

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

INQUIRY INTO PASTORAL LEASES IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT KALGOORLIE
MONDAY, 4 NOVEMBER 2013**

SESSION ONE

Members

Hon Liz Behjat (Chairman)
Hon Darren West (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Nigel Hallett
Hon Jacqui Boydell
Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson

Hearing commenced at 9.37 am

Mr KEITH MADER,
Pastoralist, Walling Rock Station, sworn and examined:

The CHAIRMAN: I call the meeting to order. I just want to make some opening comments. My name is Liz Behjat. I am the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Public Administration, which is a standing committee of the Legislative Council of Western Australia. I would like to introduce my other committee members to you. Here on my right, we have Hon Nigel Hallett; to my left is Hon Darren West and Hon Jacqui Boydell. We are the four committee members who will be taking evidence at this hearing today.

I would like to thank those of you who have come here today, but I do need to make a statement. I understand that there may be an expectation from some of the people who are here today that people are going to be able to give us some anecdotal and oral evidence with regards to the matter into which we are inquiring. I am very sorry if that is the impression that you have got, but I think you may have been given information by a member from another house, other than the Legislative Council, along those lines and that information was however incorrect. We do have a number of witnesses who we are hearing from today who put in written submissions to our inquiry. The submissions period closed on 17 September. A number of those sought extensions and extensions were granted until 30 September. So, only those people who have given written submissions to this committee will be giving evidence in front of us today. The expectation may be that this is some sort of a community meeting or a town hall gathering; it is not an opportunity for people to question the committee. With regards to our hearing, it is for the committee to question those people who have given us evidence. I just need to make that very clear from the outset. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

Mr Mader, on behalf of the committee, I would like to welcome you to the meeting. We just need to go through a few formalities here. As you understand, this is a hearing of the Parliament of Western Australia and it is going to be recorded by Hansard. These are the formalities that we will go through and then we will take evidence from you. You will have signed a document entitled "Information for Witnesses". Have you read and understood that document?

Mr Mader: Yes.

[9.40 am]

The CHAIRMAN: These proceedings are being recorded by Hansard and a transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. To assist the committee and Hansard, please quote the full title of any document you refer to during the course of this hearing for the record. Please be aware of that microphone in front of you. Try to speak into it and ensure that you do not cover it with papers or make any noise near it. I remind you that your transcript will become a matter for the public record. If for some reason you wish to make a confidential statement during today's proceedings, you should request that the evidence be taken in closed session. So, if there is anything that you want to say to the committee in confidence, before you actually start saying that, you need to indicate that to the committee. We will clear the room, we will go into private session to determine whether we will hear you in private and then let you know what that determination is. If the committee grants your request, any public and media in attendance will be excluded from the hearing. Please note that until such time as the transcript of your public evidence is finalised, it should not be made public. I advise you that the 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. Would you like to take an oath or an affirmation today?

[Witness took the oath.]

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you, we will begin. I do have some standard questions in relation to the pastoral inquiry, but I do have some specific questions related to your submission, so I think we will start with those questions first and we will go onto the general ones afterwards. In your submission of 12 September 2013, you stated that the single biggest environmental issue on pastoral lands is wild dogs. If you could perhaps, for the committee, explain what are the issues around this and, in your view, what is the best way that we could address the issue of wild dogs?

Mr Mader: The dogs were introduced by Indonesian fishermen a couple of thousand years ago. The dogs are killing all the native animals. I mean, they have taken all our small stock like sheep and goats and all that from the rangeland. There are hardly any roos left in the wilderness now. I reckon within 10 years, it might even be five, there will not be a kangaroo left in the goldfields. So, they are eating all the little animals that are hanging in there sort of thing. The government is not controlling dogs properly—it might have been 28 years ago or something like that—and they have just bred up. I mean, there are more dogs in Australia now than what there ever has been. There is no silver bullet because you are not doing anything about that sort of thing. I reckon if you were to fence all the pastoral country from the coast to the other coast, you could even reintroduce all the little bilbies and that back into it because out there in the desert there is just nothing; there are only dogs and camels; that is all there is; all our native animals are gone.

The CHAIRMAN: When you say “dogs”, these are not dingos, are they; they are just feral dogs?

Mr Mader: They started off as dogs. They are all crossed now with domestic dogs and you just call them dogs now—or government dogs, whatever you want to call them.

The CHAIRMAN: And your view as to the best way to address this problem?

Mr Mader: I cannot see the government spending more money on actual doggers. So I reckon, like I said, if you were to fence all the pastoral country, it would not only be for the pastoral industry and also the south west, but it would also be good for the environment. You would be able to reintroduce all sorts of little things in there, back into the wilderness on a larger scale.

The CHAIRMAN: I know that you have given evidence to another inquiry that is on foot at the moment with regard to the sandalwood industry and some issues surrounding the Forest Products Commission with that. So, leaving that to one side because you have given extensive evidence to that —

Mr Mader: I tried to give extensive evidence, but they would not, they refused to, take my evidence.

The CHAIRMAN: Other issues in relation to environmental damage on pastoral lands, what can you tell us about that?

Mr Mader: There are other things about the environment, like these kangaroos, when you fence open cuts, there are tens of thousands of kangaroos over the years dying on these fences. I showed you plenty of photos of them. So, that is one government issue thing. The other one is these government-owned stations —

The CHAIRMAN: So, you are saying that the kangaroos are dying —

Mr Mader: They smell the water, they have got to have a drink—you know what I mean?

The CHAIRMAN: Right.

Mr Mader: I reckon fencing them is wrong. I reckon what you should be doing is probably building a good set of trap yards at the beginning, at the entrance, to the open pits, so the stock and the wildlife can access these pits of water. But just fencing them off like that, the kangaroos have

got to have a drink, they can smell that and they will do anything to get in there. Then they do get in there and then they die in there on the fence trying to get out.

The CHAIRMAN: Are the current arrangements for land tenure adequate, given that the arrangements are constrained by the Land Administration Act at a state level and the Native Title Act at the federal level? Perhaps you can talk to us about your feelings on land tenure.

Mr Mader: Like you just said, we have had an issue with the Forest Products Commission. I mean, that John Slorach just right from the word go, and he still says it, says that they are a government department or they are government and they can do whatever they like, we do not own the station, we have got no right to it and stuff like that. They have just indiscriminately land cleared. There is another issue; you go on about taking stations off of people for the environment, well, they have just indiscriminately land cleared and they say they do not have to rehabilitate because they are a government department.

The CHAIRMAN: You are going back to the sandalwood issue there when you are talking about land clearing, are you not?

Mr Mader: You just said about the land tenure, we have got no rights whatsoever, according to Forest Products. Obviously, we have; he is still there five years later.

The CHAIRMAN: With regard to this current period of the renewing of the pastoral leases that are due to expire at 2015, has the Department of Lands managed this process adequately?

Mr Mader: I do not know; I really have not gone into that side of it.

The CHAIRMAN: Have they consulted with you in relation to renewals?

Mr Mader: They send all that stuff and then PGA told us not to sign it or do not agree with it sort of thing.

The CHAIRMAN: Sorry, who told you?

Mr Mader: The PGA.

The CHAIRMAN: Told you not to sign?

Mr Mader: I think so, something like that. I remember reading an email about something about it. It was an inadequate sort of thing.

The CHAIRMAN: So your decision was based on the information given to you by the PGA that the lease was inadequate.

Mr Mader: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: You have not taken your own advice in relation to your lease?

Mr Mader: I have been dealing with Forest Products for five years and it has taken up a considerable amount of my time. So looking at other ideas or other things is just, you know, plus you also have to work, you know, you just cannot sit in the office all day and do paperwork.

The CHAIRMAN: The concerns that you might have about the 2015 pastoral lease are obviously in relation to the sandalwood trees, but are there other issues that you have formed an opinion about or is it just that?

Mr Mader: There is that one. And Wendy Duncan had a rangelands review and not one of those things have been implemented into it. So it just shows you that, you know, they are not interested. They are not interested in doing the changes that should be done sort of thing.

The CHAIRMAN: What were some of the changes that you gave evidence to in regard to the rangelands review; what were those issues in particular that you thought of?

Mr Mader: I reckon a lot of them. Diversification is one, and always that pastoralists should have had the rights to do the sandalwood on their station, you know. But obviously they did not, because

they are on my place doing illegal sandalwood, entering an illegal tendering process, and it just keeps going.

The CHAIRMAN: Who is conducting an illegal tendering process?

Mr Mader: The Forest Products Commission.

The CHAIRMAN: And you have taken advice on that and should be able to say that it is illegal?

Mr Mader: It is illegal because the tendering process was corrupt.

The CHAIRMAN: Does anybody else have any other questions for Mr Mader?

Mr Mader: I have been saying that for five years and nobody can prove to me that it is not.

Hon DARREN WEST: The lease that you have been offered that is to expire in 2015 and the renewal that you have been offered, are you satisfied with the conditions of that lease? You have said that the PGA have told you not to sign it. Do you have any specific issues about that renewal?

[9.50 am]

Mr Mader: No. Like I said, I really have not looked at it because, like I said, it has taken a considerable amount of my time just doing this Forest Products thing and it is just incredible now. No, I really have not, but I reckon we should be able to diversify on these places and have a bit more right to, but we are not. I mean, there you are saying that we have got to have liability insurance; well, I have got someone on my place that is there illegally and because they are a government department, they can do what they like. It is just a joke. Why should we have liability insurance for them, you know, or anyone else that comes on our place that we do not even know is there? It is like someone jumping in your backyard and breaking his leg hopping over the fence.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: What are the terms of your current lease in comparison to the new lease being offered? Is there a difference?

Mr Mader: Like I said, I really have not looked into it because I am just trying to deal with this Forest Products stuff.

The CHAIRMAN: You said that you do not have the opportunity to diversify.

Mr Mader: I said we should.

The CHAIRMAN: That is what I said, you do not have the opportunity to diversify.

Mr Mader: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: If you were given that opportunity, what would you diversify; what would you do?

Mr Mader: There are a couple of things I was thinking about. One was to plant sandalwood there because they have just taken everything and they have never rehabilitated or replanted any seeds. They took all the undersize trees and everything.

The CHAIRMAN: So you are saying for every sandalwood tree that has been taken off your property by the Forest Products Commission, not one has been rehabilitated?

Mr Mader: They were supposed to plant 12 seeds but they do not. I went down there and filmed where they had not been seeding, and then when I made the complaint, John Slorach from Forest Products went out there—well, he did not, but after I tried to get it from freedom of information how many, what date, what was there, you know, what did they do to them for not seeding, John Slorach just wrote a thing that he went out there and inspected 20 sites and 13 were good and seven had not been reseeded. So he had a bag of seed with him and he reseeded those seven sites, and job done! There are 1 000 sites, more than 1 000 sites, and they had not been seeding and the places where I have seen they had not seeded. I went back there after I got that letter and he had not been

in there seeding that, and he is getting paid by taxpayers' money to reseed an area and he has not reseeded it.

The CHAIRMAN: When you say you diversify into your own sandalwood industry —

Mr Mader: To grow sandalwood, yes, but then you have an aggregation and also some sort of thing like horticultural or something like that, you know—not horticultural, you know, something like grow some fruit trees or something like that.

The CHAIRMAN: Would that be viable on your station?

Mr Mader: I do not know. I would have to look at it, sort of thing. You would have to look at some sort of thing. I have looked at a couple of different ones, but you have just got all this red tape sort of thing.

The CHAIRMAN: Is there anything else you would like to say to us in closing?

Mr Mader: Yes. With that other thing about Brendon Grylls having full rights to take our leases off us, I reckon he should not be allowed to do that because when we had this drought thing, then our rent, you know, our rates go right up. And they had a thing here where they could apply for rent relief, you know, and I got knocked back on the grounds of saying that, when I was saying that Terry Redman kept lying in Parliament. I got knocked back on my rent relief, so I reckon he was using his authority there to knock me back. Now, if he knocked me back, I would like to know how many other people he knocked back; because we had no income. I would like to know how he, if he was to knock me back, what is the point of having this rent relief if you are going to knock everyone back? You could not have got worse than what I was, because we had no income.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: Keith, what were the differences? What was your base rent that you were paying and what did it go to?

Mr Mader: In 2000, the three rents were run with pastoral board rates, one was APB rates and the other one was shire rates. They were all under \$1 000. Now they are about \$8 000 or \$9 000.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: Combined?

Mr Mader: Yes, combined.

The CHAIRMAN: And that is from 2000 to 2013?

Mr Mader: Yes, and they have been sitting around about the eight or nine for the last few years sort of thing, you know. They just went through the roof. Then at the same time everyone lost their sheep because of the government dogs. And what income? You know, your changing over to cattle is a big thing. Changing over to cattle sort of thing, you just do not do it overnight unless you have plenty of money; and then he just knocked us back on that.

The CHAIRMAN: If there are no further questions from members, thank you, Mr Mader; we appreciate you coming in and taking the time today to give us your evidence. As I said, you will be sent a copy of that transcript and you will be given instructions as to what to do with that. Thank you very much.

Hearing concluded at 9.55 am
