are you attending today in a private capacity or representing an organisation?

Mr SULLIVAN – It is probably a bit of a mixture of both. The Victorian Farm Safety Training Centre is part of the University of Ballarat, so I speak on behalf of the Victorian Farm Safety Training Centre and the University of Ballarat.

The CHAIR – Thank you very much. Your evidence will become public evidence in due course. If you would now make a statement, or some comments – about 10 minutes or so – the committee will then ask some questions.

Mr SULLIVAN – What I just handed to the committee was a copy of the presentation I made at a conference between the VFF and the AWU in July. I intend putting forward a written submission, but I also intend listening to other people before I do that. The reason I put this forward is that I feel I am consistent in my approach. The feedback I got from that presentation was supportive. So I am continuing down that line.

You have background on me as manager of the Farm Safety Training Centre. I used to farm full time. I have been involved in farmer education for 16 or 17 years now and have been involved in health and safety particularly in the last five years. I was actually drawn into my involvement with health and safety as a request by a VFF – what we call a region five group – who had some concern about a fairly ad hoc approach to health and safety training within the training system. It is as a result of that we were introduced to organisations like Farmsafe Victoria and Farmsafe Australia, Worksafe and on and on it goes. I guess over the last three to four years I have firmed a commitment to improving health and safety on farms, through education, but through also other avenues, particularly community involvement.

I will speak in dot points; that's the way I speak. I am basically a farmer, and that's the way I speak. I don't write out reams of reports. But, if you like, the questions about the AWU conference and VFF conference is what will make a real and practical difference. I have said that from the outset we need an integrated, committed and cooperative approach to farm safety. Quite often we see health and safety on farms as sort of stand-alone, out there on its own. It is an issue that if we put it out on its own, it is easily avoided – whether that is the involvement of education or whether you are a machinery manufacturer or a reseller, or whatever. I think quite often – particularly from an education point of view – we have lost opportunities. We are developing wonderful extension programs on improving productivity on farms, but we seem to be ignoring the fact that the bottom line could be affected by accidents, injuries and prosecutions. I guess that's one of the things I am committed to – improving that integrated approach to farm safety. Whether that is farm safety management, design of equipment and machinery, when you sit down
and do the farm budget or when you are looking at purchasing equipment for the first time, you should be thinking about the health and safety effects of what you are doing.

When we talk about committed, I am really fortunate because I can sit right in the middle. I am not aligned with a union or an organisation with an affiliation to a political area. So it is really great that I don't have to follow a particular line. However, I think we have to make sure that we do have a committed approach from our peak bodies. They include the unions, the VFF, Women in Agriculture, the CWA, et cetera. We need to be driving the same message. It comes right down to even what we have on the front cover of our magazines: if we are trying to promote best practice, then we should be promoting best practice at all costs. It also comes right down to our suppliers and our advisers – our advisers within the Department of Primary Industries or our consultants. As I reiterated before, we tend to put health and safety out there on its own. So bring it in, be committed to it.

Cooperative: that is about working together. Unfortunately, even though we had an AWU-VFF conference that was supposed to draw things together, I actually felt that it pushed things apart a little bit. I have seen that in the media as well. It is time to say, "Look, we have got problems. We have really got to get together and do something about it through a bipartisan approach."

But we also have to identify the problem. In Victoria or Australia it is very difficult, because we are small businesses. We are not all covered by workers compensation, so we are not clearly getting good accurate statistics about the causes and frequencies of accidents and injuries. I spoke to a New Zealand ACC representative last week about this very issue. They have a no-fault all-embracing insurance system. So therefore, they are clearly able to identify incidents and causes. They are actually volunteered forward because people want to make sure that they get coverage. So we could learn perhaps from their experience. If we cannot clearly identify what the issues are on our farms in Victoria or Australia, then we might be able to learn something from what the New Zealanders are collecting. I think that is important, because if we are going to have a strong evidence base on dealing with particular issues, we need to be able to collect that data.

We tend to focus, as Michael mentioned, on guarding and that everything is solved by putting on the guards, when really we have some major long-term issues, not only manual handling issues but noise, dust, chemicals, et cetera that we are really not sure about. We have a better idea of what the solution is rather than the problem. So, again, we need to be able to quantify that so that we can have a decent focus.

I mentioned leadership before, and making sure we have this best practice cooperative approach, and that all suppliers are singing from the same song sheet. One of the things about getting farm safety advice or health and safety advice is that farmers don't necessarily go to the experts. They don't necessarily come to the Michael Lawrances or to Worksafe or even health and safety consultants. They tend to get their poor advice sometimes from their suppliers. Some of those suppliers are, of course, motivated about selling the product – what is the safest product or which is the safer machine? If we can bring those people on board and perhaps be getting better-informed advice it would be useful. So misinformation can be a bit of a danger.

I think there are opportunities out there to make sure that we show best practice through practical demonstration. We have demonstration farms that are demonstrating improved productivity, and perhaps the best varieties or the best productivity in terms of pastures, crops or whatever, but not necessarily demonstrating best practice in terms of health and safety both in what they do themselves but also what is out there in front of us. The same with field days. Our news articles and our publications need to do the same thing, particularly with graphics. The mechanics that we employ on farms and the electricians, all should be singing from the same song sheet.

I was on a dairy farm the other day and the electrician said, "Don't put a safety switch in because it will be always tripping out." Of course it will be tripping out if they have a problem. So why not
solve the problem and then we can put the safety switch in. So we have to be singing from the same song sheet and bring those people on board as well.

The same thing applies to feed sellers, contractors, resellers, et cetera, but also to some of our community organisations like our councils, for instance. Obviously they are involved in some related farm activities. They are users of machinery – and our racecourses employ a lot of farmer volunteers. How often do you see an ATV heading down the track with a couple of people on it and no helmets or a tractor? Everyone is pitching in to help when they want to do that, but at the same time they could be using unsafe machinery or unsafe practices. So there are some opportunities there to display best practice. And as Michael said, maybe even on the football field as well.

We are about to see some new regulations with respect to falling from heights. There was a great opportunity to make sure that we demonstrate best practice through putting a little bit of pressure on the designers and manufacturers. I haven't seen it in detail. One of my concerns is that in some cases the machinery and the equipment that is produced puts health and safety as an option, as an add-on – as a costly add-on. There is an opportunity to make sure that when we sell a farmer a silo these days that the safety features are built in, and it is not up to the farmer to do a risk assessment and then have to go and buy these things and install them later on as a more costly add-on. I think we need to put a little bit more pressure on the designers and manufacturers to assist farmers through best practice. If the obligation is on the farmers to do the risk assessment and determine what needs to be fixed, why not in the first place try to fix it so that they don't have to look at it as an option? Sometimes they are not necessarily cost-effective when they are add-ons. I guess, too, continue to promote and encourage the safe practices as well as safe equipment.

The guidance material: as you know, I am involved in health and safety training. One of the concerns that I have had about the material that I have been able to access is that there is lots of useful information, but if you don't engage farmers in the first paragraph, it is just going to sit by the bed unread. I think that's a problem with Worksafe information. I think it is a problem with Farmsafe Australia information. It is a problem with codes of practice specifically. If you are going to engage farmers, it has to be relevant to what they are doing, and cut to the chase about solutions and ideas to assist them in solving the problems; and be in plain English. Farmers are not dumb, they can read, but put it in the talk they understand. It has to be relevant, clear and concise, easily interpreted. A picture tells a thousand words. A picture of a well-guarded piece of machinery or chemical stored properly could convey the right sort of messages.

Mr McQUILTEN – Before-and-after shots?

Mr SULLIVAN – I think we have to focus on the after side of things. Sometimes exhibiting the bad practice tends to be the focus. As alluded to before, let's look at what some of the solutions are; and remember that farmers are innovative. They are the mothers of invention. If we could perhaps throw them the challenge that they might be able to come up with the best solution – taking that on board. Sometimes they will do that whether we like it or not. Some of the bail twine solutions may not be the best option. So consequently solutions need to be simple and well-researched. So yes, if we are putting up a new PTO guard, let's make sure that it is effective and there are no other faults with it – and the PTOs are one issue – but that it’s cost-effective and that the solutions require minimal paperwork, and perhaps they are achievable as well. Sometimes when I look at some codes of practices for other industries, they look at the engineering solution, and it is out of reach of most small businesses. So we have to make sure these things are achievable, and perhaps in some cases perhaps incentive-based – if there is a bit of a discount or something to encourage people to fit ROPS or silo lids, or whatever the case may be.

The issue of compliance and Worksafe: with respect to Worksafe field officers, they have to play the policeman role, and they are focused very much on compliance, whereas I think they need to have an educative role and perhaps sometimes leave the book in the car if they are going to make
long-term change. Sometimes in a visit from Worksafe, a farmer is told to do three or four things; they do them and wipe their brows and say, "Geez he didn't see all those other things. I would have liked to have known a bit about it but if I open my doors, they are going to ping me." So I think a more educative role for Worksafe people would be of value.

It may also flow onto the Department of Primary Industries. The Department of Primary Industries doesn't have any farm safety person. I know it stays within this room, so to speak – but DPI, provides a fair degree of lip service when it comes to farm safety. They are certainly not demonstrating best practice on their demonstration farms. They also have some responsibilities to their own people, too. I think by showing best practice and perhaps acknowledging that farm safety is an issue for the department, DPI would be useful.

Coming back to the field officers: I was speaking to one the other day, and he said he drove up to this farmer and congratulated him because he saw him wearing a helmet while he was riding an ATV. I think sometimes we need to praise people for what they are doing right, not only hit them over the head for what they are doing wrong. By exhibiting and putting people forward who are demonstrating best practice would be useful. Often when they get a Workcover visit, or perhaps even in my work, people just want to be told what to do. Some farmers say, "Look, tell me what to do and I will get on with it" – rather than a reading a whole lot of gumph on paper. So it is a bit sort of, "Show me the way, and then once I am kick-started I can come back and work on it.'

Coming down to my area, which is primarily farmer education: I am not a traditional TAFE teacher; I am more a person who has worked in farmer education and farmer extension and adult learning. We heard mention of the managing farm safety program, which was geared towards getting people towards competency – lots of paperwork and things to fill out so that you become a competent person in managing farm safety. I did some work last year to try to improve that and make it work, because people were not putting things into practice. We were up Peter's way. I did some work with some tomato growers at Boort where we ran a workshop on a particular farm, and then the second day of training was done on each individual's farm. We had it Farmbiz funded, so that they only paid 25 per cent of the cost, which was about $140. They were very motivated farmers. Peter was not there, but they were! They got a lot out of it, because it took the training from applying it to someone else's farm to “implementing it on mine". “Tell me what I can do on my farm. I have this old grain store that is a chemical store; what do you think of it?” He has now built a new shed, but that's beside the point! I think that's critical. It is the application not only just the education and implementation. One-on-one, hopefully there is evaluation for that sort of work down the track because it is important – “It is the evaluation of my own farm." I think that's a failing perhaps of the chemical training. We have put thousands of people through it, but what sort of change is it really making on the farm?

No barriers to participation in training: we need to remove those. Some of those are just the two days. We can come down to one day and people will say, "Look, health and safety reps do five days". Well, we are trying to get into the door. We are trying to reach everybody. So time is one barrier. Cost is another. At the moment, health and safety education or training or workshopping or whatever you want to call it – extension is costing. I did a program at Leongatha last week as part of a trial. It cost the farmers nothing. They came up afterwards and said, "How long does the trial go for because the people up the road aren't going to pay for this? It is important to us, but the average Joe Blow is not going to pay for it.”

In New Zealand it is funded through their education system, and it is for nothing. But their whole program is geared towards this competency. It is not done on-farm. It is effectively done in a room. So I don't know how effective it is going to be. But they have had 7,300 people through it. John Merritt knows about that. So why aren’t there 7,300 in Victoria, Andrew? I think we have to be sure that we are getting the right message through. So certainly it has to be effective, relevant and practical.
Farmers are practical people. They are not idiots, but they are practical people. It is not about that they don't understand the process, but they want to be able to implement it. We have seen a shift away from the education of focusing on competency-based training back towards extension-type programs. The farmers have driven that. That is why we have Top Crop and Beef Cheque and Target 10 and the like. That's how they best learn, in that discussion-type group. It tends to pull in people, even people that look over the fence for a while but ultimately get pulled in.

Having that integrated approach: my aim with the work that I am doing at the moment is to make sure that health and safety gets into those programs and is integrated into it, so that when they go to the next field day and they might be looking at particular equipment, they start thinking about the health and safety implications of everything that they do.

The sort of thing that we do needs to be followed up. “Are you going to come back and see us in 12 months to see how we are doing?” I think that's an important thing, not just leaving people in the lurch but minimising the paperwork and providing some effective incentives.

Just on a final summary, I have been a little bit aghast about the fact there is very little health and safety training in schools, in preparing kids for work experience.

When I looked at the education program in New Zealand, they are focusing on where their major claims are. I looked at their material, and there was nothing on tractor safety. They were focusing on the claims end of things. I think we have to make sure that we do take a whole farm approach, but acknowledge there are some things that are more dangerous than others. Some of the things appear in the statistics very quickly – the fatalities. But the injuries and the health issues don't necessarily; for example, the use of hazardous substances and dangerous goods, noise-induced hearing loss, even the impact of stress and these sorts of things.

With farmers, we need to shift away from working safely to making sure that the farm is safe. Most farmers will try and work safely. In the programs that I have delivered, some of the farmers ask, "Are you accusing me of not working safely?" And I say no. But when the pressure is on, when the harvest is due, the weather is coming in crook, or McCain’s are saying, "Your spuds have to be in" – by that date – it's a bad mix. So all the things you worked around previously now you take a shortcut to finish off, like jumping on the back of a truck to tarp a load of spuds to go to McCain’s in bad weather. All those things come together, and boom, we have a fatality.

So if we focus on getting the farm as safe as we can, with physical things and changing the management philosophy and the culture, then I think we will go a long way to preventing a lot of those incidents and accidents.

**Mr WALSH** – But how do we as prospective legislators come up with things in our report that do the things that you are talking about? We have spent years talking about what the problems are. You have to clearly articulate what the solutions are; otherwise we are just reinventing the problem instead of the solution.

**Mr SULLIVAN** – Okay. I have a few things that I put down in pre-empting that. Let's have a look at some of the things about importing and designing of machinery and equipment for a start, so we don't keep introducing new hazards, right? So a bit more pressure on the importers, resellers, designers, manufacturers – whatever you want to call them. Some of those can even be the backyard Joe who is making a new post hole digger or driver, or whatever it might be.

**Mr WALSH** – So who does that?

**Mr SULLIVAN** – I think Worksafe could do that sort of thing. We have the Tractors and Machineries Association on Farmsafe Victoria – certainly Farmsafe Australia, so they are in the mix already. We have a couple of critical issues that I believe are relevant, particularly in Victoria. We have a coronial inquiry into ATVs. I think again that is an importation issue as well. Let's say, "Look, we have a problem; they are useful machines, but let's find out the solutions and
get in there and do something about it and stick with it”. The New Zealand approach seems to be a bit watered down; they are leaving the decisions up to the user of ATVs – passengers, rollover protection – up to the farmer. I think farmers would in some cases like some clear direction about certain things. The ROPS on ATVs haven't been engineered, but in New Zealand they are letting farmers make up their own minds. I think let's make some things clear-cut.

Mr WALSH – So who does that again?

Mr SULLIVAN – I guess it is a combination of your Workcover authorities and perhaps the importers themselves. When you have decals on an ATV that say “no-one under the age of 16”, yet they are leaving it up to farmers to make that decision themselves –

Mr McQUILTEN – Would you put rollbars on them or not?

Mr SULLIVAN – If you put them on, at the moment all the research says that there are no strong mounting points for them, but I am not an informed person. Some people will say that in New Zealand they want a chance to be thrown free; they don't want to be caught up in anything else; they want to get out of it. It needs some work; it needs some research done on it.

PTOs: let's find a decent PTO cover that is durable, that will last forever, and not spend most of its time in the workshop. A critical one, and I know it is an engineering solution. The run-overs: there are some issues about how do we change people's attitudes for a start, but what did I say before? Let's focus on the safe place as against the safe person. So if Joe is still going to jump off the tractor, how can we protect him? We have seen things like access platforms. They are useful, but not everyone is taking it up. We have older farmers using older machinery predominantly, so it is an educational thing there. I am not sure what the answer is. It is the same with handbrakes on tractors. Again, it is a run-over effect. What can we do? What can we learn from other industries in making sure that if we put something in place it can't be easily disconnected?

I think if we do come up with some good solutions, we need actual incentives for people to take them up, to get them out there in the first place. The fitting of safety switches in workshops – which I think is one of the most at risk areas on farms, because of all the leads and whatever – but if we have problems around electricians and the likes, let's solve the problems; let's get the solution, research it and then get it out. Don't get it out there only half-baked.

The real problem with respect to the manual handling is that we need to clearly identify what the problems are. And we have only touched on it, I believe, in the shearing; but then we have things like working in packing sheds, milking cows. We have all got manual handling issues that don't emerge until you are my age, and you are sitting there probably half in pain – because they are accumulative things that we could perhaps look at solutions for. Some of those are engineering solutions. Some of them are also about job rotation, and things like that.

Mr WALSH – So if we go through shearing sheds and packing sheds, and so forth, who then are the best people to come up with the ideal design? A, for a new one; but B, how you modify the old one?

Mr SULLIVAN – There is a mixture. I don't think you can say just one person.

Mr WALSH – The organisation? Who is responsible for it then?

Mr SULLIVAN – There is a shared responsibility in all of this. If we leave it all to Workcover, you will have people from other industries trying to tell you what to do and how do you make it practical. So really you have to make the people all work together, right? As I said before, the farmers themselves, given the challenge, will come up with the solution because they want to keep working; right? But they want to keep working safely. In many cases, they have designed the machinery and equipment themselves to do a particular job, but they need to have
some advice from health and safety consultants, Worksafe – whoever they might be – ergonomists, whatever, so they get it right.

Mr WALSH – But if we are writing a report, I would like to think in five years time if we look back at it and say, “Well, we recommended X should be done and Y is responsible for it” – we can look back and ask, “Has it been done? Did we get it right?” If we leave it to people to work together, it is almost an untenable state. So for accountability you almost need someone who is accountable to ensure it works.

Mr SULLIVAN – Yes, and I guess the other thing, too, is that maybe in throwing it around somebody has to put their hand up. I said the DPI itself has not done a lot. The VFF is looking at, in some cases, some single-issue things that certainly affect their members. We have employer organisations and unions focusing on the high employment areas, yet we have a lot of self-employed people in there. So I don't think I can really answer your question with respect to one person; but obviously it links in with the Workcover Authority from a regulatory point of view. But we have to make sure that they are consulting with the people who are actually working in those fields as well.

Mr WALSH – So if you extend that and come up with an ideal shearing shed and people don't do it, do you have protective laws in there before an accident happens? Or do you wait until someone is injured and then go and sue the employer?

Mr SULLIVAN – This is a personal opinion – but I think you have to be careful of overregulating, because there are too many variables. What solution may fit one shearing shed may not fit the circumstance of another shearing shed; or when someone is perhaps shearing six, seven weeks and another one is only shearing a few, if you then dictate that this should occur in every shearing shed, I think you would have a worry. There may be regulations as are already there that cover things like plant regulations and hazardous substances and the like. I have a little bit of a concern about overregulating. I would rather – and particularly with reference to codes of practice – see guidance material about how you actually apply it to your business. I have started to see that emerge in Worksafe. We were seeing a book on manual handling for the food industry. In some cases farmers will pick up stuff from Worksafe shearing and say, "There is some good relevant information in that for me, and I can go to it if I need some information".

Mr INGRAM – Can I just follow up on that: Overregulations yes, but there are some areas, like Australian standards, where you wouldn't allow farmers to say, "Well, we will allow any crash hat to be used on an ATV". We set Australian standards on some types of equipment, so do you see that is necessary in some areas?

Mr SULLIVAN – Absolutely. So an Australian standard for an ATV helmet, for instance, is good, but make sure that we get the right messages out there. Once you get over 30km, it is no good for you; so there is an educational role for all these sorts of things.

Dr NAPTHINE – I come back to the role of Worksafe inspectors. I have had a number of instances brought to my attention where Worksafe safety inspectors have been on farms or in businesses in rural Victoria and have issued provisional improvement notices only to be asked by the employer, "What advice can you give me with regard to a solution to the problem?" Worksafe have said, "That's not our job". In fact, they have gone as far as to say, "If we give you advice, particularly if we give it to you in writing and then something happens, we can be in trouble". Now if they are the experts – and we have a lot of very small employers, small superphosphate spreaders or farmers who don't have great expertise in occupational health and safety, and you have people who supposedly have expertise in occupational health and safety coming onto their property or business issuing provisional improvement notices and then walking away from providing any advice in terms of solving that problem – to me, that is not the best way forward. How do we get over that,
particularly where they have said that, "Look, we can't give you any advice in writing, because that could get us in trouble if something goes wrong".

Surely that should be something we can address in terms of using the expertise of these people, not just to identify problems but to help identify solutions.

Mr SULLIVAN – Yes. And I think I mentioned in my presentation, Denis, that an educative role from Worksafe would be really useful, where sometimes you leave the book in the car, because I think that is one of the problems. I have tried to involve some people in an educative role and they have been told, "Well look, they are under instruction if they come onto this farm and they see something, they will have to issue a notice." I am trying to get farmers on board, and if I bring someone along and they hit them with a pin notice, they will just go to ground.

There was the intent of having an educative role within Worksafe in the farm area a number of years ago, and they employed people to do it, and now those people are inspectors. So I think it is absolutely critical that there is an educative role within Worksafe – absolutely – and they should have no fear about providing or discussing solutions. The ultimate decision could be the farmers, but at least put it in front of them rather than just saying, "Here's a code of practice, work it out for yourself".

The CHAIR – The Victorian government has recently provided the $450,000 to the Victorian Farmsafety Training Centre, and the policies and programs intended to actually develop that education and training.

Mr SULLIVAN – It is spread over a three-year period, so it is not just a short-term project, and it is a commitment to a number of projects. I come back to what I said before: that when I first got involved we had a training program that was well researched, but from an education perspective it was not working. So the initial work that I did with the Boort tomato growers, and a few others, identified what could work. We then said, “Well, how can we reach the masses?” Not everyone wants you on a one-to-one basis on your farm. So we decided, okay, can we break that down into just the one-day workshop on a farm and see if we can get that integrated into these extension programs. That is one of the major aims, and that is really where the basis of my expertise is – to make that work, refine it and make it work.

We have also had basic information with respect to particular hazards from Farmsafe Australia, but we have had nothing in those key areas of horticulture, the dairy and even the southern beef properties. So when we looked at putting forward this submission, we said there are some real deficiencies about guidance material in this area, not only to pick up farmers and supportive education, but to pick up that off-the-shelf information similar to the health and safety in shearing. But I am mindful, as Michael said, some 20-odd years went into health and safety in shearing, but there has not been that work, particularly in the dairies, and in the other areas. So it might be that we develop some information that still is only a kickstart. And it is really working, as Michael said, with farmers trying to identify what the problems are in the first place and then putting forward some practical solutions, but at the same time not to the point where those solutions are out of reach – but that they are within reach. The aim is to refine this one-day workshop, integrate it into existing programs, role it out through a number of mediums – whether it is through Women in Agriculture – it is those existing community groups that we can access, and sometimes it is a small community group who asks, “Can you run a one-day workshop for us? Can you customize it for us? Can you fit it in between milkings? Can you just focus on the shearing sheds?” So there is that aspect.

My community involvement means I promote what we are doing, but also assist other communities in supporting them with health and safety, so as part of that project I also work with communities, whether it be schools, CFA groups, Women in Agriculture, CWA groups, or whatever, in terms of promoting what we do.
The CHAIR – In relation to local communities and to follow up Peter and Denis’s questions from earlier on: having lived in country areas all my life, the country people in general but also farmers as part of that have a suspicion about people from outside coming along and telling them what to do. There are courses like Train the Trainers, and things like that – and you can train a trainer, a Worksafe inspector to talk to a local person who would actually then go out and through their networks, whether it be within or CFA – go in then and look at individual farmers doing a higher project. Is that being put forward?

Mr SULLIVAN – Absolutely. And not only through the formal trainers and the trainers’ network themselves in those sorts of communities, but also hopefully we will see the reactivation of the farm safety action groups potentially, which are built around community. We have a couple of really active ones. If they are going to work, they are obviously working in their own communities, and there is certainly a chance to utilise the local people. There is probably something to be gained from the New Zealand experience. 7,300 people were involved in undertaking these programs, and I believe a lot of it was to do with the farmers being trained up to provide the training. Right? So there is an opportunity to find out how that worked – that part of it. I am not quite sure about the effectiveness of the actual training, but certainly the involvement of local groups would be useful.

When we got involved some five or six years ago in the whole issue of farm safety training, we ran a program at Dookie that involved industry people as well as trainers and farmers. So a number of people that worked through my centre in the trialling of these workshops are farmers first rather than trainers, and I think it is critically important not only from a credibility point of view but also from a follow-up point of view that you have local people involved.

Mr McQUILTE – Farm dams and drownings: have you any thoughts on that, particularly young people?

Mr SULLIVAN – I believe that drownings are not included necessarily in statistics of farm accidents on farms unless they involve some work issue. I probably haven't got any more comments other than the fact that we know they are a hazard and we know that kids on farms are a major issue, because we live, we grow up and we see our time out – hopefully – on farms, so they are places of recreation all mixed in. It is our livelihood as well as our workplace, as well as our place of recreation. In terms of specific strategies, I think we have to identify perhaps what are the most at-risk type drownings; and obviously if they are close to the house and the play areas, and perhaps dams are not battered down and are steep-walled, like for instance some manure pits in and around dairies, some channels in and around farms, and perhaps even some deep irrigation-type dams that are not for livestock. I think those are critical areas and therefore we have to provide a barrier – it does not have to be a pool fence – but some kind of barrier to prevent kids having access to dams.

Dr NAPTHINE – Andrew, with your experience both as a practical teacher of farm education and also linked to the university in terms of research, are you aware of any evidence-based research showing the effectiveness of any particular farm safety program? We talk about farm safety programs, and empirically we say if we have one-to-ones or discussions groups, or we have this, empirically they must be effective. But is there any evidence-based research that shows any particular farm safety program has been effective?

Mr SULLIVAN – I haven't got that, but I know Leslie Day from MUARC presented some literature research that showed the effectiveness of the one-on-one. I am not sure. I believe it was in England where an agricultural engineer worked with farmers on particular solutions on farms, one-on-one, so it comes back. That was actually the reason I decided to look at the one-on-one approach, looking at implementation rather than just education. I am not involved in research, but I think definitely we need an evaluation of the New Zealand work if we have got 7,300 people through. I think there has been a lot of work done on educating farmers with respect to the
effectiveness of discussion groups. That is well known. So if that works with farmers, then health and safety's involvement in it should work as well.

Mr WALSH – Andrew, as we go forward with this, no doubt there will be lots of different programs and lots of different trainers; how do we ensure that we don't end up with QA systems where we end up with total confusion in the marketplace and duplication? People throwing their hands up in the air and not really knowing what they are doing.

Mr SULLIVAN – It is a valid point, because those programs were sold on the basis of some kind of benefit – whether it was improved prices – or now it seems to be more towards market access. When the farmers didn't see those benefits, they fell away from the program. So if we treated health and safety in the same manner – well, there are no benefits in money terms straight away. So therefore again, if we treat health and safety in isolation again like that, it is going to be very difficult. So if we are talking about QA programs or environmental programs or cow–time projects, or whatever, that we integrate the health and safety into those programs rather than again seeing them stand alone.

As I mentioned earlier with that Boort group and the Rochester group, there was the motivation for people to say, "Yes, well I am making change; how am I going?" In some cases, people do want some follow-up as well. It could be auditing, or it may not be. I have undertaken my auditing training for health and safety, and if I followed the standard for auditing, most farmers wouldn't get within cooee of it. So you back away from it; you really think what are the things that you can do to make a practical difference. So it is about identifying hazards and looking at what controls you can put in to reduce injuries. That's the major focus; and then if we need some paperwork or we need some recording that evolves out of it rather than having a paper tiger telling you what to do.

The CHAIR – Thank you very much, Andrew; we are very grateful.

Witness withdrew