CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

RURAL AND REGIONAL SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into cause of fatality and injury on Victorian farms

Kerang – 23 March 2004

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Witness
Mr R. Trezise, Farmer.
The CHAIR — Please state your full name and address.

Mr TREZISE — Richard William Trezise, PO Box 220, Cohuna. I did not plan to do this!

The CHAIR — Could you make some brief comments?

Mr TREZISE — I feel that as a farmer I probably can make a few comments about how we operate. I have probably had all the accidents that a farmer can have — chainsaws, knees injuries and broken toes and fingers. When you are talking about legislation I wonder how far you can go to protect people from themselves. The farming community has done a remarkable job on the safety side of it, particularly considering the pressures it is under now. Everything is going faster and there is more pressure. The farming community has done a remarkable job, considering that the statistics still say that it farming is up there as the worst industry around. I feel that we do have to accept that every now and again we are going to lose one because of that fact. Every now and then a fellow will walk up to a tractor and try and start the thing while sitting beside it. We all know what happens; those sorts of things do happen. Education is probably the real way to go; people have got to be made aware of the situations out there. Whenever someone comes to my farm to work I say, ‘Do not kill yourself and do not kill my machinery’. Generally speaking it is the misuse of machinery that kills the person. It is fairly elementary stuff; there is no great secret to it. I saw a sign in an old second-hand shop, a sign that was probably 50 or 60 years old. It said, ‘There is no better safety device than a careful worker’. It is fairly elementary stuff when we get down to it, but it is an education process.

Mr CRUTCHFIELD — I hope you are kidding when you said that is what you say to a person who comes to work on your farm. Do you do any sort of induction training for someone who comes onto your property?

Mr TREZISE — No. I said, ‘Do not be reckless! If there is a dangerous job on the farm, come and see me; if I think it is too dangerous I will be the one who decides’. The trouble is that between Koondrook and Cohuna there are so many farms, and everyone has a manager. You have varying degrees of management all the way along, and I do not know how you deal with that, I really do not. It is a real problem. It is a minefield in that regard, and that goes for better management of the business too. Do you know what I mean? You have a varying degree of management all away along that line, the top management and the lowest management. I do not know whether I am helping you much.

Mr INGRAM — Have you ever looked at your farm and asked yourself, ‘What are the risks on my farm?’ — just for yourself, not for anybody else?

Mr TREZISE — All the time; it is an ongoing process. You cannot afford to take risks. You cannot afford to take risks, such as uncovered belts on machinery and guards on PTOs. But it gets back to the person and the risk that they want to take. I am probably 10 years ahead of anyone. I can go back to when we carted hay out and we would have 10 kids on the bales of hay, but the tractor did not move until they were all seated. If one fell off now and again it did not really matter as long as you did not start before. It is fairly elementary but every now and again you are going to lose one. Having a rule like: no motorbikes on the track after dark. Or : one motorbike on the track after dark. It is elementary stuff. If you have two on the track after dark you are looking for real trouble. These are basic rules, but I do not know how you get the message out there.

Dr NAPTHINE — What sort of farm do you have?

Mr TREZISE — A dairy farm.

Dr NAPTHINE — How many cows do you milk?

Mr TREZISE — About 300.

Dr NAPTHINE — What sort of dairy chute do you have?

Mr TREZISE — Rotary.

Dr NAPTHINE — If I was coming onto your farm to work, what would you tell me if I said, ‘I am coming to work for you. What are the highest risk areas of your farm?’). What would you tell me?

Mr CRUTCHFIELD — ‘Do not kill yourself!’.
Mr TREZISE — It is a fact. I do not want my machinery wrecked, and basically it is misuse of machinery — ATVs and all those sorts of things — that cause accidents. Basically there are two rules: do not kill my machinery, because I will want to use it the next day. If I see someone bouncing up the track feeding the hay out I just go up and say, ‘Slow down’. If they do not, I say the next day, ‘Slow down!’ Then I get cranky. I would say, ‘Go out there, and if you are taking the chainsaw make sure everything is right. Do not go cutting down limbs on yourself’. Talking about the rollover protection on tractors, I reckon they are a damn nuisance. On my farm there are a lot of trees, and I kept pulling limbs down on myself — hooking the rollover protection limbs and pulling them down. Every safety device has a downside too.

Dr NAPTHINE — So when I was taking the chainsaw out you would not say, ‘Look, here are the goggles and here are the earmuffs’.

Mr TREZISE — Oh yes, all the gear! That is just part of the deal. I would say, ‘Do not forget to wear the goggles’.

Dr NAPTHINE — And steel-capped boots!

Mr TREZISE — ‘Do not do anything stupid’. That is the point I am trying to make, but I do not know how far you can go to protect people against their own actions. That is the dilemma you have.

The CHAIR — Thanks very much, Richard.

Witness withdrew.