

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE
STANDING COMMITTEE**

**INQUIRY INTO WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S
NATURAL DISASTER RELIEF ARRANGEMENTS**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN
AT LAKE GRACE
MONDAY, 6 NOVEMBER 2006**

SESSION ONE

Members

Mr A.P. O’Gorman (Chairman)

Mr S.R. Hill

Ms K. Hodson-Thomas

Mrs J. Hughes

Hearing commenced at 9.28 am

JACKSON, MR CHRISTOPHER GERALD
Chief Executive Officer,
Shire of Lake Grace, examined:

The CHAIRMAN: The committee hearing is a proceeding of Parliament and warrants the same respect that proceedings in the house itself demand. Even though you are not required to give evidence on oath, any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a contempt of Parliament. Have you completed the "Details of Witness" form?

Mr Jackson: Yes, I have.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you understand the notes attached to it?

Mr Jackson: Yes, I do.

The CHAIRMAN: Did you receive and read an "Information for Witnesses" briefing sheet regarding giving evidence before parliamentary committees?

Mr Jackson: Yes, I have.

The CHAIRMAN: The committee has not received a submission from you, but would you like to make any opening comments before we start?

Mr Jackson: Thank you for the opportunity to attend the hearing today. Given that we have experienced a number of natural disasters in recent times, the opportunity for me to speak about them on behalf of the community is welcome.

The CHAIRMAN: Could you provide the committee with some background about Lake Grace, such as how large the community is, and some information about some of the recent natural disasters?

Mr Jackson: The Shire of Lake Grace is situated in the wheatbelt. The town has a population of approximately 650 people and the shire has a population of approximately 1 600, including other communities such as Newdegate, Lake King, Varley and part of the town site of Pingaring. It is a wheat and sheep area and is currently being significantly impacted by locusts. The community is in some respects still recovering from floods that occurred in January. The committee would have seen some of the water as it came into town today. That is still impacting on the town.

The CHAIRMAN: Can you tell us about the role of local government in the provision of natural disaster relief to the community?

Mr Jackson: The council chairs the local emergency management committee. The shire president and I also sit on that committee. The council has been significantly involved in the recovery process, particularly in the provision of infrastructure, such as roads and other public facilities in the town, such as the cemetery, town ovals, dams and those sorts of things. The local authority is responsible for those things.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Can you give me an idea of how much land area was covered by flooding?

Mr Jackson: I have a statement to read that will hopefully cover some of those points.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Please do. That would be great.

Mr Jackson: It reads -

On the **12 and 13 January 2006**, the Lake Grace townsite and catchment were flooded by rainfall from Cyclone Clare -

As you are aware -

The rain bearing depression left by the cyclone passed directly over the town of Lake Grace . . . producing **230 mm** of rain **between 9.00 am on the 12th and 9.00 am on the 14th January**. Rainfall intensities peaked at 24 mm/hr in a five-hour period on the 13th when 109 mm fell between midday and 5.00 pm.

There was a lot of water in and around the town -

For comparison, the **mean January rainfall for Lake Grace is 16.3 mm and the mean annual rainfall 353 mm**.

The problem lies with the position of the town site in relation to the catchment area. The overflowing of Cemetery Lake, as the committee would have seen this morning, has cut the town off -

The townsite was severely flooded by runoff from approximately 500 ha of farmland catchment draining from the east and northeast of the town. A larger, 15,000 ha of catchment to the south east of the townsite discharged water around its southern and western edges causing water to pond, back up and combine floodwater entering from the north-east. Acting Premier Eric Ripper proclaimed Tropical Cyclone Clare, and the subsequent flood, a Natural Disaster on January 17, 2006.

Would the committee like me to proceed?

Mrs J. HUGHES: Yes, please. That would be good.

The CHAIRMAN: It is great background for us.

Mr Jackson: The statement continues -

Damage to some homes and businesses and to publicly owned infrastructure was severe. Three houses in Bennett Street were severely flooded, requiring sandbagging and then water pumped away. A further four houses were threatened and approximately **20 house yards and/or sheds were flooded**, with some yards **1m underwater for 2.5 weeks** until gravel bunds could be put in place and the water pumped out.

We are still experiencing problems in those areas, with damage to fences and those types of things -

The Shire covers 9,245 square kilometres and has a population of 1,539 -

As I earlier indicated. I have also indicated the towns that the shire is responsible for -

The Shire is responsible for 2,490.92 kms of roads (440.9 sealed and 2,050.02 unsealed).

These were the roads most damaged during the flooding.

The CHAIRMAN: The unsealed roads or the sealed roads?

Mr Jackson: Mainly the unsealed roads, but we had some significant damage to some of the sealed roads as well -

Most main roads, including the Lake Grace-Dumbleyung road -

Which the committee travelled on this morning -

- the Newdegate/Lake Grace, Lake Grace/Gorge Rock and Lake Grace/Pingrup roads **were made impassable**.

The town was essentially isolated for a period of weeks -

Most of the shire managed road infrastructure within the flood zone was damaged and **after three weeks, only two significant access roads were trafficable by two wheel drive**

vehicles. Following an assessment by the Shire and Main Roads WA staff, **more than 600 kilometres of roads and infrastructure on approximately 100 roads had sustained damage.** Flooding also meant shire staff **could not get out to the roads to repair them.**

This initially caused angst and concern within the community because the shire could not touch these roads; we would have made more of a mess than anything else -

Lake Grace is on a **major crossroad** - Perth to Esperance/Norseman and the eastern states, and Albany to Hyden. For the four weeks following the flood event, the **normal freight task was severely disrupted.** Semi-trailer/road train combinations could not access the usual freight routes and even smaller courier vehicles had difficulty maintaining any semblance of a normal service.

Even getting the bread truck into town was extremely difficult -

The Lake Grace/Dumbleyung Road (the main east-west route) was reinstated and opened to all traffic on April 24th, some thirteen weeks after the flood.

The **economic and social impact** of the flood has been extreme. A survey of local business taken three weeks after the flood showed that the disruption to freight routes caused major problems and initial **estimates indicated losses ranging to \$90,000 per business** for that period. Businesses and farmers also incurred additional freighting costs due to road closures and subsequent alternative freighting arrangements. **Freight increases** reported by those surveyed ranged from **2% (\$10,000) to 66%.**

The **cessation of travellers** cost greatly in terms of income and tourism development with local businesses experiencing losses due to traffic bypassing towns. **District roadhouses** (Lake Grace, Dumbleyung and Newdegate) estimated a range of **50 to 75% decrease in custom.** This can be further demonstrated by the fact that, in the two weeks following the flood, a **regional roadhouse on an alternative route sold approximately 41,000 additional litres to diverted traffic, an increase from the average 10-15,000 litres to 56,000 litres.**

Damage to other Shire managed infrastructure:

- Town streets and drainage
- Sportsground dam -

The dam supplies water to the ovals -

- Cemetery -

We are working on that at the moment -

- Golf course . . .
- Swimming pool
- Waste treatment plant was under threat from rising flood waters
- Works yard and equipment flooded

The CHAIRMAN: Chris, can I confirm that this was a one-off event and not an event previously experienced?

Mr Jackson: We have certainly experienced flooding events from time to time, but not as significant as this. The town was isolated for a time; that is not a regular occurrence.

[9.40 am]

The CHAIRMAN: It is a one in 100-year occurrence.

Mr Jackson: There are varying estimates of its occurrence, but Main Roads puts it at one in 500 years. I cannot comment further on that. That was an estimate by its engineers at the time.

The CHAIRMAN: Since you have managed to recover so far, has anything been done about, or has any thought been given to, future mitigation of such an event? It is a pretty unusual event.

Mr Jackson: Yes. We have applied for, and received, mitigation funding through the federal government and also matching funds from the Department of Water. The process of looking at mitigating strategies to solve some of the flooding problems in the town has commenced. With some of the works that Main Roads has done on the lake system - it has put in a number of drains - we are confident that the problem will not occur to this extent again. However, in saying that, we have the funding to look at it in detail.

The CHAIRMAN: You mentioned a couple of yards that you had to put gravel bunding around and pump them out.

Mr Jackson: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: I have been in a flood-prone area before and it has that in place all the time, with roadways and access ways through them that are locked up when a flood occurs. However, it is an area that floods very regularly. Is that still in place?

Mr Jackson: The bunding surface is still in place, and it will be included as part of any strategy that we adopt to overcome the problem in the future.

The CHAIRMAN: Is the council able to access WANDRA funds? Did it work well with Main Roads or government departments? Did that work in together properly, or were there issues?

Mr Jackson: Certainly, understanding the process in the early stages was difficult and FESA representatives came to town to speak with us. We had been able to access significant money for the opening-up costs of our roads. Through the reinstatement process, we are still fixing roads that were damaged in January; it just does not happen overnight. The 75-25 per cent split is a concern, and has been right from the start. We have made representations to the minister, Alannah MacTiernan, and to the local government and Main Roads advisory board about our 25 per cent share. We have recently been informed that as a one-off payment, they are prepared to accept 50 per cent of the 25 per cent. Instead of the council being up for \$600 000, it will be up for \$300 000. Immediately following the floods and after the initial estimates, we were reluctant to commence the process of reinstatement because we did not have that share. Although Main Roads made a \$600 000 up-front payment to us early on - that certainly was appreciated at the time - the council was reluctant to start the process of reinstatement because we were concerned that we did not have the balance of that money.

The CHAIRMAN: What is your rate base? What is your annual income?

Mr Jackson: The rate base is about \$2 million.

The CHAIRMAN: Then there are further federal and state grants.

Mr Jackson: Yes. We have an annual budget of about \$5.5 million. An amount of \$600 000 is a lot of money in that context. The process of requesting additional payments has been long and drawn out, and we have made representations to the minister and to the advisory committee. We have been notified only in the past month that they are prepared to pay that additional \$300 000. In doing that, we had to make a formal submission, as we have had to do for all the others.

The CHAIRMAN: Are you saying that in some instances the council has not been prepared to take on some of the reinstatement until that approval came through? Obviously, you have done some of it.

Mr Jackson: Yes. We needed to do it, otherwise people could not have used the roads. All I am saying is that in the early days immediately following the flood, there was concern that we should

not spend any money because there were no guarantees that we would get additional funding, so how would we pay for our \$600 000 share? In the end, we started the process.

Mrs J. HUGHES: After a disaster like this, does the council consider the possibility of any type of sinking fund for future disasters, or is there just not enough in the pot to do that?

Mr Jackson: There is certainly not enough in the pot. We struggle to maintain the length of road and our significant infrastructure at the moment. No, there is no money in the pot available for these types of things. We are led to believe that money is put aside annually for road funding by the state government and the regional road group. We have also been informed that this additional payment is a one-off, given the significant nature of the recent event. We would like some additional work to be done on looking at the extent of damage when local government in particular has difficulty funding its 25 per cent share.

Mrs J. HUGHES: As a shire, how did you track the costs that were incurred? Did you have enough resources within your shire to track those costs? Obviously, to make a decent claim, you need to be able to track those costs properly.

Mr Jackson: It was extremely difficult, given that we are only a small local authority. We have put on two additional project officers. Michelle Slarke, who is attending the hearing today, is one of those officers. Michelle was put on to assist us in the grant application process and with funding. We have applied for numerous grants, and a lot of work goes into that and is still going into it today. It has been 10 months since the event occurred. We run a local government financial system and we have the means to track where the money is spent, although it can be difficult from time to time given that we do not have a lot of staff. A lot of money has been spent just on the process of applying for grants and understanding where to go and what to do, whether it be in the initial WANDRA process or the mitigation-type applications that we have made in recent times.

Mrs J. HUGHES: You mentioned that FESA assisted you in some way. Did you find that its assistance was sufficient, or was there a need for additional assistance?

Mr Jackson: Certainly it was appreciated early on. It was involved right from the start, and its support was appreciated. The complexities of the funding and the way it works are still confusing to us to this day in the sense of what is available and how it is categorised. There needs to be more education for not only local government, but also other government agencies such as Main Roads and the Department of Sport and Recreation, with which we have had involvement throughout the process. In some respects it seemed as though some of them were making it up as they were going along. Although that may not have been the case, it appeared to us from time to time that they were saying, "This is significant. Where do we go from here?" Not having been through it ourselves to this extent, we did not know any better. It just felt that way at the time.

The CHAIRMAN: I would like to ask you about staffing. Across the state there is a serious shortage of staff. Did you have any great issues in recruiting staff? Obviously, there was no point in bringing in somebody from Perth; you needed locals.

Mr Jackson: We have three senior positions - I am the CEO and there is a deputy CEO and a manager of works. The manager of works position is probably the most important, given that our main involvement is with the management of infrastructure assets such as roads. That position was vacant during the flooding. We managed to get relief staff in and we finally employed someone. Unfortunately he passed away four weeks ago, so we have had an extremely difficult time. We are now in the recruiting process again, and it is not looking good for that very important position. We need to look at alternatives to how we manage the maintenance and construction program for our roads.

Mrs J. HUGHES: I would like to ask about the timing of the flood. It obviously happened in February. I am a city girl, so please excuse my ignorance. Is there a significant impact on farmers at that time of year? Is it a seasonal time?

[9.50 am]

Mr Jackson: A lot of people are away in January on holidays. In fact, lots of people travelling back from Bremer Bay and the like, I think, risked their lives to actually get back into town because they wanted to be with family, property and the like. Obviously, a lot of farmers have lost a lot of topsoil and those sorts of things, and suffered stock losses during the event, so there is certainly the stock and fencing and those types of things.

One of the things that I would like to mention is in relation to the funding assistance that is actually available to farmers. There is the \$1 500 allowance to get a consultant in to have a look at planning, and then there are low-interest loans. It is quite ironic that the event has been declared a natural disaster, and there is almost a sense a relief that that had happened; that, yes, there will be some funding that comes through, particularly for local people. But that is not the case. You really need to be running a not very good farm if you are going to be able to access any of this money. One statement to me was that you needed to be on the bones of your bum if you were going to access any of this money. Therefore, there is no real assistance available for particularly farmers once the event has been declared. That is obviously of concern to us.

Mrs J. HUGHES: That is interesting. When we spoke to some people in Albany, they said that after a fire it is over, and everybody basically regathers and moves on, whereas with a flood, as you say, you still have areas now that are under water. Were many of the farms unable to be reached? Were your emergency services people able to reach those people and give them assistance?

Mr Jackson: Yes, certainly. Quite a number of farms and farmers were isolated for periods of time. Obviously, with flooded roads, they could not get in and get out. I note from previous hearings that you have had that even in the Shire of Kent and other places, they have raised concerns, particularly with maybe the inability of the shire to get out and do something for them. I think, as I explained earlier, following a flood and when the roads are wet, you cannot touch them; you need to just let them dry out. If the lake systems are filled up and the water is just sitting on the road, there is nothing we can do. We can only apologise to those people and make sure that they have provisions and supplies. I actually spoke with a number of people in adjoining shires, because we were seen to be the centre of it, and we were assisting them not only with advice, but also with applying for funding through the lord mayor's appeal fund. We actually had a number of applications from the Shire of Kent in that regard, and we supported the other local authorities in that respect.

The CHAIRMAN: I will just ask about your first response to the flood. Do you have an SES group in town; and, if it was a flood, did they have access to boats if they needed boats? Was it appropriate to have or not have a boat? Were any of those things put in place?

Mr Jackson: We actually had staff who were boating to work because they could not get in from their farms. We are represented in town with FESA through the local fire brigade, and under the emergency response procedures, FESA is the response agency in the event of a flood. The State Emergency Service is not located here in Lake Grace. Kulin has a State Emergency Service. There were offers of a boat from the district office through Albany, but it is getting it here and doing all those types of things. It could well have assisted, but there are lots of boats in and around the town that were used from time to time, whether that be rescuing stock or carting politicians from one side of the lake to the other, because the airstrip was surrounded by water and isolated from the town, so that was of concern to us too.

Mrs J. HUGHES: There were seven days before it was declared an emergency. Was that too long?

Mr Jackson: I think, as I indicated before, that whilst there was euphoria that it was declared, I am unsure what the direct benefit is in the declaration, what it actually means. From a local government perspective, yes, we are entitled to 75 per cent funding up front, but we still need to

find 25 per cent. In a normal flooding event, through the state government, through Main Roads, it is a 66-33 per cent split. Therefore, we were better off by only a couple of per cent in the fact that it had actually been declared, because it attracts the federal government funding, so that is of concern to us. From a farmer perspective, as I indicated earlier, I do not think that there is actually a lot of assistance that is available. However, certainly, if people were isolated and needed evacuation, that would have come into play. If they needed to be resupplied and those sorts of things, I am sure that that is all covered as part of WANDRA, but that situation did not occur.

The CHAIRMAN: What do you believe governments should do? Once a disaster is proclaimed, as you say, from local government's point of view you know exactly what it is, but what about for the individual? Also, under the WANDRA arrangements, the relief that comes is targeted at viable operations, so you cannot use it to prop up an unviable operation. You said that if somebody is on the bones of their bum, that is the only way that person can get it, so it seems to be a bit of a contradiction. If you are on the bones of your bum, basically you are not running a viable operation.

Mr Jackson: Yes, I accept that. I cannot offer any solutions to that. However, I think it needs to be made clear to the community, in clearer terms, what the funding package really means. The government took great delight in making the announcement that this assistance would be forthcoming, but, as I indicated, most people would not qualify for it.

The CHAIRMAN: What does the \$1 500 consultancy package cover, in your understanding of it?

Mr Jackson: My understanding is that it is there to assist with having a consultancy or whatever come in and look at the damage from a farm operational point of view to see what can be done.

The CHAIRMAN: That does not include telling people how they might dry out their land or plant alternative crops?

Mr Jackson: I do not think there is an environmental component to it, no.

The CHAIRMAN: The four per cent interest relief only goes on loans up to a maximum of \$150 000.

Mr Jackson: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: I imagine that \$150 000 is not a lot of money for reasonable operations in this area.

Mr Jackson: I would not think so, no.

The CHAIRMAN: So that is probably something that should be increased, in your view.

Mr Jackson: I would think so.

The CHAIRMAN: I will ask the farmers federation when it comes in.

Mr Jackson: Yes. I am sure it will have something to say on that.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Has Lake Grace looked at the global warming issue, with more cyclones, the increased intensity of cyclones and the threat that perhaps Lake Grace may face in the future? Do you have any comments?

Mr Jackson: I am happy to comment. Both through the process of mitigation and looking at the shire's ability to maintain local infrastructure, such as grassed ovals, street trees and all those types of things, we are very serious about collecting as much local water as we can - harvesting water - and we are very much involved in that process. We have recently negotiated with the Water Corporation to take over a catchment area. We have applied for funding to install the new dam. We are undertaking repairs to an existing dam that was damaged during the flood, and we have been successful with funding through both WANDRA and the Department of Sport and Recreation and its CSRFF program, and we are looking at drought-proofing the town in that regard. We are

also involved in the rural towns program, which is through the Department of Agriculture and Food, and with the Avon Catchment Council, and we are serious about looking at issues such as town site salinity and those types of things. Looking into the future, desalination and all those sorts of options are being included in our discussions and the considerations for the future of Lake Grace as a town, so that we ensure our survival in the future.

[9.59 am]

The CHAIRMAN: Chris, you have spoken a fair bit about the rural community, the farming community; what about the town community and those businesses you mentioned, the roadhouses etc, and the significant losses they had? Has council been able to do anything to assist those? State and federal governments obviously do not. If I am running a small business and I take a hit of \$50 000 or \$60 000, it is going to take me a long time to recover, even with a good customer base, but in a small town like this it is probably going to take a lot longer, if ever. How are those businesses coping now?

Mr Jackson: Some of them I would think are still having some difficulty in the recovery process. Council in adopting this year's budget kept the rate increase to a minimum. We have not offered any other incentives or support mechanisms, but as I say, in adopting the rates we have kept that at a level not only for people in the town site but in the broader farming community because of other difficulties such as the dry year, the locusts, the recent frost events and the flooding etc; we have had it all. I am not too sure what is next!

The CHAIRMAN: You mentioned as well the tourism operators. Is that a continuing problem? Once the floodwaters go and things are repaired, people come back. What is the situation?

Mr Jackson: We are on the main arterial route that flows through the town to Esperance as well as linkages with Hyden, so I would have thought that would be back to pre-flood levels. With the amount of water that is around and wildflowers and those sorts of things, the attractions are here to maintain that.

The CHAIRMAN: You also mentioned freight. How did people get over that freight problem? Jeanette said when she was bringing us in she had to do a 33-kilometre four-wheel drive trip to get to work and back each day whereas normally it was about five or six kilometres. That is an added impost. How did people get over that?

Mr Jackson: In the end we made available certain roads to bring certain types of trucks in. Whilst it was longer, the milk and bread trucks and those sorts of things could get through. There has been no recognition of those additional costs, where they have been incurred by those operators. I cannot comment any further on that.

Mrs J. HUGHES: When we were driving here you were saying the Dumbleyung road was lifted. Did you have the opportunity to have any mitigating reconstruction of anything else to help mitigate future problems or could you choose only one or two specific projects? Was there a limitation?

Mr Jackson: That particular road is Main Roads controlled. Whilst it did lift the road it also undertook a series of drainage channels to drain the lake from one lake to another, which we hope in the future would alleviate the backup problem we had with the town flooding. That certainly has occurred. On shire local roads the damage is more widespread and in places not as significant as the road coming in. In saying that, one of the concerns that we have is that while money is made available for reinstatement, in lots of places it is ridiculous to go in to put the road back as it was before because obviously there are problems, and there are a number of floodways where this has occurred and we will need to go in and do improvement works at the same time. There is no recognition of that in any part of this process; it is purely there to reinstate.

Mrs J. HUGHES: So there is no opportunity for your engineers to come forward and say that in order for this not to happen again we need to put in extra culverts or whatever. There is no process.

Mr Jackson: It is my understanding that while Main Roads has assessed our claim, it is very clear that it is for reinstatement. If we wanted to do improvement works to fix the problem, that would be at our cost. I do not want to be dishonest in saying that when we do get the money there are not opportunities to do some slight improvements. It would be silly to think that that would not occur, but if it is significant as you have indicated - culverts and those sorts of things - there is no opportunity for that.

The CHAIRMAN: Unless you fund it yourself.

Mr Jackson: That is right.

The CHAIRMAN: Chris, I think we have exhausted our questions for you. Have you got anything further that you wish to add that we might not even have thought about but that you have because you have had the experience down here?

Mr Jackson: I have a final statement here that I can read if that is okay. It is not very long. I wish to correct comments made in an earlier session, session five, that "the community affected by the flood around Lake Grace and Kent seems to be falling to pieces". We do not believe that was ever the case. I think it reflects maybe the pressure some people have experienced and their concern at being isolated and the like. The biggest impact on community morale was caused by the prolonged closure of the road and the financial burden anticipated by all community members. The lack of funds and/or strict eligibility requirements of the funds available for farmers and businesses, together with the perceived lack of interest from government agencies, particularly regarding the closed roads, had a more detrimental impact on the community.

Despite this stress, this event brought our community together and we are stronger for it. We relied on our own resources and worked through this crisis with cooperation and determination. We have had many cases of people helping each other out, of towing travellers' vehicles from flooded waters and of neighbours rescuing sheep. A local farmer living west of town purchased a dinghy and ferried his and other children to school and people to work, and collected groceries for neighbours. In March the shire hosted a free concert to thank the community and arranged for support agencies such as the Department of Agriculture and Food, Centrelink and Southern AgCare to be there to inform people of their programs. We encouraged people to talk about the crisis and organised a songwriting workshop, and community members brought in flood photographs, videos, stories and floodwater samples, which was quite an interesting process. I would also like to table a document, which is our local emergency management draft flood debrief report.

The CHAIRMAN: Would you like to table the statements you had written out as well?

Mr Jackson: I will table those documents as well.

The CHAIRMAN: You have actually raised another question I meant to ask in regard to morale and things like that. Did you get any support from the Department of Community Development, or was any available to you, with counsellors and things like that? It is a trauma for people. When Bali happened, every man and his dog was there to counsel. Did you get any of that? Was there any opportunity?

Mr Jackson: It was certainly offered. I am not too sure whether too many people took that offer up. DCD is located in Katanning. Part of the problem during the flood was the fact that we were isolated and they may have needed to float people in. I do not know whether that was considered or not. We were isolated.

The CHAIRMAN: Okay, so it was offered?

Mr Jackson: It certainly was offered.

Mrs J. HUGHES: This morning we have mentioned flood and drought. Are there are any other natural disasters that you have encountered, such as locusts?

Mr Jackson: We are in the middle of the locust plague, which you may have read in the press. The shire has also experienced significant hail damage, which has wiped out crops, and drought. Certainly the shire is large enough for one end to be flooded and for the other end to be very dry. In fact, during the height of the flooding event they were carting water from Lake Grace out to the Lake King town site because the dam was dry. They are the extremes of what was going on.

The CHAIRMAN: All right, Chris. I will just read you our closing statement. Again, thanks for your contribution to the committee's inquiry this morning. A transcript of the hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of typographical errors or errors of transcription or fact. New material cannot be introduced in the sense that the evidence cannot be altered. Should you wish to provide additional information or elaborate on particular points, you should submit a supplementary submission for the committee's consideration. If the transcript is not returned within 10 days of receipt, we will deem it to be correct. You get 10 days to look it over and send it back to us. Again, thanks for coming in. It has certainly enlightened some of my ideas about what happened.

Mr Jackson: Thank you.

Hearing concluded at 10.15 am
