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 B. P. Hardman
Mr C. Ingram
Mr J. M. McQuilten

Mr R. G. Mitchell
Dr D. V. Napthine
Mr P. L. Walsh

Chair: Mr B. P. Hardman
Deputy Chair: Mr C. Ingram

Staff
Executive Officer: Ms K. Murray
Research Officer: Dr V. Koops
Witnesses

C. R. Manners, General Manager Policy (affirmed); S. C. Price (affirmed) – Victorian Farmers Federation.
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. The committee is hearing evidence today on the inquiry into the cause of fatality and injury on Victorian farms. We welcome Clay Manners and Simon Price from the Victorian Farmers Federation, and thank you for giving up your time and expertise in this particular area.

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

Mr MANNERS – I represent the Victorian Farmers Federation of 24 Collins Street, Melbourne.

The CHAIR – Are you happy with the evidence being taken down and becoming public evidence in due course?

Mr MANNERS – Yes.

The CHAIR – Thank you very much. Your evidence will become public evidence in due course. I invite you to make an opening statement for about 10 minutes. The committee will then ask questions.

Mr MANNERS – Thanks very much, Mr Chairman. What I would like to do is just run through our submission because you did not have it in advance. Then perhaps we can have some discussion of the issues that are raised after that, if that is acceptable to you.

Farming in Victoria is a family operation. Although there are some large company farms, the reality is the majority of farms in Victoria are family farms, and farm safety is very much a family issue for farmers.

Farms are inherently dangerous places. Farm work is often very physical. It involves heavy machinery and animals. Animals in particular are unpredictable, and working with animals will always involve some degree of risk. In these circumstances, it is reasonable to expect the rate of accidents for people working on farms will be higher than, for example, people working in an office environment.

In fact, the low rates of injury to people working in agriculture is surprisingly good news. We hear a lot about farm fatalities, but rates of injury for workers involved in agriculture are certainly not out of line with other comparable industries. I have provided a table in the submission that we have presented to you.

It is worth noting that injuries of males working in agriculture are 13 per cent lower than in manufacturing. Bear in mind, manufacturing industry takes place indoors in a controlled environment, whereas agriculture takes place outdoors where the environment is not controlled but is subject to the vagaries of nature. I think that is positive. Farmers frequently work with animals, and I might say a Jersey bull is a far more unpredictable animal than any piece of manufacturing equipment.

Injury rates for women working in agriculture are one-third lower than for women working in manufacturing and, surprisingly, women working in agriculture have a lower injury rate than women in retail trade or education.
I do not want to give the impression by that that the VFF is satisfied with injury rates on farms – far from it. Injury rates in agriculture are still too high, and the VFF as an organisation is very concerned about farm safety. But at the same time, farmers sometimes get annoyed about what we would loosely call the black-arm view of farm safety that is often promoted.

The ROPS campaign in Victoria is an internationally recognised success story. ROPS is the rollover protection structure for tractors, which I am sure you are aware of. The story goes back to the 1996 VFF annual conference when VFF members voted to make mandatory the fitting of rollover protective structures to tractors. The campaign involved regulation, but it was coupled with a rebate for the fitting of ROPS. It was regulation that was endorsed by the industry and was accompanied by an incentive program.

The rebate was funded by the Victorian WorkCover Authority and administered by the VFF. The VFF's involvement was critical to the program's success. It signalled the industry's commitment to the program and to educating our members on the benefits of the ROPS devices. ROPS is a successful example of a simple innovation that can save lives.

Most of the publicity we hear about farm safety concerns fatalities on farms. Last year, 12 people died in work-related accidents on Victorian farms. That is about consistent with recent years. We have between 10 and 14 deaths on farms each year. Four of the deaths were farmers working on their properties; one was an employee/contractor; three were friends of family members working or assisting; one was a child in the company of parents working on the farm; one was a farmer's wife on an ATV; one, a farmer's son using an ATV; and one a farmer's grandson riding on an ATV. Deaths often involve farm family members or friends of the farm family. Last year, all but one death involved a member of the family or a friend of the family.

It is also worth noting that, tragically, two of the deaths were children under 15, and six deaths were people over 56. In other words, two-thirds of the deaths that occurred on farms last year, 2002, were the old – if you refer to people over 56 as old – and the very young.

On the issue of young people being injured or killed on farms, we would like to talk a little bit about child safety on farms. The national statistics suggest that a large proportion of child deaths on farms are very young children less than five years old. Between 1989 and 1992, which were the latest figures we had available to us, there were 115 child fatalities on farms in Australia, and 63 per cent of those were children under five years old.

This reflects the fact that farms are both homes and workplaces. On so many farms economic pressure requires both parents to work in the business, and juggling child-care does not mean getting the children to a child-care centre before work or rushing to pick them up before the centres closes at 6.30. In many cases, juggling work and child-care can literally mean that – juggling work and children.

The VFF rejects the suggestion that the Child Employment Bill and the concepts of permits for employment of children under 15 will have any impact on farm safety for children. The resources committed to implementing this legislation would, in our view, be better spent assisting farmers to identify and deal with the farm safety hazards for children on farms.

The effort being put in by some VFF members to promote farm safety to children is worth noting. In August this year, the president of the VFF grains group, Ian Hastings, along with his wife Cathy and his children, hosted a farm safety day for children on their farm. Cathy and Ian have done this for the last couple of years. The day attracts 500 children from local schools. The day arose from Ian and Cathy's initiative, together with the support of the Ouyen branch of the VFF. Ian and Cathy Hastings' farm is at Ouyen in the Mallee. It illustrates a practical way in which the VFF has been, and will continue to be, involved in farm safety. It is one example of the activities that our members are involved with in promoting farm safety, and particularly safety for children.
Apart from farm safety for children, the other clear issue coming out of the fatality statistics is the rate at which older farmers injure and kill themselves on the job. There are many unique aspects to agriculture. One peculiarity of agriculture is that the work force keeps going until they literally drop. Many farmers never retire. They often reduce the pace a bit, but it is not unusual to find people in their 70s or 80s working actively on the family farm. I meet with lots of farmers as part of my work, and I often meet active farmers who are well into their 70s and 80s. It is a characteristic of our industry. In our view, it is a commendable characteristic of our industry and ought to be encouraged. Few other industries provide opportunities for older people to actively contribute.

But, of course, it is another reason why comparison of injury and death rates on farms with other industries can be misleading. Older people are not as strong and their reflexes are slower. If they are injured at work, their bodies take longer to repair themselves. This year, the VFF, in partnership with Worksafe, conducted a campaign targeting older farmers. The program was based around a video. I have left a couple of videos of it here for you to see, and also some farm safety fact sheets that come out as part of that program.

The program is based around a guy called Neil Simpson. Neil is a 72-year-old farmer from the Patchewollock in the Mallee. Neil, like many other older farmers, is active on the family farm. He is also a very well-known and highly-respected industry leader. Neil's involvement in this program sends a very strong message to other farmers, particularly those of his generation, that it is okay to spend a little money to make life easier and safer for yourself.

The key message we have been trying to deliver is that small and inexpensive changes to farm equipment can make the physical tasks associated with farming safer and easier. Older farmers do, and can, continue to make a huge contribution to agriculture. Simple modifications to farm equipment can assist them to make this contribution and reduce the chance of them having an accident or injuring themselves. The Older Farmer Video gives emphasis to these modifications that make jobs easier, including jockey wheels and winches to move equipment and levers to make things easier. It is important, because musculoskeletal injuries are likely to be a major cause of injury on farms. A bad back or a knee injury is painful and can be very costly to a farm business. So it makes good sense to invest a few dollars in making the job easier.

As older farmers choose to work on the farms later in life, so too they retain a level of control of their business. Where there is no son or daughter to hand over to, this will often mean an increased need for hired labour. The lesson for our sector needs to be that the more difficult our industrial relations and WorkCover systems make it to hire new staff, either contract or full time, the more inclined older farmers will be to not employ specialists but to do the risky and difficult jobs themselves.

We selected Neil Simpson for that task carefully, primarily because he has credibility in the farm sector. We felt it was very important to have a person with credibility selling those messages to farmers. And I think that actually has been quite successful. The feedback we have got from the video and from the program involving a high-profile person has been very positive.

We have talked about directly related work injuries and deaths. I think we also need to look at farm safety as a holistic issue and look at some of the other risks farmers face. Between 1992 and 1995, the standardised death rate for male farmers as a result of road traffic accidents in Victoria was 170 per cent higher than for males working in the population as a whole. In our view, that is a fairly shocking statistic. Sixty per cent of the deaths of farmers and farm workers on roads occurred within 50km of home.

The question is: why is that occurring? Seat belts appear to be an issue. Sixty-four per cent of the vehicles involved had seat belts, but 34 per cent of the farm managers who were driving the car with a seat belt fitted were not wearing it. For farm workers, the corresponding figure was 44 per cent. Regulation or enforcement of seat belt laws will not solve this problem. There will never be
enough police patrolling the bad roads of the western district to act as a deterrent to farmers. Farmers must be convinced that it is in their interests to choose to wear a seat belt, even on short journeys in their local area.

Another disturbing statistic is that 82 per cent of accidents were single-car accidents. By contrast, around 40 per cent of all fatal crashes are single-vehicle crashes. I think that points in one respect to the state of local roads in the country. We need to look at local roads maintenance and repair and the impact that can have upon road safety in rural areas.

The high rate of single-car accidents involving farmers also leads into the discussion of suicides. Car accidents are not included in suicide statistics, but there is little doubt in my mind that some of the single-car accidents that occur in the country are, in fact, suicide deaths. Even excluding motor vehicle suicides, suicide deaths of male farmers and farm managers aged between 15 and 64 in Victoria are 50 per cent above the male working age population as a whole. Nationally the figure is not quite so dramatic; it is 18 per cent higher.

We are not experts on suicide, but we feel that financial pressure and isolation must clearly be the factors behind the disturbing statistics on farmer suicide. As farms get bigger and as farmers pursue productivity by substituting capital for labour, the isolation and financial pressure they feel will intensify. Solutions to this problem are not easy to find. Part of the solution will lie in government providing good economic and less regulatory environment allowing farms to operate profitably. Good support for farmers in times of crisis like droughts is also important. Natural disasters, such as droughts and fires, add to the pressure on farmers.

The solution, of course, does not lie only with government. Good community support mechanisms are essential. This must include counselling services. But it also means farmers showing concern for each other and keeping in touch. Community organisations such as churches, Landcare groups, VFF branches, local football and other sporting clubs are very important to country communities. We must make sure that those clubs and groups are supported.

Beyond workplace accidents, motor vehicle accidents and suicide, the death rates for farmers are not significantly different from the community as a whole. Death rates for farmers and farm managers from cardiovascular disease are about the same as the male working population as a whole. Death rates from cancer are about six per cent higher, but the cancer rate requires some further investigation because some particular types of cancer seem to be more frequent with farmers. However, higher male death rates from cancer occur across rural areas and are not confined to farmers. There is no clear pattern in that issue for farmers. We have looked briefly at the statistics in that regard.

In relation to that issue, it is worth noting the enormous gains that have been made in recent years in respect of chemical use on farms. The VFF was instrumental in establishing the Farm Chemical Users Course, the very first training package in Australia aimed at producers in relation to farm chemicals. Over 50,000 farmers and farm workers have undertaken the Farm Chemical Users Course in Victoria, and 16,500 producers in Victoria have been accredited by the government for farm chemical use. While there is no room for complacency in relation to farm chemicals, it is fair to say that the success of the education and training program for farm chemical use rivals the ROPS program. It is a pity that it is not more widely recognised as a success within agriculture.

Finally, I would like to briefly discuss the VFF’s role in farm safety. The largest stakeholder group in the farm safety issue is farmers. In the main, it is farmers who are injuring and killing themselves on farms. In the main, it is farm families and farm businesses that suffer the consequences of farm accidents. The VFF is the representative body of farmers in this state, and we clearly have a pivotal role in farm safety.
However, that is not a new realisation on behalf of the VFF. The VFF has had a strong farm safety program in farm safety for some years. I mentioned earlier the 1996 VFF farm conference, where there was support for the compulsory ROPS program. I have also mentioned the Farm Chemical Training Program in which the VFF has taken the initiative. We have also sponsored Farmsafe Victoria, and we have been a host organisation for the Farm Safe Alliance since its inception. The Farm Safe Alliance is a coalition or alliance of all of the stakeholder groups in relation to farm safety – unions, Country Women's Association, rural doctors, WorkCover and all of those organisations that are involved in the farm safety program.

The work we have done this year on the older farm safety is, in my view, a model for the future. The campaign was developed within the VFF and was structured around a VFF identity, Neil Simpson. The message was it is okay to be safety conscious on farms; it makes good sense to look after your own health and safety; and there are some practical things you can do to make work safer and easier. The choice of Neil Simpson as the presenter of this program was very carefully. Neil is an older farmer. He is actively involved in the commercial farming business. He is also a prominent farm leader, and is well-respected in the industry.

We would like to see the VFF run a farm safety program each year. It may well not be the same as the current program we have been running with the older farmers, but it should reinforce the message that farm safety makes good sense and there are some practical things farmers can do to improve the farm safety on their farm. We are not about frightening farmers or threatening them with impractical regulations. It is very important that where regulations are used, they are used in a manner that parallels the ROPS campaign, where there is support from the industry, it is accompanied by incentives and it is well backed up with knowledge and research about what is required.

We believe that the most important contribution the VFF can make is in relation to cultural change in highlighting the importance of farm safety. There are a couple of take-home messages we would like to leave with you: the farm safety situation is not a disaster, as it is often painted. Injury rates on farms are not widely outside what occurs in other comparable industries. Farming injury and fatality statistics should not be necessarily taken at face value, but they need to be interpreted against the unique characteristics of the industry. That is not to say that we are complacent about the farm safety issue at all. The VFF places a very high priority on farm safety.

The other take-home message we would like to leave you with is that farm safety is much broader than employer/employee issues. We need to focus on all factors in rural health and injury protection, including road safety and mental health, in addition to the workplace injury and accidents. The VFF has been involved with a number of successful farm safety initiatives. The ROPS campaign and farm chemical training are standout examples. I think the organisation is uniquely placed to continue to make a contribution to changing attitudes towards farm safety among our membership and farmers in general. That is the basic presentation. We welcome some discussion of those issues.

The CHAIR – Simon, you have nothing further to add?

Mr PRICE – No, we are happy to take questions.

Mr MITCHELL – You said in your contribution that you are rejecting the Child Employment Bill and seat belts for farmers on roads; is that part of an attitude problem that farmers have with not wanting to comply with codes of practice or regulation sort of thing? What is the VFF doing as far as getting their members to comply with manufacturers' recommendations like the use of ATVs, et cetera?

Mr MANNERS – Firstly, in relation to the Child Employment Bill, we indicated that we see that having no material effect upon farm safety on farms. There is nothing in the statistics that
suggests that the requirement for police checks or permits is going to have any impact upon safety on farms.

In relation to seat belts, we are not opposing the seat belt regulations; what we are saying is enforcement is not the answer to the use of seat belts on country roads for farmers. There will never be enough policemen running around back roads in the country to provide an incentive to farmers in relation to seat belts. We need to convince farmers that they should be using seat belts even for short journeys; it is in their interests to do so.

In relation to the other issues, the VFF is very strongly involved in creating awareness and cultural change towards safety on farms. That is what this video is about. Farmers are by nature individualists; that is why a lot of them are in agriculture. But we want them to say it makes good sense for you on your farm to be thinking about safety, to be making investments in safety and to look at the impact that can have as a positive and a good investment, as well as making life easier for yourself. The thrust behind this is: make jobs easy, because if it is easy, you will be doing it safe as well.

Mr PRICE – The only other thing I will say is particularly with regard to the Child Employment Bill. We have recently quite a large debate about that. The statistics prepared by the National Occupational Health and Safety Commission analysing farm fatalities and injuries over 1989 to 1992 show that some 92 per cent of young children involved in farm fatalities were completely unrelated to any employment activity on the farm. That emphasises the issue that farms are workplaces; they are homes; they are places of recreation for the family. In essence, the Child Employment Bill and the permits and the police checks will have no real impact on improving the farm safety for kids. Clay has indicated that the majority of kids who are affected by fatalities on farms are in fact very young kids – quite often involving dams. In terms of the older kids, many of the fatalities and accidents are relating to horses for recreation use, and motorcycles for recreational use.

Farmers don’t have a culture against safety; what they have a culture against is regulations that might come in or prescriptions that are unrelated to actual achieving improvements on the farm. That is I think where the VFF can come through working with farmers to develop cultural change – not just making issues easier to implement on the farm and, by being easier, safer. But also through this campaign highlighting not only if you get injured on the farm, particularly if you are an older farmer, not only are you injuring yourself but what is going to happen to mum if she gets left home on the farm with the farm to manage that she has not been actively managing for years? There are those sort of cultural issues that the VFF can have quite a role to play in.

Dr NAPTHINE – In your statistics, you highlight the debates on farms in the last 12 months. Let me congratulate the VFF and all the other people involved in the ROPS campaign. I think it has been a very successful campaign, although it is not all that you do. If you parallel that with ATVs, what would the VFF say about how can we improve safety with respect to ATVs on farms?

Mr MANNERS – That is a very difficult issue, a couple of things. One is we have had a spate of ATV deaths in the last 12 months. Is that chance, or is there some change occurring in that area? We are interested to see the coroner’s report to come out in relation to any investigation of that, to see if there is guidance coming through from what the coroner has spoken about.

I indicated in our presentation that we are looking to run a campaign each year on some aspect of farm safety, and older farmers was the last one. We are actually talking with WorkCover now about whether we should run an ATV program for 2004. But the problem we have with the ATV program is what are you going to tell farmers to do? You can tell them to wear a safety helmet. There is some work being done on getting a more user-friendly type helmet for ATVs. I think you can teach them to be very careful about using the machine in relation to manufacturers’ specifications, and particularly in terms of adding attachments to the ATVs. But the thing that is
holding us up, if you like, in terms of running an ATV program for 2004 is what should we be
telling farmers about? Whereas in this we have come out and we say, “These are some things you
can do.” We run with sites on silos. There are half a dozen things to do. With ATVs, the answer
is not as simple as that. That is why we are struggling a bit with next year's program in relation to
ATVs as to what we should be saying to do. Apart from the helmet proposal, which I think will
be a challenge to sell to farmers, there are not many other practical solutions being put forward.
That is not an adequate answer, but that is where we have got to.

Dr NAPTHINE – Just following on from that: the message in the older farmers
campaign – to make jobs easier and to make work safer – one of the issues with the ATVs it
seems to me is the increased mobility that has come about because of the ATVs, which allow
older farmers to do things they will not have been able to do, to keep operating on steeper country,
and things like that. Do you have a comment on that? Obviously, they are useful tools and they
are being used as such, but sometimes they are being used inappropriately.

Mr MANNERS – There is no doubt that they are useful tools on farms. Every farm has
an ATV now. It is the standard equipment. I think if they are used correctly, ATVs are safe. The
issue is it is so easy to get them into a situation where they are unsafe. That would appear to be. I
don't have an answer to that in the sense that it is an awareness issue that they are potentially
unstable, and we need to make farmers aware of the potential instability. That is one of the issues
that we have toyed with for next year's program. Apparently Monash University has put together
some ATV demonstration modelling.

The CHAIR – I am sure we will take that on board.

Mr CRUTCHFIELD – I have two questions. The first one is the role of local
government, which may be your area. Are you aware of the experiment that is happening with
Colac-Otway? I know the VFF were at the forum where they were looking at local government
using that as a vehicle to sell farm safe messages? Is the VFF involved in that? Do you see any
value in expanding that project into all local governments in Victoria? It is probably a difficult
question to answer until we see the results.

Mr MANNERS – I am not convinced that there is a large role for local government in
this area. The trouble with local government is with loading on; it has so many roles for them to
take forward. We are expecting local government to be the answer to every problem in the
country. Local government has a very restricted financial base. It has very limited resources
generally, and it has high demands to do the loads of rubbish, if you like, the issues that are its
core business.

We want to be very careful expanding the role of local government to cover issues outside out of
those areas, which are more the traditional role of local government. Local government no doubt
has a role in terms of helping with awareness and saying farm safety issues need to be important.
But I don't frankly believe that the local government is necessarily the right agency.

Workcover is the key agency with which we deal. We also deal with DPI and the Department of
Human Services. I think also the VFF in the sense that we should have credibility with the farm
community, has a unique role in relation to farm safety. We would encourage the involvement of
any organisation to become involved in assisting with the farm safety issue. I just have some
nervousness about asking local government to do more in that area.

Mr PRICE – At that regional level in Colac, our VFF branch has established the farm
safety action group, which has been quite effective, led by Graham Prince. In some ways at a
regional level that leadership can be provided by VFF branches – and Clay spoke of Hastings’,
that provides the child safety information days – and we have the Colac farm safety action group.
That is something that farmers through the VFF can champion to develop local cultural change.
Mr CRUTCHFIELD – Are they as able as a body like local government to bring on board all the disparate interest groups? There may be an argument put that the VFF is not the best group, as is the AWU, to be the key advocate – and I am playing the Devil’s advocate here – but there may need to be a more independent body that will bring the more disparate groups together, because clearly there has already been some light banter about the union and the VFF and there is obviously some truth in that?

Mr PRICE – I think we would point again to this video that shows that from our perspective, we believe that we have got credibility to talk to farmers about on farm issues, and about trying to manage cultural change. To some degree Worksafe have accepted that because they have worked with us on this video, which has been about farmers trying to educate farmers to develop that cultural change.

That Colac group, for example, with their own resources have been able to work quite effectively to use the resources of the Colac-Otway shire, for example, to help bring resources to highlight farm safety issues.

Mr CRUTCHFIELD – I think Worksafe has already worked with the AWU Worksafe – with one of the speakers who was here. I am just fearful that there are all the disparate groups and there is not an overarching body that is in control.

Mr MANNERS – In relation to the farm sector, I think we do have to be very careful about characterising farm safety as an industrial issue. Once you characterise farm safety as an industrial issue, you will immediately lose farmers. It will be seen to be a regulatory issue. Clearly, there is a role for the AWU. I am not suggesting there is not. But we must be careful not to characterise the issue as an industrial issue.

We in the VFF, up until last year, used to manage farm safety through our industrial committee. We have changed that deliberately this year because we wanted to make sure that – well, our industrial committee approaches the world with a certain sort of mindset. It is the nature of the industrial system. And I think that getting the changes required in farm safety, the industrial sort of background doesn't well suit to that.

Mr CRUTCHFIELD – I was not advocating that by the way. I was referring to another group – I have forgotten its name now – from the University of Ballarat that has also been funded, so I was not advocating that. You mentioned regulation – and it is the last question I want to raise, because I think I know the answer – but I would like to hear you articulate a view on a code of practice for that sector. Clearly there is a view put forward that with a code of practice there need to be some regulation of itself, but there needs to have some teeth as well. What is the VFF’s view on a code of practice being developed?

Mr MANNERS – Well, a code of practice for what? A code of practice for farm safety to be so broad as to be meaningless, I suspect.

Mr CRUTCHFIELD – A code of practice, whether it is for different industries in that sector or ATVs – just the general principle, if you like.

Mr MANNERS – You have to be very careful. I think good advice to farmers about operating techniques is what is required. The movement within a code of practice – you tend to spill immediately into a regulation. The differential between a code of practice and a regulation is often very blurred. We are very nervous about having a regulatory approach to farm safety, because we don't think it will work.

Mr CRUTCHFIELD – Why wouldn’t it work if you have that regulation? And clearly there is a role for education as well as some form of – if you want to put it bluntly – punishment. Where do you sit in respect to that? Clearly you do need some regulatory mechanisms in any industry. Why should the farm industry be any different?
Mr PRICE – The issue in some ways does become one of enforcement. With the rollover protection scheme, that is probably an example of one where adopting a regulatory approach was in some ways useful. It delivered an incentive for farmers to make the change. On top of that, the government provided a financial incentive to make the structural improvement. That was something you could actually enforce. You can see from the paddock whether or not the tractors have got the improvement.

In terms of the issues with regard to farm safety excluding the rollover protection schemes, it is not easy to identify what a simple regulatory fix could do that would address the farm safety requirement. A code of practice is only really a short stone’s throw away from regulations. You still have the enforcement aspect.

We have heard about the statistics on seat belt use, which is really a cultural issue. Short of putting many, many more police officers out on poorly used, infrequently used country roads, you are not going to pick that up. We would argue that instead of going down the regulatory approach, particularly in instances where you cannot clearly identify a change that you can enforce, the government would be much better, Workcover would be much better working with a group like the VFF to develop that cultural change. Whether it is a code of practice or whether it is regulation, I suspect that if it doesn't have the support of the farmers’ advocates going out there and selling that reform, it is not going to be picked up and the enforcement side of it would be even much more difficult to achieve. There is some drop-off as we know of ROPS, and that has had very strong endorsement from the VFF plus strong regulatory penalties and incentives. So anything that did not have that level of support would have a much more difficult job.

Mr McQUILTEN – Farm drownings, there is I believe a report that has been done in the Coroner's Court. Is it finished? I am not sure if anyone knows. What are your views on that report? You mentioned before about the inquiry into ATVs. The coroner has done an inquiry into farm dam deaths. Therefore I would assume because it is a major part of the proportion of deaths on farms that you would have a view on that report. Is that the case? Is there a view by the VFF?

Mr MANNERS – I am not familiar with the report by the coroner on farm dam deaths, I am afraid to say. I think in preparing for this, we thought much more about the farmers as workers in terms of farm fatalities and injuries, not necessarily the young children that are being caught in the dams. We don't really have a response to that question today, but we can take it on notice.

Mr INGRAM – In your presentation, you have some data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics of the injured workers per thousand. Agriculture, forestry and fishing is all lumped together. Do you have any better information comparing agriculture to forestry and fishing industries and whether that would increase your injury rates or decrease them?

Mr MANNERS – I am afraid I don't, but we haven't asked – the ABS certainly don't publish agriculture separate from fishery and forestry, and I haven't asked the question whether they have those data separately. I am not sure if they will break them out. They probably could break them out if we asked.

Mr INGRAM – Because as part of the terms of reference we are looking at injury and fatality on farms but we are also comparing it to other like industries – your sister industries, I suppose.

Mr PRICE – That might be a question for the well resourced Committee to put to the ABS.

Mr MANNERS – I am sure that at a price the ABS will provide it.

The CHAIR – Clay, is there anything further you want to add?
Mr MANNERS – No, thanks.

The CHAIR – Thank you very much for coming along and giving up your time to share your knowledge and experience.

Witnesses withdrew