RURAL AND REGIONAL SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into cause of fatality and injury on Victorian farms

Sea Lake – 24 March 2004

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Ms K. John, Chairperson, Ouyen Farm Safety Expo Committee (sworn).
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 that any evidence taken by this committee, including submissions, under the provisions of the Constitution Act is granted immunity from judicial review, but any comments made outside the committee’s hearings are not protected by parliamentary privilege.

Please tell us your full name and address, and could you also state whether you represent an organisation and, if so, the position you hold in that organisation.

Ms JOHN — Kathryn John, 27 Thorne Street, Ouyen. I am the chairperson of the Ouyen Farm Safety Expo Committee.

The CHAIR — Could you provide some brief comments, then we will ask you some questions afterwards.

Ms JOHN — What I will say will be in addition to what is in my submission.

The approach taken by the Ouyen Farm Safety Expo Committee to reduce the incidence of injury on farms is one of education. We strongly believe that if the correct messages are delivered when habits are being formed — that is, as children — there will be, firstly, few injuries, because children will understand the reasons why certain courses of action are necessary; children are naturally inquisitive and will not refrain from particular behaviours simply because restrictions are placed upon them. If they gain understanding they are more likely to accept advice. Secondly, the need for changing inappropriate behaviours by adults would be minimised because children would have learnt the correct behaviours initially. As with public speaking, it is unrealistic to expect adults to be great orators without skilled tuition and years of practice. If children have been educated about the correct way to approach, for example, livestock, it is more likely to be an instinctive action as an adult. Thirdly, adults who do not know or see the importance of certain approaches will be advised by informed children. Feedback from the parents and grandparents of children who have attended the expo has told us that children are telling their parents, ‘It should not be done that way, Dad’. We are educating adults as well as children.

Participants in the Ouyen Farm Safety Expo are drawn from an area of approximately 20 000 square kilometres. By the end of the 2004 expo nearly 2000 children and their families will have an increased awareness of farm safety. However, our committee members are predominantly volunteers, who spend an enormous amount of time simply attempting to gain the funds to stage this yearly event. Without guaranteed finances the longevity of this event is unknown. Volunteer burnout is a potentially serious issue in this situation. We have created a multi-award-winning event with proven results, and we are educating the farmers of the future.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much. We are hearing a bit about the guarantee of ongoing funding for projects such as your own. Is there anything else you would like to add about how that could be done or how that funding could be guaranteed? What would be the practical ways to do that?

Ms JOHN — Do you mean guaranteeing the funding?

The CHAIR — Yes, just the practical ways of providing that funding and making sure it is spent well and goes to the right projects et cetera.

Ms JOHN — One would be minimising the work involved in receiving grants like this. One particular grant involved over 150 hours work simply to receive that money, so decreasing the complexity of the grants is a major issue for us, bearing in mind that we are volunteers.

Dr NAPTHINE — How much money do you need each year to run this project?

Ms JOHN — About $15 000.

Dr NAPTHINE — Where is your current source of money?

Ms JOHN — A variety of sources.

Dr NAPTHINE — Do you get it from the Victorian Farmers Federation or WorkSafe?
Ms JOHN — Yes, both, and others.

Mr INGRAM — Local government health services are included in your submission.

Ms JOHN — Yes, and nothing has been ongoing, so some of these grants are one-offs. Then we have access to our facilitator in Ouyen, who is a community capacity-building facilitator. She informs us of various avenues of gaining money.

Dr NAPTHINE — How did it start, and who is the Ouyen Farm Safety Expo Committee? Where did it all come from?

Ms JOHN — I started it, I suppose. I went to a two-day leadership workshop. I had been at home with young children previously, and then I went to a workshop. There I met a man whose niece and nephew had died. I met the father of those two children. I did not think there was anything up and around Ouyen at that stage. Since then I have realised that different people have done various things, but when I came back it was really well received by the VFF and other people, who were as enthusiastic as I was, and it began there.

Dr NAPTHINE — Some years later now, how do you assess whether this is having a measurable impact? Do you do follow-up surveys? How do you measure the effectiveness of the program with the children that have been through it?

Ms JOHN — On an ongoing basis?

Dr NAPTHINE — Yes.

Ms JOHN — That is probably done anecdotally. After each expo we send questionnaires to the children, the teachers that attended and the parents of the children that attended the expo. So we get feedback, and we compile the results of those. But the quote that I gave you was just in passing, and we are receiving those all the time. We might be at a meeting and a father of a child who had attended has said, ‘My son came home and said, “We cannot do it that way any more, Dad, we have to do it this way. We have been told and we have learnt that we do it this way”’. So they are being forced, if you like, to make changes too, because of these informed children.

Mr INGRAM — In your high-quality submission — there are some good points in there — one of the items relates to impediments to sustaining improvements in farm safety. As I said, there are a number of good points, but I take up the second-last one, the lack of practical, interactive and meaningful education training for farming families, such as access to the Ouyen Farm Safety Expo. Can you just expand on that? Obviously your program is a good one, but how do we get the practical access not only to the farm children but also to the farmers, so they will listen? With your experience, is there any other way we can do it? Have any other ideas come forward that, if funded, may make an improvement in farm safety?

Ms JOHN — I suppose because my background is that of an educator of children — and that is where I have come from, so that is my area of area of expertise — I see this as a long-term process. I understand what you are saying about getting access to farmers, but these children are all farmers of the future, and we do this with primary and secondary schools, so in their educational lifetime the children go through the program twice. It is not just a one-off, either. I write and send a whole program to schools that encourages them to do a unit of work. One-offs do not work, so the program that I write is a selection of lesson outlines, and generally a teacher of the group that will attend the expo will do a two-week unit on this.

The teachers then have access to some of the presenters if they wish. What we do each year — we have done it for three, and this is our fourth — is have various evening sessions available. Because we have presenters from all over the state, we will have those presenters available to attend VFF meetings and the like. One year the VFF groups nominated which presenters they wanted to attend their meetings. Last year we ran it in a similar style to the expo, where we had various presenters doing sessions in a similar way to the way they conduct them with the children, and the parents could roam around the areas of interest that they had there.

In a way we have a twofold approach, but our main focus is children. This year we are taking yet another different approach, because we have not yet found a formula that we think works with adults. We think this really works for children. They are extremely excited, and the teachers are really positive about the way the children take on board
the messages. If children continue talking about what they have learnt and they are excited about it, that is one way of seeing whether they have adopted an approach, and we are getting that feedback.

Mr INGRAM — One of the committee’s jobs is to find solutions to problems. You have identified a problem and made a comment there, and you have partly answered it. If I understand you correctly, you are basically saying that you do not have all the answers but you are still looking for ways to get to the broader farm families with practical, interactive and meaningful educational programs. You have some of the answer, but not all of it. Is that basically what you are saying?

Ms JOHN — Yes, for adults.

Mr WALSH — What is the take-up by the schools of your two-week block program? Do you have any idea how many schools do that?

Ms JOHN — As in the units?

Mr WALSH — Do they actually use the units you prepare?

Ms JOHN — Yes, they do.

Mr WALSH — All of them?

Ms JOHN — Yes, and they are very excited about it. We have schools ringing us, and at the moment we have maximum numbers for what we can do without more money and more committee people. We have had interest from further afield; we have them coming from Werrimull, which is a huge distance for them to drive. They would not continue doing that if they did not see it as worthwhile.

Mr WALSH — May the committee have a copy of your units to have a look at them?

Ms JOHN — They are based on the educational Curriculum and Standards Framework II, so yes.

The CHAIR — With appropriate funding would your group be able to help other communities in other parts of the state develop the kind of program that you have developed? Do you think your group would have the expertise to be able to train others?

Ms JOHN — Yes.

Dr NAPTHINE — When is it on this year?

Ms JOHN — On 17, 18 and 19 August.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for your contribution today, Ms John. You will get a copy of the transcript in a couple of weeks and you will be able to correct any matters of fact or grammar, but not matters of substance.

Witness withdrew.