

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

INQUIRY INTO PRIVATE PROPERTY RIGHTS



**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 30 OCTOBER 2019**

SESSION ONE

Members

**Hon Adele Farina (Chair)
Hon Jacqui Boydell (Deputy Chair)
Hon Ken Baston
Hon Kyle McGinn
Hon Darren West**

Hearing commenced at 10.03 am**Ms ROSSLYN KNOWLING****Chairperson, Western Australian Water Users Coalition, sworn and examined:****Mr DAVID WREN****Secretary, Western Australian Water Users Coalition, sworn and examined:****Mr ALAN BLAKERS****Committee Member, Western Australian Water Users Coalition, sworn and examined:**

The CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I welcome you to this morning's hearing into private property rights. We have with us representatives from the Western Australian Water Users Coalition.

[Witnesses took the affirmation.]

The CHAIR: Each of you will have received a form entitled "Information for Witnesses". Have you read and understood that document?

The WITNESSES: Yes.

The CHAIR: These proceedings are being recorded by Hansard and a transcript of your evidence will be provided to you in due course. To assist Hansard and the committee, if you make reference to a document, could you state the full title of the document and could you also talk into the microphones and not cover them with paper.

A transcript of your evidence will be made public. If for some reason you wish to make a confidential statement during today's proceedings, you should request that the evidence be taken in private. If the committee grants your request, any public and media in attendance will be excluded from the hearing. Until such time as the transcript of your public evidence is finalised, it should not be made public. I advise you that publication or disclosure of the uncorrected transcript of evidence may constitute a contempt of Parliament and may mean that the material published or disclosed is not subject to parliamentary privilege.

I hope that you understand all of that. I might just point out to you that my deputy is just making her way in now. She has another committee meeting in the morning so she gets here a little late. Hon Jacqui Boydell is now just joining us now.

Ross, do you want to make an opening statement to the committee?

Ms KNOWLING: As I said, I was recently appointed. The submission that you received and that we are discussing today was made prior to my committee membership. However, I am here to support the committee members who made the submission and who are here to defend the private property rights of their members. The concerns arose from the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation not being transparent with existing water rights and allocations. If spring rights were to be revoked under the new National Water Initiative, then property values would decline. This would require considerable compensation. The proposed southern forests irrigation scheme has not consulted with property owners on easement of pipeline or the effects of their agricultural operations. I will allow Dave Wren and Alan Blakers to answer any questions you may ask. I currently live on a 128-acre property, which is totally spring rights. We are at a huge risk if spring rights are revoked and our property value would probably halve.

The CHAIR: Which sub-catchment area are you in, Ross?

Ms KNOWLING: We are in the Donnelly sub-catchment, west Manjimup. I will leave you with Al and David.

The CHAIR: David, are there any comments that you want to make?

Mr WREN: Yes, this is the background on the group that we are representing. As I said in the submission, we were formed in 1998–99. Actually, we originated out of Manjimup but our chairman was out of Albany, Graham Waugh, and we had Bruce Teede from Carnarvon and several other people. We represented the irrigators in that process. I highlighted that we were told by our rural politicians, including the shire president of Manjimup, “Don’t worry about it boys. Everything’s going to be okay. You can still keep your riparian rights, okay.” When people came to the south west, including my family—we originally came from California. I was raised in two irrigation districts, so it is no big deal to me. But what attracted them was the south west with the high rainfall, the relatively cheap land and the access of surface water and groundwater. As a farmer, you look at a property, the land capabilities of the farm, the soils, the climate and the water. People have purchased land for that before any regulation. The regulation really did not start until the late 80s and 90s and then when the National Water Initiative was brought in, they were trying to apply a Murray–Darling principle into Western Australia, which basically was cost recovery for public-funded projects. For somewhere like Harvey or the Ord River it made some sense, but in the self-supply system, it made no sense at all. They kept trying to push it. Our members really strongly could not pick it up.

[10.10 pm]

Some of the boys that are now gone—Bruce Teede, John Ryan and Graham Waugh—just said, “What are you talking about?” They had invested, created enterprise, supplied fruit and vegetables for the people of Western Australia, then all of a sudden people were telling them, “We have a better model.” They did not accept it. We went through great efforts and we thought we had some understanding with the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council—I think I referenced in there the standing committee—and they made some commitments that if there are these changes happening, there would be a recognition of spring rights, run-off loads and headwater dams. What has played out, because I was involved in the 10 Mile Brook Dam in Margaret River—I personally have an unlicensed dam and a groundwater licence. Our groundwater plan was affected by the south west Yarragadee and was put on hold. We had to go to SAT to get our water developed, and we now have it developed. My two children are running the enterprise. The same thing has happened in this area. Al and Eric Phillips called us in a year or two years ago. It is the same process. You get a set of figures that says everything is okay and then the figures change to something else. What has happened is that we said that we will respond to the people in west Manjimup and Warren, and through our group, it has been revitalised and the issues are there again. They are real issues; they are not made up.

The CHAIR: David, in your submission, you state that water users’ worst fears have been realised. Can you just expand a bit on that and tell us what those fears are and how they have been realised?

Mr WREN: In 1998, the people that were involved were running their farms. Like I said, they had the surface water, the run-off flow and springs. We thought we had an understanding that if there was to be a regulation, and we understand that regulation happens, those two categories of water, which most farmers who bought it—that would be your class-A water; that is why you buy it—they would go onto a licensing regime within the allocation plan. Now what is coming out is that the spring rights issue is being muddled; it is not clear what is a spring and what is not—they are changing the rules—and in the Donnelly, they have replaced a run-off headwater dam with something called a variable-take licence. Why do you need a variable-take licence when it says that

you can catch the run off? As the water hits the ground, your spring is there, and as the dams flows down into the Donnelly, the farmer catches the water. It is a common practice. He uses some of that water and generally he has more water than he needs as a reserve for drought. Also, the water in the summer provides water to your wildlife and your flora and fauna and gives environmental flows through the summer. That has not been recognised.

The CHAIR: David, as I understand it, under the scheme that is currently in place, spring rights continue to be recognised. I accept there may be some argument over what the definition of a “spring right” is—Alan, I can see that you have something to say on that so I will come back to that. The rest of the scheme is based on ensuring that there is enough water left in the system to protect wildlife, flora and the environment. A decision has been made on what percentage of the water can actually be used for irrigation purposes. That has been done through a whole lot of modelling through the Department of Environment Regulation. I understand that in the Dixvale sub-catchment area there is an issue because that is fully allocated and so farmers in that area are no longer able to get access to additional water and the variable-take licences occur when there has been a higher rainfall than normal and they allocate that additional water to be taken when a certain level of rainfall that occurs.

Mr BLAKERS: There is a great deal of confusion in that statement you just made. People are losing variable-take licences right at this moment and they have been given to other people within sub-catchments.

The CHAIR: How do you lose a variable-take licence?

Mr BLAKERS: You have conditions on your licensing. At the moment, the confusion in licensing is horrific. I am in upper Lefroy, which is probably the most developed water-user area of the whole district. I am right up the top and I am also in the middle. At the moment, I know of four farmers there who have had variations done on their licence in the last 12 months. One farmer went from spring rights to a licence and then to another licence in the last three months. He had a variable-take and that has been taken off him, but then another farmer just down the road has been given two more variable-takes that nobody even knew were there. The allocation and the way it has been modelled and done just reeks of the big boys getting what they want and all the rest of us are bugged. I sit at the top of the catchment. I have a fairly substantial business. I own Manjimup Truffles. I export to 26 countries in the world. I am farming on spring rights. There is newsletter that came out in March that says I am not farming anymore. I have put a substantial investment—a massive investment—into the farm. I would not like to add it up because I would probably go out the back and shoot myself. I have spent a fortune to develop what I have developed. With the stroke of a pen, one bureaucrat can take me out of business. My grandfather took up that land. I am third generation there. My grandfather took up that land because of the water. Farmers are the best environmentalists in the world because water has been flowing through farmland for 100 years and it is still classified as pristine. I do not think that has been done anywhere else in the world. Everybody is talking about environmental flow. If a bloke is out of water downstream, you will let it go to him if you have got it because that is how farmers are, but with all this new irrigation scheme being promoted, some awful angst has been created in that town. I hate to see it, because I come from Manjimup.

The CHAIR: Al, have your spring rights been impacted?

Mr BLAKERS: They have not come to see me yet. I have been told second-hand. I have had one conversation and I got told, “We will do whatever we feel like doing”, from DWER. I am prepared to fight.

The CHAIR: Al, do you have a dam licence?

Mr BLAKERS: No. I had a dam licence in 1994. When I started getting in with Dave and all these guys on water rights and that—90 per cent of people down there do not understand the system. I do not, and I have been involved in it for 25 years. It is an ever-changing thing. A policy came out three weeks ago. You read it and you go, “What the hell are you doing there? Are you working on policy or are you working on legislation?” My rights are: I proved I had spring rights. You look at all their mapping, and I am outside the proclaimed area. The water rises on my land. I have proven that, but they are going around and adding half an inch onto the blue line. All of a sudden, it goes outside the property. One farmer across from me has had four changes in licencing in under a year and he is still fighting.

The CHAIR: Would the group be able to provide us with some examples of those specific cases where a person’s spring rights or variable-take licence or other licences have actually been modified in recent times?

Mr BLAKERS: Yes, the bloke I am talking about right now. Probably back in December or January, he had a visit from DWER. He was on spring rights. He was previously licensed back when all this first blew up in—was it late ’98 when we started?

Mr WREN: Yes.

[10.20 am]

Mr BLAKERS: This is the second round of the same stuff going on. It seems to happen every 18 or 20 years—that is what it appears to be doing. I call it a water grab. Back then, they gave him spring rights on his property. He had licensing. He had 360 000 kilolitres I think he said. They give him spring rights. In December last year, they saw him and told him he has not got spring rights. He challenged it. They visited. They managed to say, “You haven’t got spring rights but we’ll give you a licence for 280”—I think that is what he was offered. He said, “No, I don’t want that.” He still had his variable-take from the Lefroy, or Archie’s Oven Gulley, as it is called. That was never taken off him, so they took that. They have taken his spring rights and offered him a licence or far less—no, a decrease of about 25 per cent on what he had. He did not accept that.

The CHAIR: So is he challenging that?

Mr BLAKERS: Yes, he challenged. He was prepared to go to court.

The CHAIR: How did it get resolved in the end?

Mr BLAKERS: They have given him back his original licence quantity now. He has had four variations over two stages, but he lost his variable-take from Archie’s Oven Gulley. How did that happen? There was no consultation with any neighbours. The word in our area is that there is a massive farm down the bottom of our catchment before it goes off back into the forest called Fonty’s Pool farms. The word is that they are trying to more than double their water licence. How can you double a water licence in an area that has been over-allocated for the last 25 or 30 years? Most people who work there—there is no water there. But, magically, people have picked up—we believe that 1.5 gigs of water has been found in that area and supplied to two people. Most farmers are not lawyers. I do not read the paper every day because I do not go to town every day. To keep up with what DWER is doing—we just want transparency and there is absolutely none of it.

The CHAIR: David, would you be able to provide some case examples of where people have been impacted and their details. I appreciate that you need to go to members and ask if they are willing to provide that information, but it would help us to understand what is happening if we have some specific case examples to look at.

Mr WREN: We will try. Negotiations are happening and a lot of them are reluctant because we are negotiating. We will try because our management committee is affected.

Mr BLAKERS: To get a water licence you have to sign away certain rights.

Mr WREN: I do not have a spring right, but I do have a groundwater licence. I come from the west side. I am not affected but I have seen this play in other areas. The whole allocation plan and the water quality plan are not connected. I am involved on the west side in a project with the department of water and environment. I am on a management committee and we are doing projects for water quality for the Hardy Inlet. The allocation is separate from water quality and our boundaries are the middle of the Donnelly—the estuary. It is not just a problem for Eastbrook and Yanmah; the whole west side is affected too.

I want to throw out some figures. I have the document from the latest allocation from the department of water on the Donnelly River allocation plan. That has been updated since the submission. In my submission I used figures from the Manjimup and Pemberton Landowners. These are two sets and data and they are not even in the same ballpark—the data in front of you says two gigs, 10 gigs, whatever. I can understand the principles of it. One thing that should be pointed out from a regional perspective is that nearly 400 dams are licensed in the Warren—Donnelly area—now I think it is 416. There are at least 200 unlicensed spring-fed dams and run-off dams, and there are some big operators. There are some pretty big unlicensed dams that are currently in that area. In the allocation plan they are not including all that. The same thing happened at Whicher and Wilyabrup—they did not include those when they had the allocation plans, so when they go to regulate they are outside the bucket of water. That is the issue that AI is really concerned about.

Behind the scene, they are drafting the water resource management bill, which is planning to take that out and pass it to the Crown. It is quite clear they are doing it. It is in all the drafts. They tried it in 2000. Every policy paper and draft that comes out, they still want to vest run-off flow and springs from the Crown. In that process, we thought we had an understanding from the Legislative Council that they recognised that and there would be a transition period, and if there was an affected party, there would be some conversation mechanisms. I am not talking about money; it might be another licence or variable-take, or whatever it may be. They are not talking about that. They are hammering people. I have heard of examples that people have traded away their springs for a smaller licence.

Just to get our heads around this, the value of 200 now from the department of water out of the allocation pool, which is around—I am just using 40 gigalitres. They are estimating that maybe nine per cent of that is unlicensed, but the figures from the Manjimup and Pemberton Landowners group, who are more like AI, more head on the ground—whereas the department are using desktop stuff—they know the water and they are estimating that this is more like 36 per cent. If it is 36 per cent, we are talking about equal to the amount that is going to be in Record Brook, which is about 9 000. So I am saying that the spring rights and unlicensed water that is currently statutory and can be used is equal to what they are proposing to put in Record Brook—that is the principal. On top of that, Record Brook was—there has been a trade done for the Middle Donnelly water reserve, of 1 500 megalitres, by the Water Corporation which reallocated it from the public water supply in the town of Manjimup to the scheme —

The CHAIR: That is the southern forest irrigation scheme.

Mr WREN: — because the Water Corp is going to pursue water. Yes. The water is going to come through the bores in Nannup, and there is a cap on taking water for the irrigators in Nannup. It is not just there; they are transferring one to another. On top of that, the water requirements—this is where I am involved in our group—of the Lower Donnelly river estuary, which is a nice estuary; there are those shacks down there, and it is a beautiful place. It is not clear where it is coming from. The

reason why the Hardy Inlet is in pretty good shape is that groundwater, into the summer, is coming from the Yarragadee into the Scott and into the Blackwood and it is freshening up the river. They are doing preliminary research on the Lower Donnelly estuary to see what groundwater is going in there from the Scott. What will happen is that—they have not got the knowledge. But if there is groundwater, which I suspect there is, going into the Donnelly—what I am leading to is that as things tighten up and if the scheme goes ahead and they have got the Record Brook, which is forest, and the environmental flows are not enough for the Donnelly, they will take it from the groundwater down the road, from the Scott.

[10.30 am]

Looking from the western side, it is not just the issue on the eastern side allocation; we have impact on irrigators in Nannup. They have come to the meetings—two or three of them—and then you have the impact of the estuary and the Scott coastal plain. So it is not a simple thing. Now, this was printed out since I made my submission. This is their own stuff. I got it out of there; I was shocked. They are giving away the drinking water supply, which I did not know, and they do not know enough about the estuary because once you start cutting the flow of water, you are going to have an impact. On top of that, you have the allocation. The object is to take the spring rights and overland flow. That allocation will not happen. If you are in the Donnelly, which is basically a developing catchment—the shire and the south west development commission have identified it as priority agriculture. It already has the infrastructure. It would make more sense to put in a mechanism to develop those properties where the infrastructure is and raise the allocations for agriculture on the land capability, which is rated as horticulture. The public water supply, if you are going to trade it, trade it to the environmental flow to make up for the increase in allocation in the Donnelly. There is no money to be spent. The logic—I just do not understand it. They have a model. They have this \$60 million and they want to push this particular model, and they just cannot see the —

The CHAIR: The objective behind the southern forest irrigation scheme is to actually deliver water to those farming properties that are within sub-catchments that are fully allocated, so they cannot access any additional water. Look, I represent the area. I have spent a lot of time in Manjimup talking to farmers who were not happy about it and other farmers who want the southern forest irrigation scheme, and a lot of it is very confusing because people have got very different points of view. I have spent a lot of time with the minister's office and the department trying to get my head around exactly what is going on. They assure me that the water going into the southern forest irrigation scheme is the water that is currently not being used from the forested area. It is not being taken from any farms that currently have access to water.

Mr BLAKERS: I will totally deny that. This winter, the Donnelly did not flow. If it did, it flowed for a day. The Upper Donnelly did not flow this year. The only water that went into the Donnelly this year, below the Donnelly settlement, out at Wheatley, was from private property off the Manjimup Brook. People out there did some measurements and their accuracy was within two per cent, was it not, Dave?

Mr WREN: Yes.

Mr BLAKERS: Some of the things were amazing—the amount of water that the environment gobbled up from when it left private property until it started to get near the Donnelly was quite substantial. I have not got the figures, but there was quite a substantial amount of water eaten up by the environment as it flowed down there. We did not have much flow this year. We had a very dry year.

The CHAIR: Okay. It was flowing when I saw it.

Hon DARREN WEST: Is your group supportive of the southern forest irrigation scheme or opposed to that scheme?

Mr BLAKERS: No way. No way.

Hon DARREN WEST: You are opposed to that scheme.

Mr BLAKERS: It is one of the most idiotic ideas I have ever heard.

Hon DARREN WEST: We talked to people who actually have both positions on it, and it is very difficult for us, as decision-makers, when there does not seem to be a clear directive from the community about which way they want to go on this. I was not quite sure by your statements whether you were for or against, so thank you for clarifying that.

The CHAIR: The issue is, Darren, with the scheme, there are winners and losers, so it depends on which part of that equation you are sitting.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Uncertainty and insecurity are obviously two big issues that are concerning you guys. In your submission, you talked about a Torrens-type system of registration. Can you just explain how you think might work?

Mr WREN: The water licence, currently, is indefinite—it may be five years or 10 years. In this situation, my understanding is that if the spring rights were made into a legal document, it would be a perpetual licence, tied to the land. So you would have to have land and you would have a perpetual licence—that is it. They could not take it. That is smart. That was what we were trying to get—and the same with the other licenses; they could have rolled over. Currently, they give you a 10-year licence and then you have this uncertainty. In the proposal for the perpetual licences, there are things about environmental flows, reduction in licences—it was all built into that. It is not like if the water is less, you get a proportion of less. But at least you have a title that is secure and you do not have DWER always around the edge, confusing the issue. They are telling you have a licence and you do not have a licence. Then the next day you do have a licence and then they say you do not. In this case, my understanding, and what the Legislative Council has said in legislation, is that you do not need a licence for springs. That is what it said—and you do not need a licence for run-off, but yet DWER is saying you need a licence.

Why do you need a licence? It says that you do not; it is on your property or it arrives at your property, use a spring—it is the first call of water. You get a flow of water, you capture the run-off and you use it—that is what it says. But they are coming in saying that you need one. Where is it coming from? It says quite clearly in the legislation that you do not need one—so then people get one. Then, my understanding is that some people have traded their spring entitlements for a lesser licence.

Mr BLAKERS: To get a licence.

Mr WREN: To get a licence, yes—they trade it away.

Mr BLAKERS: Without understanding what was going on.

Mr WREN: Yes. I honestly think that, from my perspective and being experienced in the other areas, unless they are going to increase—and the figures that I am using are from MPL—the amount of water for agriculture from, say, five per cent to eight per cent, they are going to have to scoop the water from somewhere. So where are they going to get the water from? If they are trading where the scheme is going to go, like I said earlier, it would be more sensible to go where the water is already there. It is already there. The dams are already there; it is just that the licences are unsecured. License those licences, develop those areas, and if somebody has to move from the area that is drying out—in the Middlesex area, it is almost getting a bit salty—they may have to start

moving. There is also land across the Donnelly into the eastern Nannup—where Chris Scott—and all that area there. There is the horticultural land and the Scott coastal plain that still has water available from the Leederville. That is the logical way to start moving agriculture. That is the most cost-effective way. If an area has been affected by salinity or it is drying out, once you start trying to prop it up, it unravels. The statistics show it. So there is not a lack of water and suitable land within 30 minutes of Manjimup. It has been identified in their own report. The Warren rural strategy has identified areas where there is water and land, but, for some reason, they are fixated on this particular model. There are other models. There are several models.

Mr BLAKERS: The other issue that comes into it is land has been traded down there for 100 years of what its water value is. If you go and buy a dry farm, you buy it at \$1 000 a hectare. If you go and buy a prime avocado farm down there, I was quoted yesterday \$12 000 a hectare, and that is because you have got a water licence

Hon RICK MAZZA: If I can just get the premise of your proposal here, you are talking about having a fixed allocation attached to the title of the land.

Mr BLAKERS: Yes.

Hon RICK MAZZA: That is what you are proposing.

Mr BLAKERS: Because we own the dams. We built the dams. We own them.

Hon RICK MAZZA: All right. To play the devil's advocate, though, how is the government going to be able to manage water in changing environments or changing land use if you have fixed allocations attached to that title?

Mr BLAKERS: Well, the farmers will do it. We have done it for the last hundred years. You know, give us some credit. We have kept the environment pristine. We do not need somebody with a uni degree to tell us how to farm or how to manage our water. Pristine water in farming country for 100 years—that is a pretty good precedent. There are not too many places in the world I have heard of it. Everybody knows where farmers stand. They will help each other out—always have, always will. This, in Manjimup, is dividing the town something chronic, and I do not think you will ever patch it, which really, really hurts me. My football club is split fair down the middle on it, and you go, “Hmm, not good.” There was no consultation. I was at the first meeting when this proposal was chucked up and it was designed, signed, sealed and delivered when it was first put up at the Southern Forests Food Council meeting way back five, six years ago. I said, “Great idea. Can't see it working”, and from that day, that model has hardly changed. The numbers have changed. But to pump water into east Manjimup, as soon as they get the water out there, I guarantee 90 per cent of those farmers will be sold up and gone. Corporate farming will be out there. We see what corporate farming is doing to the Murray–Darling. Corporate farming does not work. We are not big enough down there to have corporate farming. Avocados are on a big rush at the moment, but you will be able to get it pretty cheap shortly, you know.

[10.40 am]

Mr WREN: On the licence aspect, you still have an allocation plan. There is still an allocation plan, and from that, you have your licence. The licence would be in concrete, but there are conditions, like if there is a drop in the allocation plan, everybody gets a per ratio reduction, or if there is more water, you go up. Now, one of the things on the allocation plan, for example, for environmental flow in Harvey, because it is cleared, it is substantially lower than the Donnelly. That is the issue. The allocation plan—and this is what the Manjimup and Pemberton Landowners are saying—they need to increase the allocation in the areas where the land capability has been identified. That is what was the way—not go to a public water reserve and then take that water and then take it to another

catchment. That does not make any sense. As a farmer, that is the logical thing to do—go to West Manjimup. The land is cheaper; it has got the water; it is got the land capability. Increase your development there, and if you get caught out, because it is bit salty in the Middlesex area or whatever, well, that is just how it is. You are going to have to move; you are going to have to sell. You are going to have to go to another area where there is the resource, and there is quite a bit of resources coming across to Augusta. There is the whole Scott coastal plain. It is not like a lack of land and water.

Mr BLAKERS: There probably is a slight lack of land.

Mr WREN: Well, the land is not available, but the water is there.

Hon RICK MAZZA: I do not pretend to be an expert in water. Rather than attaching something to the title, which would provide a fair bit of inflexibility, I suppose, would an overarching water management plan that provided some certainty placate some of the insecurities that you guys have?

The CHAIR: There is already a water management plan.

Mr BLAKERS: But that is an ever-changing document.

The CHAIR: Yes, it is; it is.

Mr BLAKERS: Every five minutes, it changes.

The CHAIR: It changes because of environmental conditions and demands. It does need to change, yes.

Mr BLAKERS: But some transparency of what is going on with the department of water down there would be fantastic, because at the moment they are operating like a secret society, and if you are in the click with them, you are laughing. If you are not in the click, you are buggered.

The CHAIR: I agree there needs to be far greater transparency and the water committees need to be looked at.

Mr BLAKERS: One of the issues I got is these two ex-high-up people in the department of water are now the consultants running out there, and you have got to employ them if you want to change your water licence.

The CHAIR: I do not know that they are having too much success, though.

Mr BLAKERS: Oh, I know a few blokes who are walking around with a smile on their face from them.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: Chair, can I just make a comment on the licence issues. I am from Carnarvon. I know Bruce Teede—or I did know him when he was alive—and my parents are growers. The water issue, and allocation, is similar in the Gascoyne River, where it is over allocated, and the licence is attached to the property.

Mr BLAKERS: Not transferable.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: One of the other difficulties is that different areas of the state are managed really differently in terms of water allocation. I think one of the biggest challenges we have as growers in the Gascoyne is that there is no recognition in the management plan of the management of farmers of the natural resource. You are testing the water all the time for salinity and things like that, so if you get, I think, over 1 000 parts of salinity, the farmer does not pump. You cannot utilise it, because it actually affects your crop.

Mr BLAKERS: It is 600 actually; 600 is the part.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: Six hundred. So it affects your crop. So there is no recognition of the role that farmers play in managing the natural resource, and when you do not utilise the resource, your allocation gets reduced, so that is one of the issues around that as well.

Mr BLAKERS: The big difference with our area is all the infrastructure down there is all privately owned, privately built, and a lot of people get offended when they have spent a lot of time or their—most of them are generational farmers and they have got a beautiful dam there, and they can use one foot off it. Because they did not chase it when this last lot went through, there are blokes down there with massive dams, and they have got riparian rights and that is all they have got. But they are not farming; they are just running cattle, but that dam is there. Now, with sensible work and with self-management by the people down there, with oversight from the department, we could water trade. We have water traded for 40, 50 years down there. If somebody is short of water, you just let it go down the creek. Somebody has come up with a brainwave to put pipelines everywhere, costs a fortune, and it will be a total disaster. Once you pump water twice, you are going backwards. The only advantage we have got down there is we have got free water at the moment. Take away the free water, we are finished. All farming down there is finished. This scheme has got the magic new crop. I have not found out what it is yet; I am waiting for that announcement.

The CHAIR: I am just noting the time and we have got other hearings this morning, so I need to bring the hearing to a close. I would like to thank the three of you for coming and giving evidence before the committee. It has given us a better understanding of the issues that you are facing. I do reiterate that if it is possible, David, to provide us with some case studies, that would help the committee.

Mr WREN: On the spring rights issue—that is what you were looking at?

The CHAIR: Or anyone who has been impacted—just their story so that we can get a better understanding of what is happening. A transcript of the hearing today will be provided to you, together with a covering letter inviting you to make any corrections to that transcript and return it to the committee. You will also be invited to provide any supplementary information that you think might assist the committee in its deliberations. You should have that in a week or two, and you will have a couple of weeks to get it back to us. I thank the three of you for coming to give evidence before the committee and look forward to receiving those further case studies, if you are able to provide them. Thank you.

Hearing concluded at 10.46 am
