

TRANSCRIPT

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Victorian Government's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Melbourne—Wednesday, 13 May 2020

Members

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WITNESS

Mr David Jochinke, President, Victorian Farmers Federation (*via videoconference*).

The CHAIR: Hello. We welcome you to the public hearings for the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee Inquiry into the Victorian Government's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. The Committee will be reviewing and reporting to the Parliament on the responses taken by the Victorian Government, including as part of the national cabinet to manage the COVID-19 pandemic and any other matter related to the COVID-19 pandemic. All mobile telephones should be turned to silent. All evidence taken by this Committee is protected by parliamentary privilege, therefore you are protected against any action for what you say here today, but if you repeat the same things outside this forum, including on social media, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript for you to check. Verified transcripts, presentations and handouts will be placed on the Committee's website as soon as possible. These hearings may also be rebroadcast in compliance with standing order 234. We have asked that photographers and camerapersons follow the established media guidelines and the instructions of the secretariat.

We invite you to make a 5-minute opening statement. We do cut you off at the 5-minute mark, so apologies for any awkwardness there. We ask that you state your name, position and the organisation you represent for broadcasting and Hansard purposes, and then this will be followed by questions from the Committee in relative order. So thank you very much, and if you could make an opening statement now, please.

Mr JOCHINKE: Thank you. My name is David Jochinke. I am a farmer from western Victoria. I am also the President of the Victorian Farmers Federation. I would like to begin by thanking the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee for inviting a submission from the Victorian Farmers Federation. In terms of my opening remarks there are a couple of key points that I would like to make. First, I will touch on our experiences as VFF operating in the COVID environment. I will highlight the joined-up thinking we saw from Government at State and Federal levels, and that was a very refreshing event. We really hope that continues. Secondly, I have observations about what our industry needs in this immediate post-COVID recovery phase. These are for the most part low-investment but substantial-gain approaches that we believe the Government should make and that will see the Victorian agriculture industry thrive and become a partner in prosperity.

Now, I do not want to bore the Committee with a tonne of data, but I do want to briefly paint a picture about the importance of agriculture to Victoria, our regions and our national economy. Australia is the largest agricultural producer. We seriously punch above our weight. We account for 43 per cent of Australia's sheep and lamb meat, 64 per cent of Australia's milk, 32 per cent of Australia's horticultural products, and as an industry it is worth roughly about \$15 billion and the multiplier effect of the food manufacturing in Victoria is worth \$38 billion to the Victorian economy. From an employment perspective the May quarter last year indicated that Victoria's food and fibre production and manufacturing employed nearly 200 000 people. Victoria is also the largest food and fibre exporter. We export more of our dairy, fruit, nuts and prepared foods compared to any other state in Australia. To put that into context, half of Victoria's total exports come from the agricultural sector.

In the pre-COVID environment our exports were on trajectory to double almost within the next 10 years. So, what is essential to the agricultural supply chain? First and foremost we have worked with Ministers and their departments to maintain the integrity of the supply chain. We undertook extensive analysis of what the supply chain is to understand and pre-empt the pressure points and lobby Government to put in place immediate contingencies. So what did we focus around? It was basically labour. A contingency and strategies were put into place for the workforce to ensure that food and fibre demand is met and that farmers have access to staff for essential farm tasks in the agriculture supply chain. We needed to make sure that we urgently secured visa arrangements for overseas seasonal workers who were currently in the country.

We also took a similar process of understanding the need for having farm jobs for local workers who had lost their employment due to the COVID crisis. We also sought and gave guidance to our farmers and farm businesses across the state about the best health practices that they could put in place in their workplaces. We also ensured that we focused on access to inputs—farm supplies and merchandise such as fertiliser, manufacturers of farm supplies and inputs such as stockfeed, farm contractors such as shearers—and also vets

that supply animal and husbandry services, knackeries, abattoirs and livestock yards were included. We then also focused on freight and transport logistics. Processes that we helped put in place ensured that infrastructure of national importance like ports, stevedores and diesel refineries could continue to operate during these restrictions, and we also maintained our current cross-border exemptions for agriculture to ensure we could get freight and further supplies in and out of the state. We also focused on telecommunications and the importance of maintaining and improving internet and mobile phone connectivity. A process to put in place increased internet and telecommunications in rural areas is absolutely vital for the prosperity of the rural sector.

Some of the lessons that we have learned out of COVID-19 are basically in two points. First of all, the positive thinking of bipartisanship across the government and the ability to make decisions and take actions within days instead of years on important issues. But then secondly, it is understanding the real threat to our supply chain and making sure that we do build on our competitive advantage and that in fact if we did have a shutdown for six months we would be able to continue to supply the quality food and fibre to our constituents. So some of the real key points that we can get out of growing a better sector is to grow our export markets to create better opportunities, to facilitate new investment and to increase opportunities to get better productivity that drives quality and innovation across the agricultural supply chain. Thirdly, to capture more value through low-key infrastructure and transport investments, especially around port and freight lines. Then also to increase jobs to improve the skills of our workforce and build on our current building capacity of operating businesses in ag. But more so, to make sure that we keep our costs down in agriculture by making sure we do not have too much regulatory burden through red tape.

So all in all agriculture has supplied, and we are a sector that has prospered through trying times. Thank you.

Ms STITT: Thank you, Mr Jochinke, for appearing today. I just wanted to ask you about your role at the VFF and how you have found being able to communicate with government during this particularly difficult time for your members. Obviously the Government needs to hear from key stakeholders, and I know the Victorian Agriculture Industry Reference Group is giving the industry that opportunity. Would you like to comment about how that group is operating and what sort of work you have been doing on that reference group that has been important at this particularly hard time for farmers?

Mr JOCHINKE: Absolutely. Thank you for the question. My role has been definitely the point person when there has been a key issue to contact either departments or Ministers who are relevant to those areas of expertise or pressure points. I have to admit that we have had excellent access to both departments and getting responses from Ministers during this time, and it has been a trying time and a lot of workload, so we do appreciate that.

The COVID working group that brings together all the stakeholders in agriculture has been a wonderful source initially of action. We were able to drill down and get into some of those gnarly sections of cross-border issues or making sure we have got open access to supplies, especially at a critical time, because when those COVID restrictions did come in we were at the start of our cropping programs of our pasture programs across the state and the finalisation of harvest. So understanding that we needed that access and to work together to overcome those issues and even the implementation of the different restrictions that were put in place and social distancing and quarantining or even isolation of workers were able to be worked through by that group. The group was very similar to what we have seen in other states, and we commend the Government for bringing it together in such a timely manner. We were actually able to resolve some issues across the different players within agriculture succinctly because we were able to talk about issues that dealt with everybody and then we could get the answer at the one spot and deal with it. Instead of dragging it out over weeks or months, we were able to deal with it in a matter of days.

Ms STITT: Do you have an example that you can give the Committee of the kinds of issues that you have been able to resolve—you know, complex issues that have been able to be worked through by the committee?

Mr JOCHINKE: Well, one of those gnarly ones, those wicked ones, was: okay, if you have a workforce that lives in a house and you need to transport them from the house to your place of employment and then let them work in very close quarters, how do you actually design a process or a protocol around allowing that to occur? In the sheep industry we saw that with simply just taking some commonsense practices of making sure you have got your distancing, making sure you only use every second shearing stand in the sheds where possible and just giving that guidance and information to the producers. We also saw that in horticultural

production, where an apple producer was able to bring in a different standard of how they pick apples and operate the machinery to ensure that they have that social distancing and to ensure that they have critical safety equipment and that they are compliant and providing a safe working environment for their employees but then also that they had a testing regime put into place so that if people were feeling crook and they were still living in the same house but working in the same employment they could manage a system to first of all identify by either temperature or then put in place sanitisation that lessens the risk or the chance, if somebody did catch COVID, that that would spread throughout the whole workforce. So having a discussion about how and why you do things and having a discussion around some difficult processes that were put in place definitely expanded our knowledge and made the transition to business as unusual as easy as possible.

Ms STITT: Great. Thank you. Obviously we have had good rain, but there is no question that farmers are still doing it pretty tough after years of drought. I understand that the Victorian Government has recently adjusted the drought support package. Can you talk to the Committee about how important that has been, particularly when dealing with the COVID pandemic at the same time?

Mr JOCHINKE: Especially for producers who have had up to two to three years of below average rainfall it is quite trying. Now, obviously when it rains you have still got to take that rain, make a product and sell it. So also in the environment of a low Aussie dollar and favourable commodity prices maximising your ability to recover or bounce from those situations is really important. The response that we saw out of government was quite measured. We did see some good initiatives that helped areas either re-establish their pastures or re-establish some of the inputs that they need for farms. When you come out of a drought, one of the hardest things to do is to put yourself in a position to maximise the opportunity of the upcoming season. Obviously there is always more we can do in this space. That preparedness part is something that we really, as an industry and as government and even in my role engaging farmers, need to work on. And I think that is going to be the next challenge to ensure that when we do come to the next drought we have people in the most robust position so that they can take not only a knock of drought but then also, if there is another incident, that they are in a position where they have got equity or a robust business model to ride that through.

Ms STITT: I understand that the Minister for Agriculture recently announced increasing the maximum amount available for the drought resilience grants from \$5000 to \$10 000 and expanding the grants to new activities such as mobile phone booster technologies. Can you tell us how these changes have been received by your members and how these important grants will be used to support farmers through both the drought and the coronavirus pandemic?

Mr JOCHINKE: Once again, anything that can assist the business model of farming to bring us up the knowledge chain of how we can become better or more economic in our finance and how we can make better farming decisions, and when we do purchase, be encouraged to spend money in our businesses that are focused on addressing those key issues—that resilience piece—is basically the core business of what I think government should be doing. It is the encouragement of best investment, of best practice. We saw that as a positive step. Our members—we can see that the amount of people that have taken up those grants and schemes has been extremely positive. But I also note that they are not ever going to be able to sustain a business through hard times. They are only there to help cushion or to help make a decision or to invest in a certain piece that makes the job easier, but it is never going to be able to prop up a farm or take real hardship away from the real devastation of drought. But having the ability to once again rebound and be resilient is the reason why agriculture has done so well underneath this environment, in conjunction with the Government understanding that this is an organic system. You cannot switch agriculture on and off; it is not like an engine. When you have a crop in the ground, when you have livestock in your paddock, you need to feed them all the way through. You need to make sure that inputs coming in are done at the right time, that when the animal needs assistance it is looked after but then also when we have the processing of animals and plants at the back end we have got access to that supply chain to make sure that we can get it down to the consumers.

Ms STITT: Great. Thank you so much. Chair, I am going to cede the rest of my time to my colleague Mr Maas.

Mr MAAS: Thanks, Mr Jochinke, for your time today and your appearance before the Committee. I would like to keep going along the line of some of the elements that are part of the drought support package. I understand that the VFF administers the farm machinery grants program as well, and I understand that the

Minister has recently extended that. Would you be able to talk us through how this has been received by farmers in the Milawa region?

Mr JOCHINKE: Well, Milawa, being in the north-west of the state, absolutely got pummelled by two exceptionally dry years, which made it really tough for farmers to be prepared for this upcoming season, and that was what that machinery grant was all about. It was about focusing on getting farmers and their equipment up to a standard where they could operate in preparedness for this season. That program went unbelievably well. The take-up of that was almost immediate, and we actually exhausted the first tranche of funds. Through discussions with the Minister she is quite aware of what the position was and now has provided additional funds to make sure that we cover not only the overflow of applications but any future applications to exhaust that initiative.

It has got to be said that when we put programs like that in place and we work in partnership with the department of agriculture to deliver and give outcomes, we do once again look at not only, 'What is the initial investment?' but 'What is that longer term effect? What is that ripple effect?'. For us it is about farm safety, making sure that we are operating in an environment where we are not just wiring stuff together where it really needs to be fixed properly. That is what this fund was able to do. It was able to allow that higher level of maintenance, that higher level of improvement of equipment that would not have been able to occur in a normal situation when people have been economically strained for two years.

Mr MAAS: Thank you for that. Look, no-one is really aware of how long this pandemic will last. The vagaries that go with COVID-19 are such that we just do not know that. You actually mentioned that there would be some long-term benefits from the drought package. You mentioned farm safety. Are there any other long-lasting effects that you think farmer recipients would have from receiving any of the drought package grants?

Mr JOCHINKE: Well, one of the most common and best programs there are is that drought resilience package, and that could be spent on many different areas. One of those generally is stock containment areas, which has a huge environment effect by taking livestock off paddocks that they would generally walk to find a source of food—containing them in an area so that farmers can feed them, look after them and give them the best possible welfare under those trying conditions.

Once again, when you are in drought, when you are at that critical stage, it is as much a rainfall drought as it is a money drought. So having access and the ability to put in infrastructure that you can use not only for this drought but in future droughts as well is what I believe good government spend, good taxpayer spend should be about—that is, giving farmers the options to have flexibility in decision-making but also addressing the specific issue.

What we have seen with that program is a huge uptake of that stock containment, being able to utilise it for that, but then also some different novel ways of fodder supply—making sure they have got the ability to store fodder or even grain so that when prices are lower, they are able to capture that, build up a bit of their own personal reserve so that when it does need to be called on, they can utilise that without the further assistance of government.

Mr MAAS: Thank you, Mr Jochinke. We have some very tangible examples there of how the Victorian Government has continued to support the agricultural industry during stage 3 restrictions. Would you be able to take us through how the overall pandemic impacts have been lessened for the agricultural industry in Victoria?

Mr JOCHINKE: From the investment or from the processes from Government?

Mr MAAS: Yes, from the support given by the Victorian Government.

Mr JOCHINKE: Okay. One of the key attributes when you are in a situation of people not being aware or assured of what they are able to do or not able to do is information, and one of the key things that we would be making sure of is that we do not have too large a vacuum or too long a wait between getting information presented and then getting a solution coming out the back end. One of the good examples is essentially a frequently asked question program that has been put in place by DJPR to ensure that if there is a commonly asked question, that they can answer it almost immediately with authority that, 'Yes, you can do this' or, 'No, you can't do that'. Secondly, it is to have a hotline. So if I do have a query that is a little bit more obscure or

unique, I get a reference code. It is then looked at, ratified by a process and then given as an answer back to me. And then, because of that process, we can then use that for additional experiences or operations that we do come up against—similar situations so we can address in a timely manner. So having that ability to work succinctly, quickly and then also you are not supplying misinformation, that it is a one-stop shop, has been a positive experience in trying situations. And of course there are many, many circumstances where we have had troubles in the initial phase of adoption or the initial phase of the code restrictions coming in, but being able to address them in a timely manner has been an absolute positive outcome of this.

Once again, as I said in the opening comments, that bipartisan coordination between State and Federal Governments, the continuation of what can be seen as overcommunication in some areas, is needed in these times, because as soon as you create a vacuum, as soon as you create uncertainty, that has huge business ramifications because of the decisions we need to make in a timely manner. But then also ensuring that we are in the best possible position to recover from this crisis is that we are continuing business, that we are making good decisions now that actually for the rest of the season we will prosper from.

Mr LIMBRICK: Thank you, Mr Jochinke, for your presentation and for appearing before the Committee today. In your presentation you mentioned an issue of red tape. Could you provide a few specific examples of this type of red tape that affects your members and how it affects them?

Mr JOCHINKE: Quite frankly, there has been a circumstance of continued layering of some issues or polishing of some issues that quite frankly have now made the mechanism unworkable. One of the classic ones for me is native vegetation. At the end of the day, as a Victorian farmer, as someone who is passionate about the environment—because at the end of the day a productive farm is a healthy farm. If I do not have that, I cannot operate. But the amount of paperwork I have to go through to manage one tree, of which I have planted plenty, to remove one, is absolutely ridiculous. I beg your pardon to say that the amount of paperwork you have got to go through to manage that tree is almost equivalent to the tree that you are removing. So we do need to rethink it. What is our key objective when we talk about red tape and especially around native veg? It is one of the most hamstrung issues that I see—that is, not allowing farmers to manage the landscape.

Once again, I am not talking about a net loss; I am talking about managing it. So if I remove trees, I have to replace trees. I am happy enough to plant them, but to remove them is nigh on impossible. If we do not do that, the future trees, the future landscape of our environment, will become denuded, because the perverse effect of our current legislation is—and I am sorry, I am on a bit of a high horse here, but this is a passionate one for me—there is no incentive for me to make positive environmental outcomes other than my own personal belief, and that is wrong. We need to have workable legislation that encourages good behaviour. When you come into times like what we are in now, we want people to be productive, have the ability to adopt the highest levels of technologies and even adapt new technologies. But when we have got bureaucratic processes that quite frankly mean that farmers do not engage with them, and that are quite unworkable for our situations, you have got to ask yourself: where did we ever lose common sense? It is because we try to make things too rigorous, and for me that is a classic example of where we make it too hard to do business in this state, let alone Australia.

Mr LIMBRICK: Yes, you will not get much argument from me there. The native vegetation laws are something that we have spoken about extensively in the past. There has been some government reaction to the pandemic with regard to regulatory controls, and some loosening of red tape. Have you seen any of that positively affect you? If you could identify something that might be useful to maintain going into the future, so some reaction from government that you have seen a positive effect from that we should continue with—can you provide an example of that?

The CHAIR: Sorry, just before you do, can I also remind the Member and the witness of the terms of reference of this Inquiry.

Mr JOCHINKE: Thank you, yes. When I say terms of reference, with regard to native vegetation, that has a big effect on how we operate our businesses. And I guess when we are coming down to loosening of red tape, it also is about—labour was probably one of the classic examples—the need to ensure that we had a workable system, that we could get visas for backpackers and visas for Pacific Islander programmers who were in the country, to look after them. Because if your visa expired when you were here, what happened to you? What happened to our ability to have a workforce? Where were they able to go?

So having that ability to work with both levels of government for an outcome was for us a classic example of being pragmatic, being practical and using common sense.

Mr LIMBRICK: And just finally, going down the track, what sort of effects from the pandemic concern your members that might be coming up down the track? So you mentioned one thing, with international markets and trade and currency effects—what are the big things that you are concerned about that might be the effects of the pandemic?

Mr JOCHINKE: So it is no secret to everyone here that the China effect and the ripple effect that is going through industry is absolutely huge. And we have got concerns for all different commodities that we need to make sure that we are getting good access to markets and that we are supplying what they need but also having a diverse basket of ability of countries that we trade with. And I see this as an opportunity, also noting that we have got huge environmental stewardship credentials. We have got some of the world's leading practices and production—and also how we do look after our workforce. We should be promoting that and using that to leverage into other opportunities for marketing our products in different countries.

But then also, it is one thing to get our trade agreements done at the national level, but then on a local level—to ensure that we are assisting companies to get manufacturing, assisting companies to make sure that their supply chains, such as the airfreight that we saw into China as well; it was a great initiative, a great response to a demand that we needed. But that is only the start of what we could and should be doing. It is actually being able to identify those opportunities and actually do something about it. Once again, it is great to have an agreement, it is another thing to actually execute and get maximum value out of it.

Mr LIMBRICK: Due to lack of time I will finish up there, but thank you very much.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Thank you, Mr Jochinke, for appearing. I will bring it back to the COVID-19 issues specifically. Ms Stitt asked before about the industry reference. David, are you actually on the group yourself or is it another rep?

Mr JOCHINKE: No, I have been on it since the start.

Mr D O'BRIEN: So how many times has it met? Are you able to tell me?

Mr JOCHINKE: I believe eight now.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Eight, right. And it was established—or it was announced, at least—on 23 April. That was about a month after the state of emergency was declared. Do you think it could have been a little bit more timely in terms of responding on behalf of the agriculture sector?

Mr JOCHINKE: Initially I think we had a couple of meetings prior to the public announcement that we were meeting. Compared to other states I believe that we were within the same week of Queensland establishing theirs as well as New South Wales. I will have to double check that, but we were very much in the same linear position. But I would say that we need to make sure that the learnings out of this and how we coordinate could be improved, and as a part of all of these things you will reassess where we are at. But I think that the learnings out of having a round table on a regular basis, and especially who to pull together and when to pull it together, are critical. So probably the correct answer is: could have been done a week or two earlier, but the reality is when we did come together we actually kicked some really good goals. So there is the positivity around that as well.

Mr D O'BRIEN: So just a very brief question, but I think you said before that the committee, or the reference group, looked at some of the issues about how to deal with particular protocols and things, I think. Did that include the manufacturing sector? So abattoirs and dairy factories and the like, were they included as well?

Mr JOCHINKE: Yes, look, we incorporated all the peaks and R and D organisations that operate within Victoria. And when we do talk about processes and protocols, that is essentially what the committee was there for. So when we looked at climate arrangements or how to engage your workforce to make sure that you kept them safe, that was really a focus of different parts of the meetings.

A lot of the meetings had different flavours. Some of them were focused on cross-border, another one might have been then on what was deemed as critical to maintain—once again, inputs at the initial stages. But each meeting we have had has had expert advice come in from the previous peak to make sure we get those action items addressed, and then also I believe that every item that has been raised has actually been dealt with that week. So for me that positive quick turnaround is one of the things that I would really like to see maintained into the future operating environment. Sometimes some of these questions take longer to answer than what we see in this crisis event, but I think there is also a positive: we actually can continue to operate under trying conditions, and that is what that stakeholder group actually provided.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Yes, good. Can I ask: certainly from my electorate and I am sure Mr Riordan had similar feedback again, going back to—I think the right date was 22 March—when the Premier said he was going to national cabinet and instituting a lockdown effectively and specifically said, 'We'll be shutting down non-essential industries', that in my experience caused huge numbers of issues because everyone suddenly said, 'Well, am I essential or am I not?'. To this day people are still saying that. Did you have discussions with the Government about that in respect of agriculture, because that was a key question?

Mr JOCHINKE: Absolutely. I had direct conversations with the Minister for Agriculture, the minister for police, the emergency services commissioner and even the Premier himself. We had those direct lines of conversation to ensure that they understood that, whatever the decisions are being made, agriculture could not be switched off like a car engine, that we need to continue on both inputs in and services in to ensure that we are having production out. So we were quite active in that space. We were like a lot of the state when the announcement was made, wanting clarity or seeking clarity around what that actually meant for us, and that did cause a bit of angst between our members to understand, 'Well, what is the output of a certain decision or a certain comment made?'. Our simple way of interpreting it was: if you were not listed as a non-essential, you are essential and you need to carry on your business until further known, with the guidelines put into place. It took a while for us to shake that through the system, I have got to admit.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Yes, that was right. But, as you say, it took a while for people to appreciate that. Has the VFF had any contact or correspondence throughout the pandemic with the rural assistance commissioner, Peter Toohey?

Mr JOCHINKE: Yes. I have had personal conversations, and Peter has been one of the people who have been on the stakeholder engagement committee all the way through.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Righto. What has his role been? Has he had a role from a government perspective?

Mr JOCHINKE: From my understanding he has been talking to constituents and bedding that information directly in. But, to be honest, I do not have weekly contact; I do not have a direct understanding of his daily operations.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Yes, sure. And in respect of your conversations and contact with government and representations to government, are there any outstanding issues that you raised that you either did not get a response to or did not get a satisfactory response to from your perspective?

Mr JOCHINKE: I might frame that slightly differently, Danny. Every question that I have had has been responded to. It is actually us understanding what the right question to ask has been. It has been a little bit difficult because it is understanding, once again, from that premise of what we can or cannot do; to navigate that and actually get down to the heart or reframe that question appropriately has been a little bit difficult because, quite simply, we did not know how to tackle some of the key issues such as that workforce example or cross-border examples that for the South Australian side of things were very fluid and changed three times within one day.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Yes, fair enough. Likewise there were issues with exports, and we had AIG in here before, who indicated some of the problems they have had with freight and the like. What challenges is Victorian agriculture facing, particularly with exports but also with inputs. Have there been shortages and issues getting hold of particular inputs?

Mr JOCHINKE: Well, everything has been under stress in the supply chain. There is no doubt about that. We have seen it just from a consumer angle. It was not a supply issue; it was a demand issue, and demand quite

simply outstripped supply on a normal buying basis. I would say that is very similar then to agricultural inputs as well. When we were not sure of what was happening in the lockdown, people would then try to get as much product as they could up to their farms, which then caused a lot of stress. I personally know, I was at port to get a loading slot, which you have to book in usually only a day in advance—it took weeks, or at least a week then, to get the slot you wanted. So, yes, that definitely made it a challenge. Even now we are seeing limited products that are hard to get hold of, but if you have a good relationship with your retailer, you generally can get enough to see you through, but not generally the quantities that you need for the whole program. That has been a part of the stress.

I guess the other part of the conversation is: how do we ensure that we have got a robust supply chain? Some of the things that we are concerned about is how much fertiliser do we ever have in the country at one point, as well as how much diesel do we have. Underneath these times we saw that supplies got extremely low—low enough for us to be concerned to see a what-if scenario if we do get down to what we saw about 14 years ago when we did have some restrictions start coming in—especially at these peak times, because in agriculture if you are late out of your window, if you do not hit that sweet spot of production, you can never catch that time up; that is always lost to you. So having the ability to do it in a timely manner and not being able to get your inputs does have a huge impact on the profitability of the farmer and the sector.

Mr D O'BRIEN: In the 20 seconds I have got left I will not bother asking another question, but just to say thank you to you and the farmers of Victoria for continuing to supply us throughout this crisis. Thank you and good luck.

Mr JOCHINKE: Thanks for your support.

The CHAIR: Thank you, and I am sure the Committee agrees with that sentiment. We thank you very much for appearing before the Committee today. The Committee will follow up on any questions which were taken on notice in writing, and responses will be required within five days of the Committee's request. The hearing is now adjourned, and thank you for your time today.

Mr JOCHINKE: Thank you.

Committee adjourned.