



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

SENATE

**RURAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS AND TRANSPORT REFERENCES
COMMITTEE**

Reference: Commercial utilisation of native wildlife

PERTH

Monday, 11 August 1997

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

CANBERRA

SENATE
RURAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS AND TRANSPORT REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Members:

Senator Woodley (Chair)

Senator Calvert	Senator Crane
Senator Bob Collins	Senator Foreman
Senator Conroy	Senator Heffernan

Participating members

Senator Abetz	Senator Gibbs
Senator Bob Brown	Senator Lundy
Senator Brownhill	Senator Margetts
Senator Chapman	Senator Murphy
Senator Colston	Senator Murray
Senator Cook	Senator O'Brien
Senator Eggleston	Senator Tambling
Senator Ferris	Senator West
	Senator West

Matters referred for inquiry into and report on:

- (a) the potential impact which commercial utilisation of native wildlife might have on the Australian environment;
- (b) the current and future economic viability of these commercial activities; and
- (c) the adequacy of existing Federal Government regulations and controls to ensure biodiversity of any native species commercially utilised.

WITNESSES

ALLEN, Mr John, Avi-Ark Pty Ltd, 1982 Powell Road, Baldivis, Western Australia	504
ANDERSEN, Ms Diana Janette, Owner, Kimani Aviaries, 360 Aldersyde Road, Bickley, Western Australia	495
D'CRUZ, Mr Geoffrey, Birds 'n' All, 17 Bennett Street, Caversham, Western Australia	534
DAVIES, Ms Carol Ann Rhys, Managing Director, Heritage Wildflowers, PO Box 114, Belmont, Western Australia 6104	470
GOLDING, Mr Antony Michael, Managing Director, Little Meadows Emu Farm Pty Ltd, c/- Post Office, Waterloo, Western Australia 6228	462
HEALY, Mrs Jacqueline Poula, Senior Project Officer, Mid West Development Commission, PO Box 238, Geraldton, Western Australia ...	429
HERLIHY, Ms Astrid, 6 Nanganaway Street, Kalamunda, Western Australia ..	537
HORWITZ, Dr Pierre, Conservation Council of Western Australia Representative on WA Threatened Species and Communities Consultative Committee, 79 Stirling Street, Perth, Western Australia 6000	479
ISON, Mr Graeme, Managing Director, Yellabiddy Marketing, PO Box 414, South Perth, Western Australia 6159	446
McNAMARA, Mr Keiran James, Director of Nature Conservation, Western Australian Department of Conservation and Land Management, Hackett Drive, Crawley, Western Australia 6009	513
O'MALLEY, Mr Peter John, Senior Research Officer, Agriculture Western Australia, Baron-Hay Court, South Perth, Western Australia 6151	419
.....	444
POLGLAZE, Mr Richard Ernest, Curator of Birds, Multiplex Construction's Egerton Stud, 12571 West Swan Road, Belhus, Western Australia	531
SIEWERT, Ms Rachel Mary, Coordinator, Conservation Council of Western Australia, 79 Stirling Street, Perth, Western Australia 6000	479

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SENATE
RURAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS AND TRANSPORT REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Commercial use of native wildlife

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Present

Senator Woodley (Chair)

Senator O'Brien

Senator Heffernan

Senator Conroy

Participating member

Senator Margetts

The committee met at 9.02 a.m.
Senator Woodley took the chair.

CHAIR—Today the committee holds its sixth public hearing on the subject of the commercial utilisation of Australian native wildlife. This matter was referred to the committee by the Senate on 30 October 1996. To date the committee has received over 330 submissions, many of which have contained lengthy and comprehensive attachments. The committee's terms of reference are broad ranging and require the committee to look at all aspects of the commercialisation of Australian native wildlife.

On 27 May 1997 the committee tabled an interim report which noted that because the subject was a complex one, and because some aspects of it were of considerable concern to many people, the committee has decided to conduct an extensive program of public hearings and inspections throughout Australia. This hearing today is part of that program. The reporting date for the inquiry is the last sitting day in February 1998.

Before we commence taking evidence let me state that this is a public hearing, and as such members of the public are welcome to attend. For the record, all witnesses are protected by parliamentary privilege with respect to submissions made to the committee and evidence given before it. Parliamentary privilege means special rights and immunities attached to the parliament or its members and others necessary for the discharge of the functions of the parliament without obstruction and without fear of prosecution. Any act by any person which operates to the disadvantage of a witness on account of evidence given by him or her before the Senate or any committee of the Senate is treated as a breach of privilege.

[9.05 a.m.]

O'MALLEY, Mr Peter John, Senior Research Officer, Agriculture Western Australia, Baron-Hay Court, South Perth, Western Australia 6151

CHAIR—Welcome, Peter. Do you wish to make an opening statement or some comments on your submission, and then we will have some dialogue about it.

Mr O'Malley—It was felt appropriate that the department actually make a submission. We have been involved with the introduction of emu farming in Western Australia, and we do run a new industries program. We see new industries basically coming from the utilisation perhaps of other wildlife and fauna, and the agency has spent a considerable amount of time and effort actually trying to understand the growth patterns of new industries so that they can better assist new industries develop along a commercial path.

CHAIR—Thanks for that. We will enter into some dialogue. Kerry O'Brien, would you like to start us off?

Senator O'BRIEN—Certainly.

CHAIR—Have I caught you on the hop?

Senator O'BRIEN—No, you have not really. I was just looking through the submission which I went through with a bit of an eye for detail last night, and I was looking for any involvement of the department, particularly with regard to the emu industry, in the development of markets for the industry. The evidence we received in Queensland in relation to the industry was that there was in effect a stalling of the industry because they got to the point of having the meat processed but they were running short of markets for the product. I was wondering what, if any, role your department has in expanding or developing the market for the industry, or assisting them to do it.

Mr O'Malley—Initially we did undertake sort of generic promotional publication of information, such as leaflets. We also attended a number of international events—the international leather fair, for instance, in Singapore—where we distributed leaflets and offered information on the products that are coming from the emu industry. We do not see ourselves as leading in that area. I believe we need to just facilitate the industry effort rather than be seen as leaders. The emu industry in this state was characterised by a number of large individual organisations actually targeting their own markets, and we saw that we could help by giving more generic information as opposed to targeting specific areas.

Senator O'BRIEN—In terms of the industry in Western Australia, do you have any idea how many people are employed in the emu farming and processing industry here?

Mr O'Malley—Not offhand. We did commission a report by McIntyre to actually evaluate the progress of the emu industry last year. I am sure that information is contained in that report, but I could not give you the answer off the top of my head.

Senator O'BRIEN—I am sure the secretariat can follow that up. It may have been clear in your submission, but what parts of the state are occupied by emu farming operations?

Mr O'Malley—It is basically confined to the south-west. We did have farms as far north as Geraldton and Northampton, and I think there are one or two farmers further north, but the majority of farms are within the south-west corner of the state.

Senator O'BRIEN—Are any of the Aboriginal communities involved in farming birds? We saw an Aboriginal community at Cherbourg in Queensland involved in it.

Mr O'Malley—The original farm was established at Wiluna under the Ngangganawili people, but they actually expanded into a commercial venture but they have since ceased to trade, as I understand it.

Senator O'BRIEN—So there are none now?

Mr O'Malley—Not that I am aware of, no. Conservation and Land Management may be able to clarify that a bit better.

Senator O'BRIEN—I think your table 1 on the emu industry sets out the detail of the production and sales statistics.

Mr O'Malley—That is correct, yes.

Senator O'BRIEN—Up to the end of the last financial year.

Mr O'Malley—Yes.

Senator O'BRIEN—And they are regularly kept. Would those statistics appear in your department's annual report?

Mr O'Malley—No. That particular table was generated as a result of the McIntyre report that I referred to earlier.

Senator O'BRIEN—I see. It is not a normally generated set of statistics?

Mr O'Malley—No. I must add that the statistics are not complete because there is no record of domestic sales. So while that table will show there are fairly large volumes of product unaccounted for, there is a small amount of sale occurring domestically which

is not recorded.

Senator O'BRIEN—Going on to the part of your submission that deals with sandalwood, that is, if I read it correctly, not a native species. Is that right?

Mr O'Malley—I could not comment sensibly on that at all, I am sorry. The sandalwood project we are running in partnership. We are just there as the service providers basically.

CHAIR—So you cannot tell us what an obligate parasite is then?

Mr O'Malley—I can, yes. It is a tree that lives off another tree, and it needs a host to survive.

CHAIR—I am just trying to get at the 'obligate' word—'parasite' I understand.

Senator O'BRIEN—You say in the submission that *santalum album* is a native species endemic in India and the Indonesian islands. Does that mean it is native here and endemic?

Mr O'Malley—I think it is widespread, yes.

Senator O'BRIEN—We have received a lot of information about crocodile farming. What parts of Western Australia are currently involved in the farming of crocodiles?

Mr O'Malley—Once again, I am not actually involved in that area. It is more Conservation and Land Management, but my understanding there is that the areas are Broome and Wyndham. I do not know whether Wyndham is still progressing, but Broome and Wyndham have been the primary areas.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Mr O'Malley, obviously your submission really sets out the philosophical support for the commercialisation of wildlife in Western Australia. Could you provide to the committee the actual new industries program document commissioned by David McIntyre?

Mr O'Malley—The document?

Senator HEFFERNAN—Yes.

Mr O'Malley—I cannot see there is a problem, but I would have to clear it with the program manager, Brian Stynes.

Senator HEFFERNAN—If that was possible I think it would be helpful to us. But other than that I do not think that I have any questions—your submission speaks for itself.

CHAIR—Mr O'Malley, I note at the beginning of your submission the program objectives, which are, in summary, to highlight new industry ideas, maximise the opportunity and reduce the risks of new industry, better understand the needs, and create development paths.

One of the aspects that has been debated right around Australia in terms of our hearings has been the conservation value of the commercial utilisation of native wildlife. Do you have an opinion on that, and why was that not highlighted as one of the objectives of your program?

Mr O'Malley—I think there are two different issues. We are dealing with new industries which may necessarily not be from wildlife. We are talking about new industries to Australia, so they can be coming from overseas. In terms of a comment on the conservation value of the utilisation of wildlife, it would be my personal comment and my experience that where there has been a commercialisation of wildlife species, then the evidence seems to support that it has actually added to the conservation rather than detracted from it.

CHAIR—You are aware that that is a fairly well-contested position that you express there?

Mr O'Malley—Yes.

CHAIR—Certainly in the Northern Territory, the Northern Territory government through their parks and wildlife section you could say has put a lot of evidence down to support their support for that side of it. That was very interesting, but still the debate goes on and our committee needs to probably at the end have some opinion about that.

Mr O'Malley—A lot of the recent expenditure in the new industries program has been to actually develop a growth path for new industries to try and overcome the typical rush in development and then the industry goes backwards probably before it actually starts to grow again, which is characterised by a lot of new industries, in an effort to overcome those sorts of detrimental issues which can come in as a result of the industry becoming uneconomic for a period before it commences a new growth path. We can see that that sort of approach with wildlife species can perhaps draw criticism.

CHAIR—You also say in your submission:

New industries have little or no easy access to commercial, technical, scientific or marketing resources and their development is severely limited by their ability to contribute to the funding of important research and development initiatives.

Through your department are there resources going into research and development? You talked about marketing before, but some of the other issues are just as important.

Mr O'Malley—Yes. The new industries program is in excess of a million dollars in investment. Agriculture Western Australia have put almost that amount of money into the development of the emu industry, if you take wages and time into account over the last 10 years. It has also been well contributed to by the Commonwealth Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation, which has funded the research we have conducted at the Medina Research Centre.

CHAIR—You also say:

Any initiative to streamline the regulatory controls associated with these industries is strongly supported.

We have certainly heard that in other places. Do you have any comment about what kinds of regulatory controls you find onerous? Are they federal or state regulations?

Mr O'Malley—I think people in industry can best comment on those sorts of issues. Our observation is that the industries do have a problem with funding market research. Other industries which do not deal with native species are not required to contribute to the registrations and levies which are imposed as a result of dealing with wildlife. There are also a lot of restrictions in terms of marketing. There are forms to fill out, there are requirements to meet, and they do add to the cost of actually marketing the product.

CHAIR—Do you, or the department, have an opinion—and this is where the federal regulation comes in; the federal government's export of native wildlife which really operates as a prohibition on that industry—about the export of native wildlife?

Mr O'Malley—I personally would, and I think the department would, support the structured export of native wildlife provided it could be shown that it has been done humanely and ultimately would be of benefit to agriculture or Australia as a whole. It is really a decision as to whether it is actually linked to the development of an industry or it is actually allowed to progress on a private basis where private individuals benefit, as opposed to an industry with general benefit.

In some instances, such as the emu industry, I can see that there would be substantial benefit in exporting genetic material for the benefit of the industry as opposed to the benefit of individuals, whereas in the bird aviary type situation, under strict controls, you can imagine that individuals would be allowed to develop their own market scene and profit individually.

CHAIR—Towards the end of your submission you say:

A legal market and stable price will ensure proper welfare of the birds by resulting in less smuggling and thus an end to inhumane treatment and greater protection of endangered species.

Are you aware of much smuggling or an illegal industry in Western Australia itself?

Mr O'Malley—Only by news reports. My only contact with it is what you see in the news, and it has been dramatically demonstrated by the news that some of these procedures are obviously very inhumane.

CHAIR—Yes. Would that be smuggling out through major airports? Is that where it surfaced in the news?

Mr O'Malley—Yes, it surfaced in luggage by tourists. It is also well known that there are individuals coming here specifically to target our wildlife.

CHAIR—Birds and reptiles?

Mr O'Malley—Birds and reptiles basically, yes.

CHAIR—We had evidence—it is not tested—in Queensland and possibly in the Northern Territory that occasionally wildlife is smuggled out by flying into remote airstrips.

Mr O'Malley—Yes, I have heard those rumours too.

CHAIR—You are not any wiser than we are. It is very hard to test.

Mr O'Malley—Yes, that is true.

CHAIR—It always makes the media.

Mr O'Malley—There is some suggestion that genetic material is also being flown into Australia, which is of concern in terms of our disease surveillance and protection of our local stocks.

CHAIR—Genetic material. In what sense would that be?

Mr O'Malley—Prior to the introduction of allowing improved avian strains, and also there are exotic birds coming in as well, which suddenly appear in Australia with no previous record. They have obviously entered Australia in some way, but the lack of records is not really for us to say that they have come in within the last so many months, but there is anecdotal evidence that suggests they have come in as a result of illegal importations.

CHAIR—Just going back to the regulations again, I do not know if your department has had much to do with the federal legislation, but that is something we have to be aware of. One of the departments in the Northern Territory did a lot of work and they said it was very complex and almost impossible to understand, let alone administer it.

You did not have an opinion on that?

Mr O'Malley—No, that is all handled through Conservation and Land Management. That is the requirement to meet the CITES agreement.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Following on the smuggling issue—and we have had several people come as witnesses to provide anecdotal evidence on smuggling—I wonder whether as a government the Western Australian government had made a submission to Customs on the problem. If it is hearsay, if it is in the press, and there are obviously locals on the ground who would have contact with your department, et cetera, have you made a submission or raised the issue with Customs, which would be the supervising body?

Mr O'Malley—No, we have not. The centre of the industry basically occurs in New South Wales and Victoria so that they are the areas where these rumours are arising from. We are a long way removed from those.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Do you not have evidence or press reports of smuggling in West Australia?

Mr O'Malley—Coming in or going out?

Senator HEFFERNAN—Yes, both ways.

Mr O'Malley—Sure, but our concern in terms of the commercial industry has been with the poultry industry and the threat that smuggled birds present to those sorts of industries.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Have you taken those concerns to Customs?

Mr O'Malley—Not that I am aware of.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Do you not think that would be eminently sensible?

Mr O'Malley—Yes, we often do not do things that are eminently sensible.

CHAIR—We are all guilty of that. Turning to the bushfood part of your submission, and again I am not asking you to give us answers where you do not have expertise, in general terms is there any marketing of bushfood, say through specialised restaurants in Western Australia? There certainly is in Adelaide and the eastern states. There is a chain called Red Ochre.

Mr O'Malley—No, Western Australia is well behind other states in its promotion of bushfoods.

CHAIR—Do you see that as being a possibility? You are obviously interested in the area.

Mr O'Malley—There is a new industries program which will be dealing with the promotion of bushfoods in Western Australia. It is hoped that we can put a bit of local flavour into them as well, but initially I think it will be based on species which are being utilised in the eastern states currently.

CHAIR—I imagine there are some significant and unique bushfoods available in Western Australia.

Mr O'Malley—So I understand, yes.

CHAIR—The list you have given us here really is from the eastern states.

Mr O'Malley—They are known to occur in Western Australia as well, as I understand it. The lass that supplied that list is going to be involved in the new project. She is obviously the person to ask.

CHAIR—Yes, good. Some of the committee have actually sampled some of the Red Ochre restaurant food and tell me it is very good. In terms of bushfood one of the significant things in the Northern Territory that impressed me was the amount of work done by Parks and Wildlife, which was the main department we interviewed, and the land councils that had done a lot of collaborative work, in the development of this whole issue. Would you see it important to have contact with Aboriginal communities because they could benefit from the economic use of bushfoods? They do anyway where they have them for their own use, but there are also some cultural taboos associated with some of those foods. Do you see it as important for your department to maybe have a consultation with Aboriginal communities on some of those issues?

Mr O'Malley—I think there is a requirement for the department to be sensitive to their views and their cultures, yes.

CHAIR—It of course depends where the foods are collected and whether they are farmed, and all those kinds of issues are critical, but there certainly was a creative relationship, it seemed to us, between the Central and Northern Land Councils and the government departments in the Northern Territory in the mutual advantage that that gave to both groups of people.

Mr O'Malley—I think we can be sensitive to that, yes.

CHAIR—You have got it in here so obviously you recognise it. In terms of the crocodile industry, you have given us an overview of the viability of the financial aspects of the emu industry. Are you aware in Western Australia of how viable the crocodile

industry is in terms of its economics?

Mr O'Malley—No, I am sorry, I could not really make a comment. I am not aware of any study which has actually been done. I am aware that the crocodile park which was at the harbour here in Fremantle is in the process of closing down.

CHAIR—Is it, right. We unfortunately had planned to go to Broome but it did not come off. There is a crocodile farm up there, I believe.

Mr O'Malley—Yes.

CHAIR—There is a bit of an anomaly that we came across between Queensland and the Northern Territory in terms of crocodile farming. In Queensland they are only able to develop product or breed crocodiles from the captive animals. In the Northern Territory they have quite a big industry in collecting, particularly eggs but sometimes juveniles, from the wild. Do you know what the legislative framework is in Western Australia, if there is any, because that is an anomaly between those two states that is of interest to the committee.

Mr O'Malley—My understanding, and I am sure Conservation and Land Management will be able to answer that question specifically, is that our procedures would be very similar to those that exist in the Northern Territory.

Senator HEFFERNAN—I was just wondering, Mr O'Malley, in David McIntyre's report, which you may be able to provide to the committee—

Mr O'Malley—Yes.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Did he raise the issue of over-harvesting of bush tucker from the wild as opposed to farming bush tucker? I just think there is a great danger that if everyone goes out and decides to get some bush tomatoes, there will soon be no bush tomatoes. Did he raise those issues in his report?

Mr O'Malley—No, he dealt specifically with the commercial emu industry as it exists.

Senator HEFFERNAN—He did not go into a wider—

Mr O'Malley—No.

CHAIR—One of the big issues for this committee of course is the whole conservation value, and the debate at either extreme is that commercial utilisation will destroy species both flora and fauna and at the other end of the debate is that in fact commercial utilisation will have a significant conservation value. So this committee really

is trying to hear both sides of that debate.

Mr O'Malley—Obviously if there is going to be harvest from the wild that is going to be subject to strict controls. Who administers those has to be determined, but our impression of most new industries would be commercial growing rather than a harvest situation. There may be opportunities for better management of areas which actually promotes the growth of the species in the wild and have a game ranching type exercise with certain livestock or wild stock, such as kangaroos, but they would be basically controlled commercial operations as opposed to direct wild harvest.

CHAIR—I think we have just about exhausted our questions. Thank you very much, Mr O'Malley, and thank you for your frankness. If we could get that report that would be great. That would add to our—

Mr O'Malley—I cannot see any real problems.

CHAIR—Good, thank you.

[9.31 a.m.]

HEALY, Mrs Jacqueline Poula, Senior Project Officer, Mid West Development Commission, PO Box 238, Geraldton, Western Australia

CHAIR—Welcome, Mrs Healy. Would you like to make any comments on your submission?

Mrs Healy—Yes. The Mid West Development Commission made a submission to the references committee because while we have not done any investigation into the commercial use of native wildlife we believe that there are opportunities for diversification or opportunities to use native wildlife for economic ventures. But in saying that we are also very concerned to make sure that whatever use there is made that there is no danger to wildlife and that there would have to be a benefit in any type of economic activity.

Senator O'BRIEN—Could you tell us about the Mid West Development Commission? What is its role?

Mrs Healy—We are a statutory authority. We are one of the nine regional development commissions that the state government has set up throughout non-metropolitan areas of WA. We cover about 450,000 square kilometres of Western Australia, stretching from the Batavia coast, the Geraldton area, right through to the desert community of Wiluna, and our principal role is to promote economic activity in that region.

Senator O'BRIEN—And what sorts of economic activity currently exist in the region?

Mrs Healy—The mid west is extremely diverse. We have agriculture, which includes broadacre farming and pastoralism. It is a very strong commercial fishing centre. We have one of the biggest rock lobster fleets in Western Australia.

CHAIR—That is out of Geraldton.

Mrs Healy—Yes. The region has a very strong mining sector now which is worth more than a billion dollars annually to the state—chiefly goldmining but also mineral sands, copper and zinc. We are also starting to see a development of the tourism sector within the region. There are a number of potential new industries for the mid west. We are looking at a new steel mill which could possibly take place within the next few months. We are expecting a decision on that shortly. I guess what I am saying there is that it is moving to downstream processing of minerals.

Senator O'BRIEN—In terms of what the commission sees as a potential for development in this industry, does your commission have a role in targeting potentially

successful industries and assisting them to get off the ground?

Mrs Healy—If it was a new industry, or a potentially new industry, we would have a role in working with other agencies, whether government or private sector, to try and look at the viability of those industries. For example, if we were going to be looking at some sort of venture based on native wildlife we would possibly work with the ag department and CALM and maybe the private sector as well to put some seed funding in and look at the viability of that.

Senator O'BRIEN—So looking at a potential new industry would not necessarily involve the private sector at the initial stages?

Mrs Healy—Not necessarily, no.

Senator O'BRIEN—It is a very broad area. Are there areas in this broad area that your commission would look at and then seek to get interest from the private sector to develop?

Mrs Healy—I am not sure that we would just pick an area and then try and target it. We do not have the resources to do that. We are only a very small organisation with a small budget. If we were aware, for example, through the ag department or CALM or some other avenue, that there was potential for an industry to occur in our region then we would possibly look at it. But we just do not have the resources for us to pull something out of the air and say, 'Let's look at it.'

Senator O'BRIEN—There has been recent media comment about the cultivation of Australian native flora and its sale overseas. I do not know if you saw that. Of international trade worth \$400 million we get \$40 million worth of it.

Mrs Healy—No, I did not.

Senator O'BRIEN—You did not see that? Western Australia boasts of a broad spectrum of native flora—its wildflowers. Has your commission looked at or been involved with any companies associated with the commercial growing of native wildflowers?

Mrs Healy—Over the years we have had some involvement. Possibly about eight years ago the commission held a flora summit in Geraldton and invited international guest speakers from Holland and various other countries to come over and talk to growers and potential growers in our region. That was probably the biggest involvement we had at the time. Since then we have worked with individual companies, more on a referral basis. If they came to us with concerns about, for example, how they could get government assistance we would look at referring them to the right places. But more lately we have become aware that there is a concern that Western Australia is going to lose its market

share in wildflowers because they are being grown so extensively overseas now, so that is obviously a concern. So I guess we have had some involvement but it has been limited.

CHAIR—Do you know if you have any or many commercial flower growers who are working with native flora and who are exclusively or aggressively growing Western Australian flora for export?

Mrs Healy—Yes, there are quite a few in the mid west region. There are a number of bigger ones down in the Coorow-Moora area. Throughout the Northampton area there are people who are growing wildflowers, and I know locally in Geraldton there are people who are seed collecting as well, and they are growing out seeds or propagating seeds. I am not sure whether they are selling them overseas but I think that they are selling them domestically as well, so it does appear to be a growing industry. I guess our interest is that it is becoming more popular. There are a lot of communities in our region now which are expressing an interest in getting into floriculture. It is because of this that we have become aware that there is a danger that Western Australia might have to start looking at different types of plant species because Israel, for example, is growing Geraldton wax—thousands and thousands of acres of it.

CHAIR—Yes, it exports millions of dollars of it.

Senator O'BRIEN—Talking about the export situation and the growers in your region, what market would they access and how would they physically get their product to market? Do you know anything about that?

Mrs Healy—Our commission is actually just undertaking an investigation into that, not just for floriculture but horticulture as well. We are trying to get a better understanding of what level of activity is occurring in our region, but my understanding is that the bulk of what is grown is actually transported to Perth and sold via an exporting company, and there are a range of them in Perth, I understand.

Senator O'BRIEN—So there is some sort of broker—that is probably not the right way to put it—but a middle person in Perth?

Mrs Healy—A middle person, yes. I doubt that there would be many people from our region who export directly. I think most of it goes to Perth.

Senator O'BRIEN—Do you know roughly where the majority of the crop is sold? Is it to the eastern states or Asia or Europe?

Mrs Healy—I could not give you a definite answer on that. My feeling is that a lot of it is exported overseas.

CHAIR—Is Perth the only international airport?

Mrs Healy—For export I think it is.

CHAIR—Geraldton does not have it?

Mrs Healy—No, Geraldton does not.

CHAIR—And nowhere else in that part of the coast?

Mrs Healy—I am not sure about Port Hedland, but Port Hedland is further away so most of our product would go to Perth.

CHAIR—It is easier to get it to Perth anyway.

Senator O'BRIEN—In the region itself can you give us some sort of idea what proportion of the 450,000 square kilometres that the region comprises had been converted to traditional agricultural purposes, or mining purposes, and how much retains the natural habitat?

Mrs Healy—No.

Senator O'BRIEN—I know it is a big ask.

Mrs Healy—All I can say is that on the coastal strip from about a hundred kilometres inland a lot of that area is dedicated now to broadacre farming. Beyond that we have the pastoral rangelands and I know that pastoralists are starting to look at using flora on their properties for different types of industries such as oils—ti-tree oil and so on. But a lot of that is grazed, and I think a fair amount of it would be considered disturbed by pastoral activities, and now mining is increasing in that area as well. But I do not know the proportions.

Senator O'BRIEN—That is probably more than I could have expected as an answer to that very broad question! I am interested in the issue of the proportion of land that remains natural habitat, because one of the key issues that is emerging from the submissions for the preservation of the native fauna is habitat preservation. I guess what you are saying is that the best land has all been converted to broadacre farming, grazing or mining.

Mrs Healy—Yes, but I think if you need exact answers on that, the ag department and probably the Pastoral Board could help, and there are other agencies that could give you that as well.

Senator O'BRIEN—Sure.

Mrs Healy—But I also say that there has been a recent study of the Gascoyne-

Murchison pastoral area that is now looking at sustainability of that area and the protection of the rangelands is a very big issue, and that might be a report that is worthwhile for the committee to have a look at.

Senator O'BRIEN—You talk in your submission about the wild harvesting of free-ranging native animals, I think basically birds. Has your organisation done any specific work on the potential for wild harvesting of free-ranging birds?

Mrs Healy—No, we have not done any level of investigation. Those comments in there, particularly about the pink and grey galahs and the corella, are about a common problem that farmers have. They can obtain licences to actually go out and cull these birds because they are considered a pest to farming crops and so on. It does appear to be a waste just to kill these birds. They are native birds. There might be a better opportunity for keeping the population numbers controlled and it is not just a matter of keeping the population controlled. There is an imbalance now because there are some birds that are becoming extinct and the food chain and so on has been disrupted. You do get these sorts of ebbs and flows of bird numbers, so there may be an opportunity to look at harvesting these birds rather than just shooting them.

Senator O'BRIEN—We have heard evidence, certainly from some witnesses, that suggests that taking a bird from the wild will not necessarily lead to the best saleable quality bird, because having not been raised in captivity they do not necessarily cope well with captivity—they do not look as good and they do not interact with people as well.

Mrs Healy—Yes.

Senator O'BRIEN—We did hear in the Northern Territory about a project to take a limited number of birds from the wild and to breed from those birds. Has your commission received any information from your agricultural or conservation and land management departments about such projects?

Mrs Healy—No, we have not heard directly from them but I have, just this morning actually, received some information from a venture that we have in Kalbarri, which is north of Geraldton. It is called the Rainbow Jungle Bird Farm and the owners of that establishment have an arrangement with CALM. I am not sure whether it is a licence or what it is but with CALM they are actually allowed to go out into the wild and collect eggs and the young of Corneby's cockatoo—I think that is the name—which was an endangered bird. Through this operation at Kalbarri the birds were actually grown in captivity and then handed back to CALM. I am not sure whether CALM then releases them to the wild or what happens with them. I am aware that some of that is happening in our region but to what extent—

Senator O'BRIEN—That may well be a conservation program, not a commercialisation program.

Mrs Healy—It could be, but it is a commercial business. It is a tourism business in Kalbarri, so it is combining tourism and the conservation aspect.

Senator O'BRIEN—So they would use those birds as they were growing as part of their display.

Mrs Healy—Yes, and I think that they actually do keep some of the birds as well but I am not 100 per cent sure on that.

Senator O'BRIEN—I suppose somewhere or other we will find a list of the sorts of birds that this state might think would be well suited to a wild harvest or farming practice. Do you know of any such reference material?

Mrs Healy—I have not seen it, no, but I would think CALM would be the first place to call.

Senator O'BRIEN—We will ask them when they are here later on today. Thanks very much.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Jackie, it could be argued that Australia has lost the world marketing edge for its own native flora, fauna and wildlife by being non-progressive, insular, isolationist and probably overzealous with protecting its genetic material here and allowing smugglers to export it overseas—for instance, emus are more in use in America by far than here. Do you think your organisation would agree that we have botched up the opportunities that commercialisation of wildlife presented to this country 20 years ago? This all should have happened 20 years ago and now we have lost the edge, as it were. Birds in America are worth a lot of money but the market has closed up; they have got enough genetic material over there. Do you think that is an argument you would agree with?

Mrs Healy—I am not sure. I am not sure how that genetic material has developed over there, whether it is just purely through the black market or whether there has been an opportunity for some birds to be exported, through conservation programs or whatever, so it would be difficult for me to answer that. I know that ever since I have been at the commission—six years—this has been something that the commission has been talking about: Will there ever be the opportunity to use wildlife commercially to a greater extent than what has been happening already? I guess it is not answering your question. I could not really say yes or no to that, but I know it has been an issue that our commission has been aware of, or interested in, for a long time.

Senator HEFFERNAN—It is part of the argument we have got to deal with.

CHAIR—It sure is.

Mrs Healy—You need to know how that material has got overseas; whether it is just purely through the black market or other avenues.

Senator HEFFERNAN—What it really means, Mr Chairman, from my point of view, and I would be interested to hear the witness's point of view, is that we are here arguing about something that has already escaped. The horse has bolted, as it were, in a lot of these industries and we are going to play some 'purer than the driven snow' show after the event has gone and we have lost the opportunity.

CHAIR—A concern to Western Australia would certainly be the same development in terms of wildflowers that we were talking about before.

Mrs Healy—It is a concern, as you were saying, Senator Woodley, about the wildflowers because we were talking earlier about Geraldton wax, for example. A lot of our growers now are being told that they have to start looking at different species because there is already a flood of Geraldton wax being grown overseas by other countries—Israel for example. That is potentially going to affect people that are already in the industry in our region.

Senator HEFFERNAN—It would be fair to say the challenge there would be to come up with a better Geraldton wax than they have got.

CHAIR—Of course it is pretty easy to smuggle seeds and things overseas, anyway, but do we know how the material got into some of them? We do not know. Was it illegal trade? In your submission on the potential impact you say:

Issues of animal protection and welfare ie: during transport, capture and handling need to be considered carefully.

Have you any concerns at the moment about that? Obviously what you say is true but is that based on some bad experiences? There is of course the whole issue—I do not want to get Senator Heffernan going here—of transportation of some of our domestic animals, such as sheep, and there has been a fair bit of controversy surrounding that. Is there any background to that comment about transport, capture and handling?

Mrs Healy—It was a comment that came—I put this submission together and it was through discussion with CALM. I was talking to some of our local officers about their views on the opportunity for using native animals and it was one of their concerns. That was a very big issue; I think we have talked about it already. If you are just harvesting from the wild, what is the impact on a bird if it is captured and transported somewhere? The chances are that it will not survive or it will not be in a very good condition. That comment was not from any personal experience but it was from talking to CALM.

CHAIR—That would also be the origin of your comment about quarantine

measures?

Mrs Healy—Yes.

CHAIR—So CALM, I presume, have a few concerns there too. We can ask them anyway.

Mrs Healy—Sorry to keep referring to them but they are a reference body for us as well.

CHAIR—No, it is not a problem. We do not expect every witness to be an expert. We certainly have got to pursue all of the issues as widely as we can. The other issue was emerging industry as against overseas markets, but I think we have canvassed that one fairly well.

I certainly have seen the media reports about the problem of the overpopulation of emus in some of the wheat-growing areas. There is also a debate about whether or not the problem is that the farmers have taken over too much land for farming wheat and pushed the emus off or whether there has been an explosion of the population because of the availability of water and feed provided by human beings—which then of course cause higher breeding rates than normally. Is culling the only method being used at the moment to keep the populations down?

Mrs Healy—This particular comment refers to an incident about two years ago when there was a drought in the Murchison area. My understanding was that these birds were actually gathering together. They were trying to move into the wheat belt areas where there was grain and feed and so they were actually moving south and getting caught along the barrier fence. They were actually gathering there in such numbers that they were causing harm to themselves and erosion of the pasture land there. I am not really sure of the best way of dealing with it but my understanding was that the best way at that time was to shoot the birds because they were in a distressed state as well. There was very little that could be done for them.

CHAIR—I understood that was about all that could be done. We are going to have a look at koalas on Kangaroo Island—the same problem. They are an introduced species there.

There was an interesting comment here and I wondered if you wanted to say a little bit more about it. This is under paragraph 1.3 which is headed, ‘Commercially based collection and/or breeding of native fauna,’ and you say:

There would need to be strict regulation or control of breeding so as not to domesticate all wildlife and to protect and maintain the genetic make-up of native fauna.

Would your concern be that in breeding of native fauna the genetic base would be narrowed too much?

Mrs Healy—I think that is the case and particularly with species that are endangered or the numbers already very small. There would need to be some protection of the genetic stock and it would be terrible if all our wildlife was taken out of the wild and put into a commercial situation and we did not have anything left in the wild. There needs to be a balance so that the wild stocks are retained.

CHAIR—There certainly needs to be a balance. I think our committee would agree with you there. The problem for us is really to ascertain how you arrive at that balance, and that is a pretty fair sort of a balancing act itself, I think, in a lot of this. Then, in terms of ecotourism do you have some idea of the sort of ecotourism that is happening, say, in your area or in other parts of Western Australia—Kalbarri of course?

Mrs Healy—Yes, I was talking about the Kalbarri one where there is a parrot sanctuary. It is very popular and it is also involved in conservation. As I was saying earlier, it is collecting some species of birds from the wild—the eggs and the young—breeding them up and then returning the stock back to CALM. Ecotourism in general is becoming much more of an industry that our region is trying to promote and along with that come the concerns of what does it do to the environment.

I guess you have all heard the term of ‘loving the environment to death,’ but I think also our region is becoming aware that it has the potential for attracting a lot of people because it can be maintained the way it is. We have something very special in our region and we need to maintain that if we want to develop an ecotourism industry. People are becoming more aware of ecotourism but along with that they are also becoming quite concerned about protecting what we already have.

CHAIR—Actually we were supposed to go to Kalbarri too. When we dropped out of the Broome leg of our trip we missed that too, which is a pity. Some of the ecotourism which we saw which we were very interested in does have a conservation value I believe—for instance, in Alice Springs there is a newly developed desert park that is trying to breed some of the very small marsupials and displaying them in a marvellously constructed area that is as natural as possible. It is \$20 million worth of capital just to build what they have got there now and they have got a further development program. Apart from Kalbarri you do not have any ideas of developing that kind of ecotourism?

Mrs Healy—I am not aware of any larger scale types of tourism developments which have that sort of conservation element. What I am aware of is that through our pastoral region the pastoralists, because of the state of the pastoral industry, are becoming more conscious of diversifying and tourism is one area that they are moving into, with station stay ventures. In conjunction with that they are starting to try to promote the natural elements of where they live, so they are trying to encourage tourists to come into

the pastoral region and to have a look around at the native flora and fauna.

From their point of view it is really important that it is maintained because that is part of their tourism product, so while they are not actually setting up infrastructure, like enclosures or whatever for dedicated breeding programs or whatever, they are relying on the natural environment to remain in the natural state, so that does help encourage the tourism side of their business. They are calling it nature based as well as ecotourism. The awareness is there but they are not actually going any further with, as far as I am aware, establishing tourism ventures that have dedicated programs for conservation. There may be some but I am not aware of them.

Senator HEFFERNAN—It would be a good opportunity to go and have a look at what the pastoralists do. I think we are a curiosity in ourselves. We are a diminishing race.

CHAIR—You will have to establish a museum because when they have stuffed all the Australian farmers that is the only place we will be able to see them. Is that not correct?

Senator HEFFERNAN—You have been with the Mid West Development Commission for six years, did you say?

Mrs Healy—Six, yes.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Would you like to nominate the flagship achievements of the Mid West Development Commission, just to give us an idea of what you have achieved?

Mrs Healy—I think we have actually changed to a commission in the last two years, so prior to that we were the Mid West Development Authority. In its infancy it was setting up a lot of infrastructure. One of the key things that we are very interested in is regional infrastructure, so it would be difficult for us to say any one thing that we have worked on on our own but we have worked in partnership with other groups. One of the biggest things to my mind is the recognition of the need to upgrade the east-west road links between the mineral province area back to Geraldton—the development of a marina in Geraldton. Land that was once the former Westrail marshalling yards is now a beautiful marina. We are yet to develop the land side of it but it is a facility there for the people of the region.

Another area that we have latterly become more involved in is working closely with businesses, trying to make existing businesses better established. So what we are trying to do is make them more aware of government programs that are there for their improvement.

Senator HEFFERNAN—This is a free ad, mind you.

Mrs Healy—Yes, I am just trying to think. Promotion of the region I think is a very big thing too. Last week we launched a brochure called *Region of opportunity* and it is actually trying to target the rest of the world, I guess. Outside of the mid west region we are trying to attract people to come to the region to look at the opportunities that we have there in all those industries that I have already talked about—and potential new industries. I would say that recently that would be one of the biggest things we have done. There were 80 people at the breakfast. Probably a lot of people had not heard of our region. They are now aware of what can happen there.

CHAIR—In terms of ecotourism do you take in Shark Bay, Monkey Mia?

Mrs Healy—No.

CHAIR—So that is north.

Mrs Healy—Kalbarri is our most northern boundary.

CHAIR—That is an example of ecotourism that is successful but has some question marks as well, does it not?

Mrs Healy—Yes.

CHAIR—It is one of those balancing acts that are going on. It is certainly very interesting. I have been there. My final questions are on the whole area of regulation which you comment on. This is one of the terms of reference for the inquiry. The main federal acts of course are the wildlife protection acts which are to do with the export of wildlife. Do you have any comments about that legislation? You have sort of described it and you say it provides strong protection for biodiversity. Again, this is a controversial aspect and there is a big debate that goes on. Again this committee hears both sides of that debate.

The Northern Territory department particularly was very critical of this act from two points of view. One was that it is very complex. In fact there are two acts, one of which is the original act and the other is an amendment act, and it is very hard to fit the two together. We got evidence in the Northern Territory that a lot of the protection which is supposed to provide protection to our native wildlife in fact does not do that because it goes out illegally. Do you believe that there needs to be changes to that federal legislation? Would you have any general comments about in what direction?

Mrs Healy—I am not familiar enough with the act, I am sorry, to really comment on it.

CHAIR—Would you have a personal opinion about whether or not we ought to export native wildlife? The other side of that debate of course is a very strong position put by some of the conservation groups who would say that the act is needed to stop any exportation of native wildlife because that is the only way to protect our native wildlife. Do you have a personal view on that?

Mrs Healy—I think to say not to export native wildlife is a bit of a joke really because it is already getting overseas in some form. Possibly commercialisation will help overcome that. I am not familiar enough with this act, but I think there do need to be controls on our native wildlife and it needs to be protected. But I am just not familiar enough with the legislation and how it can operate to be able to offer comment on it.

CHAIR—Your summary, however, is one we agree with. It says:

There needs to be a whole of government approach to land use planning, protection of the environment, and community and economic development to ensure the maintenance of biodiversity while still enabling commercial utilisation of Australian native wildlife.

That is a pretty good summary, I think, of the debate.

Mrs Healy—I know it is going to be very difficult to achieve that but it does need to be looked at holistically. You cannot just look at it from one particular aspect.

CHAIR—Yes, that is certainly very true and that has been brought home to the committee. You cannot just look at the commercial viability without looking at the conservation values and vice versa.

Senator O'BRIEN—Just going back to the wildflower issue, what financial assistance, if any, is available to growers of wildflowers in Western Australia generally to improve the stock to, taking up Senator Heffernan's point, produce a better Geraldton wax? Is there money that comes through the state government or federal government or other bodies?

Mrs Healy—I think if there is any it would come through groups such as the ag department or possibly CSIRO. I am not aware of any direct money that goes into it. I think a lot of it might be commercial operators that actually try and improve their own stock through their own means but I am not sure what assistance is available.

Senator O'BRIEN—Your organisation does not play any coordinating role or overview role in that?

Mrs Healy—We have not actually been asked to do that at this stage. If somebody came to us and said, 'We really need to start improving our quality of Geraldton wax; what help is there?' we would try and find out what assistance there is for them but it has

not happened at this stage.

Senator O'BRIEN—What about the university here? Does that play any role in that industry?

Mrs Healy—I think that a couple of the universities have a role. There is Murdoch and Edith Cowan universities, but I am not sure which ones do get involved at this stage. I know that there are universities that work with the mining companies as well in terms of rehabilitation of mining sites and trying to bring back the natural vegetation there. I think the universities probably are key people in all of this.

Senator O'BRIEN—But to your knowledge there is no great involvement in the wildflower side of the industry?

Mrs Healy—Not that I am aware of, but that is not to say it is not happening.

Senator O'BRIEN—Could you possibly point us to any information which might give us an idea of the value of the commercial wildflower crop in Western Australia?

Mrs Healy—Yes, I am sure there is information around. The Department of Commerce and Trade would possibly have that information. They certainly have helped us get the information on different sectors of our economy and I am sure that wildflowers might have been in there.

CHAIR—Certainly in the eastern states if you say 'Western Australia' you say 'wildflower' in the next breath.

Mrs Healy—Yes.

Senator O'BRIEN—Finally, from the inclusion in your submission of the article from the *Weekend Australian* referring to the comments of Dr Grahame Webb, I take it that your commission is supportive of the views as expressed by Dr Webb in that article?

Mrs Healy—Yes, I cannot quite recall everything he said in there but I do believe that we are supportive of that.

CHAIR—No trick questions.

Senator O'BRIEN—No trick questions. I was looking at the opening of the article, which is quite provocative. It talks about animal rights people as 'bunny huggers'.

Mrs Healy—That is a trick question, I am sorry.

CHAIR—You do not have to answer that.

Mrs Healy—I think what I said before about there needing to be a holistic whole of government point of view is where we are coming from. We are not anti people's concerns about conservation of wildlife—otherwise the industries would not be sustainable, and they have to be. I guess we are already concerned about the emu industry and what is happening there. I was out at Wiluna about two weeks ago and the emu farm out there has gone into receivership and the emus are being released back into the wild. I do not believe that is a very good situation for any business or firm or for the environment. If there were any business opportunities they would need to be investigated very carefully and they would need to be sustainable.

Senator O'BRIEN—What should have happened to the emus in that circumstance?

Mrs Healy—I am not sure. I am sure CALM did this, but you would need to look very carefully at what the current situation was out there. Was it a good season for supporting the numbers of emu that were being released out there? I believe it probably was. They have had very good rain in the last couple of years out there. They would need to be very careful about what they do out there and whether the animals could cope back out in the wild.

Senator O'BRIEN—And what the size of the population was out in the wild that they were going to compete with.

Mrs Healy—At the time, yes.

Senator O'BRIEN—I think Dr Webb's strong view is that to conserve many species they have to actually be farmed and managed and that we need to become involved in sales overseas. Is that fair representation of your comment?

Mrs Healy—That would be fair comment.

Senator O'BRIEN—Thank you very much.

CHAIR—At the end of your submission—and this is one that keeps coming up so I will keep asking it—you say that it would be possible that sustainable use of native wildlife industries could assist in the prevention of the illegal trade in wildlife. Are you aware of any illegal trade in your area?

Mrs Healy—Not personally, no.

CHAIR—We are trying to pin that down because it comes up everywhere but to get the hard evidence is very difficult. And you say:

Provide alternative industries for rural areas and Aboriginal communities.

Where are the Aboriginal communities in your area?

Mrs Healy—We have got a fairly large proportion of Aboriginal people throughout our region. We have communities east of Kalbarri, Wiluna, Meekatharra, the Murchison area—right throughout the whole area—and in Geraldton there is the Yamatji group.

CHAIR—Do you know of any discussion that is going on with those communities about the possibility of alternative industries?

Mrs Healy—No, our commission has not been involved personally to this date but we are looking to become more involved in that area now.

CHAIR—As I was saying to the previous witness, in the Northern Territory I was impressed with the amount of consultation and knowledge that was being shared, particularly between Parks and Wildlife and the Northern Land Council. That seemed to be a very creative development to me. I think they had a long way to go but we probably could all learn from that. Thank you very much. That was very valuable for us to hear you.

O'MALLEY, Mr Peter John, Senior Research Officer, Agriculture Western Australia, Baron-Hay Court, South Perth, Western Australia 6151

CHAIR—Mr O'Malley, we welcome you back again. Sorry to put you back in the hot seat, but there was just one question that we wanted to ask because we understand you have a degree of knowledge in this area.

Senator HEFFERNAN—We visited the emu farm at Cherbourg and one of the issues that was raised there in the problems they are having with the leather was the toe-trimming.

Mr O'Malley—Yes.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Which they do not do up there. I just wondered if you could illuminate your view to the committee on that practice here and benefits that flow from it, et cetera.

Mr O'Malley—We have made application to the standing committee of animal welfare group to actually have toe-trimming included in the code of practice for the management of emus, simply because we see it as a necessary farming management practice at the moment. It is not a very pleasant operation. It is an amputation where you are actually removing the last phalangeal joint of the emu's toe, and there are obviously very strong welfare concerns about it. Our evidence suggests that the amount of stress it imposes on the chick at hatch is minimal. We have done a number of trials where we have compared the toe-trimmed birds with untreated birds, and evidence suggests that the birds which have been toe-trimmed take approximately an extra day to a day and a half to get on feed.

When an emu hatches it averages around about 420 grams, and for the next four to five days it eats very little and actually loses hatch weight and, by the fifth or sixth day, there is a reverse in that trend and they start eating and obviously start growing fairly rapidly. With birds which have been toe-trimmed, they are a little bit slower in getting up, moving around and finding that feed, to the extent that they will take an extra day to actually get up or reach the point where they start showing a positive increase in live weight.

In terms of their ease of management from that point, in not having very sharp claws there is little damage done to the pen mates when they are handled, weighed, and driven between pens. It is also a lot easier for individuals handling the birds. There is obviously less likelihood of injury, and when the birds are transported to the slaughter at the end of the growing period, then obviously there is less ability for them to inflict damage on their pen mates.

Senator HEFFERNAN—It is probably not a good comparison but I am an old

sheep man. In management terms it would be a similar tool to mulesing a sheep, do you think, which assists in the management of the sheep? That is also a fairly—

Mr O'Malley—I think I would rather not look at it in terms of a big trimming operation and that sort of level of stress. It has not got a major level of stress associated with it, although it is fairly emotive. When you first see it, it does not look a very nice operation, and I can imagine that most people would feel that it is quite severe, but it does not come into the same category as mulesing or dehorning cattle, in my view.

Senator HEFFERNAN—In terms of the recovery of the leather from the animal, you would see it as a—

Mr O'Malley—In the trials we did, we compared birds which had been toe-trimmed and birds which had not been, and took them right through the full growing period and assessed their skin quality after slaughter, and also after transport for an hour and a half prior to slaughter, and without toe-trimming we got less than 25 per cent of skins falling in the A and B grade categories, whereas with toe-trim treatment we were actually getting 80 to 85 per cent of all birds falling in the A and B grade category.

Senator HEFFERNAN—What is the situation in Western Australia now with regard to toe-trimming?

Mr O'Malley—My understanding is that the industry fully supports toe-trimming, and the majority by far—almost a hundred per cent of farmers producing birds for slaughter—will in fact toe-trim.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Thanks very much.

Mr O'Malley—For your information I just add that the toe-trimming operation is carried out immediately after hatch, and it is done with a hot blade. We recommend that it be done with a hot blade debeaking machine, which actually removes the nail at its growth point and cauterises the wound at the same time so it minimises bleeding. You can also develop a high level of precision, and the operation can be done fairly quickly and rapidly. We have also done further research where we felt that if we actually could retain some of the under-nail pad of the emu's toe, then the end result would result in a slightly longer toe and a toe which had a protective pad at the end. You can actually achieve this by modifying your technique when you are using the hot blade debeaking machine, and the end result is quite acceptable.

CHAIR—Thank you, Peter.

[10.55 a.m.]

ISON, Mr Graeme, Managing Director, Yellabiddy Marketing, PO Box 414, South Perth, Western Australia 6159

CHAIR—Welcome, Mr Ison. Have you any comments to make?

Mr Ison—I am one of the owners and the managing director of Yellabiddy Marketing, which is a marketing company specifically looking at or marketing emu, kangaroo and crocodile products—the range of products derived from those three species—and obviously of great interest in the scheme of things as far as the inquiry went.

CHAIR—We have your submission, which is quite substantial, and we will be asking you questions about that, but if you would like to make an opening statement—there is no need to read your submission—then we would be very happy to hear you and we can have some dialogue.

Mr Ison—Yes. There are a few things that I would like to run through just very quickly.

CHAIR—Sure.

Mr Ison—Peter O'Malley from the agricultural department, whom we have just heard from again, was asked quite a number of questions which—from perhaps his standing within the agricultural department or his input into the industry—he was not able to answer, and I would like to touch on a few of those and maybe to highlight some of the answers that were not forthcoming.

CHAIR—Not a problem.

Mr Ison—Peter has been a stalwart, for the emu industry in particular, with the research and development. The agricultural department has spent a lot of time and a lot of money on research and development in helping emu farmers develop farm related programs to ensure that they get a reasonable quality product or a good quality product. The agricultural department certainly does not have a directive to market product. The agricultural department there is to assist farmers in producing a product to then allow market forces to market the product, and I think it is important to make that distinction. A lot of the time we expect that people like the ag department or Conservation and Land Management will take a leading role in marketing of a particular product, and I do not believe that is necessarily their bent. I do not think that is their prime focus. Their prime focus is in helping the primary producers to establish the product to then allow it to be marketed.

Currently in Western Australia we have got about 86 licensed farms. All of those farms obviously employ people directly. You asked Peter about the number of people employed in the emu industry. Apart from the 86 farms there is an emu-only processing facility in Western Australia that just processes or slaughters emus. That employs 15 to 20 people.

CHAIR—That is in Perth?

Mr Ison—That is here in Perth, yes; just out of Perth. We also have five or six marketing companies that are directly associated with marketing emu product, and obviously they employ marketing managers and secretarial staff and so forth. There was another question asked about unaccounted for product. We have done X amount of kills of emus and that should have produced X amount of tonnes of meat or X amount of litres of oil or square metres of leather. I would suggest to the inquiry that there has been a huge development program from a product perspective—a lot of trial product—so a substantial amount of oil, meat and leather has gone into trial so it is not accounted for in the Bureau of Statistics because it has gone into market development: into trial tanning procedures, into samples for meat and into oil development procedures.

One of the other issues you touched on was some of the bushfoods and bush tucker, which are of great interest to me as my company markets a couple of different brands of bush tucker. I did not touch on it in my submission, but we do have quite a substantial number of restaurants in Perth that either specialise or have uniquely Western Australian products on the menu. A very well-known one here is Prickles Restaurant in Fremantle which specialises in kangaroo—the Australian game cuisine if you like—and they also do a hell of a lot of bush tucker. So I think there is a lot of local support here for our local produce. As I said, we also have abalone and bush tucker products available through Downtown Duty Free, which is a national duty-free chain, and that is again local Western Australian product that is then marketed through all of the Downtown Duty Free stores. So there is quite a substantial amount of product being marketed on the local scene.

The other thing I would like to touch on that Peter was asked a question about was the development of the emu industry. In Western Australia now we have been seriously developing emu products for about 10 years, and we have a way to go before we become a major world force. But that compares with the eastern states—Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria in particular—where commercial emu farming has only been happening for the last three to four years, or two to three years really. So a lot of the product development and a lot of industry development that has occurred in Western Australia has not yet necessarily been caught up with in New South Wales and Queensland.

Some of the things that you are getting in submissions and some of the things you have seen—I think somebody mentioned you have been to see Cherbourg—that are in

place in places in the eastern states are not necessarily state of the art. I think it should be pointed out that with our research through the ag department and our support through Conservation and Land Management, Western Australia has had 10 years experience in developing emu product and emu markets. One of the comments was that Cherbourg was having trouble marketing product—they were able to grow it but they had not developed markets. Western Australia on the other hand has spent the last 10 years developing markets, so we are probably at a slightly more advanced stage in actually being able to commercially and viably farm the emu, compared with a state that has only been farming them semi-commercially for the last two years. I think it is important to note that.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Would you care to comment on the proposition of the wild harvesting of bush tucker versus commercialisation of bush tucker? Do you see a danger of bush tucker disappearing from the bush if we just allow a policy of wild harvest?

Mr Ison—Yes, absolutely. I do not think there is any question about that. If a substantial market was developed for bush tucker and if it was not controlled in some format then we would certainly run the risk of exploiting a natural resource. I temper that simply by saying that, from a commercial farming point of view or a development of a commercial market, I do not necessarily think that there would be any benefit to a commercial industry taking the resource and not replacing it.

What I am getting here is that it is far better for an industry to actually grow the product and harvest the product than chasing around all over the bush trying to find it in its wild state. I do not see that being commercially viable versus actually growing the product; like wildflowers for argument's sake, where they commercially propagate them rather than just taking them out of the bush.

Senator HEFFERNAN—On a completely different tack, we had some people come to us—in Brisbane, I think it was—who had a strong objection to the taking and eating—the commercialisation—of emus because they were natives, whereas they did not have the same objection to farming ostriches because they were not natives. Do you think there is an opportunity for the ostrich industry and the emu industry to work together on marketing, or is it different?

Mr Ison—I think they fall broadly into a similar category in that they both involve birds, for want of a better way of putting it. They both have fairly similar target markets in some product groups, and I think they are far better from an environmental impact point of view than some of our hoofed animals that we farm in marginal country. So, yes, I think there is an opportunity for—and there already is existing—a number of combined emu-ostrich operations. I do not necessarily think that with the marketing that the ostrich industry has done over the last 60 years, and based predominantly in South Africa, that emu will necessarily step in and consume ostrich markets. Ostrich markets are well established with very high quality product and I think the emu industry has a way to catch

up before we would be seen as either competitors or to work in with a quality product the same as ostrich.

Senator HEFFERNAN—To what level has the ostrich farming developed in Western Australia?

Mr Ison—I have nothing to do with the ostrich industry in Western Australia, or Australia for that matter. Unfortunately I cannot answer that.

Senator O'BRIEN—Some of the Queensland producers apparently are talking about a levy on slaughtered birds for the purpose of establishing a marketing body. Are you aware of that proposal?

Mr Ison—Yes, I am. I am also aware of a similar discussion here recently in amongst the Western Australian emu producers. I have two things to say about that. One is that on the current kill rates and slaughter rates the levy would have to be rather substantial for it to make any difference in market development. For argument's sake, if you levied \$5 a bird, and we are killing 10,000 birds or 20,000 birds a year, it does not leave a big enough pool of money to really do any serious marketing. So how big a levy do you put on it to make it a serious marketing fund? \$100 a bird, \$200 a bird—I mean, you will make—

Senator O'BRIEN—Obviously that is not a viable proposition.

Mr Ison—Exactly.

Senator O'BRIEN—But you are talking about here, or are you saying that the 10,000 to 20,000 birds are in Western Australia?

Mr Ison—That is approximately the number that would be designated for slaughter in the next 12 to 18 months in Western Australia. I have the figures from New South Wales. There are 48,000 birds in New South Wales—that is one of the largest states. Again, at \$5 a bird it does not leave a hell of a lot of money over 600 producers to develop international markets for a product. I think there is a core that needs to come back first, and that is quality assurance and product development prior to market development.

Senator O'BRIEN—Is there a need for developing the market here?

Mr Ison—Absolutely.

Senator O'BRIEN—It seems that they are using parallels of meat and livestock, for example, in their promotion of the conventional animal husbandry market products—beef, lamb, pork. Is it controversial within the industry as to whether this levy system is established?

Mr Ison—I do not think so, not at all. No, I do not think there is any doubt that levies have to be established for a number of items, and I think one that has been recently debated has been the residue testing question—to have a levy to help cover the cost of residue testing. There is certainly no problem in those sorts of areas.

Senator O'BRIEN—The potential for the industry is a bit of a question mark. Obviously it is a fairly small proportion of the meat product that is sold here or overseas produced in Australia. What reliable information can be produced on the potential for the industry? Are there any scientific or—

Mr Ison—How long is a piece of string?

Senator O'BRIEN—Yes, I suppose that is true.

Mr Ison—I suppose from European experience in the game meat markets—and that is specifically ostrich, venison, wild boar, that type of market which is one of the markets that emu is certainly suited to—Australian domestic growth of emu product and kangaroo product will be slow because of our cultural background with eating game product. Europe will be different—and I have this in my submission—and there are potential contract orders for more meat into certain countries than we can produce currently. But those countries will not take orders of meat until we can show them we can produce quantities of meat over a long-term period. So they are not interested in dribs and drabs of meat as it becomes available. For argument's sake, in Belgium they want to see us provide 40 tonnes of emu meat a month to allow them to establish a market for the product. It is no good them getting 250 kilos a week because they cannot establish a base to launch from.

Senator O'BRIEN—You talk about that potential market in Belgium. Would the industry currently produce enough birds to satisfy that market?

Mr Ison—Yes, the industry can certainly produce the birds. There has never been a question about producing the birds. I suppose there are two other by-products from an emu which are fairly important as well—the emu oil and the emu leather. The problem that we have had up to date is being able to market the oil and the leather at the same rate that we market the meat. I know that is where a lot of research and development has been aimed for the last five to six years. Meat sales per se have not been a major problem for the industry. We are able to develop substantial markets for substantial quantities of meat. It is the catch-up of the oil and leather that makes farming the bird viable. Unfortunately, we are not in a position where we can farm the bird for meat alone. We need one of those other two by-products to break even on the bird and all three to actually make it a viable industry.

The development of oil markets and the development of leather markets has been hindered somewhat by quality issues—as Peter has explained with the scarring of the

leather and so forth which we are addressing over time—but it is a little bit of catch up. As I said, we are facing 50 to 100 years of marketing of, say, ostrich for argument's sake, versus five years of serious marketing of emu. Prior to that it was product development, not marketing. So the focus really has changed but I do not think we have been given a long enough lead time to actually have confirmed orders for product. I think we are still in the development phase.

Senator O'BRIEN—With the proposal to remove the end phalange of the toes of the emus, I just wanted to explore something: your company is a marketing firm?

Mr Ison—That is right.

Senator O'BRIEN—So you do not actually farm the birds.

Mr Ison—We have two divisions to the business. One of the partners—the other half of the business, if you like—is a primary producer actually growing the bird.

Senator O'BRIEN—Does that primary producer currently remove the toe?

Mr Ison—Yes.

Senator O'BRIEN—Can you say what the experience is with the useability of the skins from the birds?

Mr Ison—I would have to echo exactly what Peter O'Malley from the ag department said. Yes, we found that we were getting far better than 65 or 70 per cent A-B grade.

Senator O'BRIEN—Do you take your product from other primary producers?

Mr Ison—Yes, we do.

Senator O'BRIEN—And what proportion of those producers would follow the same practice?

Mr Ison—For us to purchase leather they have to be declawed. We just do not get a good enough quality leather unless the bird is declawed.

Senator O'BRIEN—Is there a significant market for the leather? You were saying that you need to sell the leather and I see from your submission that you seem to have some downstream processing of the leather. Do you actually only sell the leather as product, or do you also sell the leather as leather?

Mr Ison—Both. Certainly the focus for us was the development of a raw leather or

a tanned leather and then to take it to the market. To purchase as leather was very difficult. We were forced into the situation where we needed to actually show a downstream process product to give people a better idea of what the potential uses of the leather were. Through the development of our downstream products, we are now developing markets for leather based on the fact that, yes, we can prove or show that the leather has got some good uses.

Senator O'BRIEN—I think you in your submission talk about a production facility in Sydney.

Mr Ison—Yes.

Senator O'BRIEN—And export to Singapore.

Mr Ison—Yes. Do you mean the leather specifically?

Senator O'BRIEN—Yes, leather products.

Mr Ison—Yes, we export to a number of different countries, Singapore being one.

Senator O'BRIEN—Right.

Mr Ison—America has been, until fairly recently, a good market for us. Canada is still a fairly viable market for us. Certainly South-East Asia, for accessory product other than garment, is very much our focus. The processing or the manufacturing facility we have in Sydney is a licence agreement where they will manufacture product exclusively for us—an exclusive range of product. That particular company is notated in the submission as Outback Leather. It only does Australian leather, so it only does emu and kangaroo and crocodile products. It does not do cowhide or merino.

Senator CONROY—You mentioned until recently the US market had been a good one. What has happened?

Mr Ison—There was quite a substantial farm base of emus in America that has developed over the last 20-odd years. They are now starting to trickle their own product, domestic grown US product, onto the market. They are starting to tan leather and starting to manufacture cosmetic product so we are finding it hard to compete in that market head to head.

Senator O'BRIEN—We were told that there were two million emus possibly in the United States.

Mr Ison—Yes. I could not give you exact figures on it. On my last recollection I think there were about 4,500 farmers and well over two million birds.

Senator O'BRIEN—And also that there are emus in France.

Mr Ison—There are some emus in France. There are four emu farms in China, and there is even one in the UK somewhere. I think it is in Scotland.

Senator O'BRIEN—In terms of the husbandry of the bird, it is obviously adaptable to lots of different parts of the world and breeds very quickly. Is there any material available which would indicate that it is suitable for some of the undeveloped parts of the country as a specific global food product?

Mr Ison—Can you be more specific about undeveloped parts of the country?

Senator O'BRIEN—Not this country, other countries.

Mr Ison—Yes, I would imagine that because of the ability of the bird to reproduce at such a rate then, yes, it would be seen as suitable. Certainly China saw it as a viable farming option for meat for fairly small land-holding lots with the very high reproductive rate and fairly low maintenance—yes, absolutely.

Senator O'BRIEN—You talked about the processing—I think it was an abattoir here in Perth employing 15 people. Would that be a permanent employment situation or just casual?

Mr Ison—It varies a little bit. Peter Pieri tends to like going gold prospecting and having the odd holiday. Depending on the time of the year and on what product is required, I would imagine that during the busy periods it is certainly full-time employment. During the not-so-busy periods then yes, it would be part-time employment.

Senator O'BRIEN—Is that facility fully accredited for processing bird for export into the European Union and Japan?

Mr Ison—It is, yes. It is AQIS approved for EEC or EU, and also for export into Asia. It is a single-purpose facility which means that it can gain—

Senator O'BRIEN—Only emu?

Mr Ison—Only emu—that is all they kill there. So it can gain acceptance into some fairly tough markets—Belgium being one of them. A lot of Scandinavians are very strict on the standard of product—a single-purpose facility being one of their standards.

Senator O'BRIEN—Are there any specific advantages that you have in Perth in terms of the cost of getting your products to the European markets compared to the eastern seaboard?

Mr Ison—No, other than maybe freight costs I do not see any strategic advantage in being in Western Australia versus being in Dubbo.

Senator O'BRIEN—Have you any idea what the freight cost difference would be? I mean, maybe the industry is—the difference between viability might be that freight cost.

Mr Ison—Considering that the European market is a fairly premium market, so you can expect to get a relatively premium price for your product, I do not think freight in the volume of product that goes into the markets is a substantial component to the cost.

Senator O'BRIEN—Do you send the meat product frozen or chilled?

Mr Ison—Depending on country requirements, depending on customer requirements.

Senator O'BRIEN—So it is either?

Mr Ison—It is either. Into specific countries like Singapore we are not allowed to import chilled; it has to be imported frozen. That is a country requirement, not an Australian standard. It is totally determined by what the standards are of the importing country.

Senator O'BRIEN—With the harvesting of kangaroo from the wild—I am just trying to look at your submission—is your company involved in that in any way?

Mr Ison—In the marketing of kangaroo leather product, yes, we are very substantial marketeers of kangaroo leather product, in finished product—in accessories, handbags, that type of product—and also in a range of golf accessories, in kangaroo leather.

Senator O'BRIEN—Someone else produces them to finished state and you market them—is that what happens?

Mr Ison—Effectively, yes, for want of a better way of putting it. Yes. We are not actually involved in the hands-on. We do not have contract shooters. We do not have tanning necessarily. We buy predominantly tanned skin.

Senator O'BRIEN—It may be in your submission and I may have overlooked it but are the emu skins that you secure here processed in Western Australia?

Mr Ison—They are initially processed here. Finished tanning is done in Victoria currently.

Senator O'BRIEN—Right. What, they are salted here and sent as a blue—

Mr Ison—They are pickled and wet glued here generally and then finish tanned in Victoria, manufactured in New South Wales and sent back here for export.

Senator O'BRIEN—Doing the rounds. That is actually not as unusual as the circumstance we saw in Cairns, where the crocodile skins are produced, sent to Japan to be tanned, brought back, made into product and sent back to Japan to be sold.

Mr Ison—We had a focus originally—and we still have—of maintaining 100 per cent Australian content in the product.

Senator O'BRIEN—And there is no problem with the quality of the tanning of those products here?

Mr Ison—There is, yes, absolutely.

Senator O'BRIEN—There is quality—

Mr Ison—We still have a number of quality issues as far as tanning, but we are working towards sorting those out and we have been for the last two or three years. We are getting better.

Senator O'BRIEN—The tannery at Cherbourg was interesting, and we were told there that the key issue with the emu is the quality of the original skin prior to tanning—in other words, the damage to the skin. In the context of the removal of the bird's claw in effect you are getting say 80 per cent A or B quality hides. What is determining the difference between an A and a B quality hide?

Mr Ison—The world leather industry, for want of a better way of putting it, totally determines leather quality. They have a set standard. It is not a matter of us imposing a standard and saying, 'This is A grade' or 'This is B grade.' The buyers of leather around the world will tell you what is A grade and what is B grade. They have a standard in place that says X amount of scars in so many square feet or where the placement of those scars is determines the overall grade of the skin. There is no special scientific formula. It is based on the international standard for leathers, whether it be cowhide or sheepskin or emu.

Senator O'BRIEN—How much of the product is being used in fashion garments that are produced in Western Australia?

Mr Ison—It would be less than 10 per cent.

Senator O'BRIEN—Where is that process, here or overseas?

Mr Ison—As in the manufacture of the garments?

Senator O'BRIEN—Yes.

Mr Ison—Here, predominantly. Certainly I can only speak from my company's point of view. As far as I know there is only a very small amount of garments, or people marketing emu leather garments, and we are probably one of the largest, and ours is totally Australian based.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Would it be fair to say, then, without toe-trimming, that the emu leather industry has got no future?

Mr Ison—No, I would not necessarily agree with that. The focus would have to be on product that did not need big panels of A grade skin. It would be a matter of marketing a product or a range of products and, as attached to the submission, there is a number of small products there that can utilise skin that may be not as good quality.

Senator HEFFERNAN—You say here, 'At present the industry faces a large stockpile of second-grade leather not suitable for tanning, and is facing the fact slowly discarding this non-commercial product.'

Mr Ison—Yes.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Would that not just continue though?

Mr Ison—That is what I would call non-commercial value or C grade or less. It might have been birds that were very badly scarred. There is a cut-off point of non-commercial value.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Would you like to comment in your submission on 4.1, national state requirements?

Mr Ison—Yes.

Senator HEFFERNAN—It seems to be a fairly intricate system, and I just wondered whether it needed to be as bureaucratic as that to achieve the—

Mr Ison—I suppose I looked at that question a little bit tongue-in-cheek, where it said, 'Do you think there is enough control?' Yes, detailing—as I have in my submission—I think there is certainly enough control. We have had problems in the past with intrastate regulations between the states, if you like, and then having a federal overview over the top of the whole lot trying to coordinate over and above what the states are doing. You do not want me to run through that in any detail?

Senator HEFFERNAN—No. Do you think that level of counterbalance is necessary to protect the industry from people who are—

Mr Ison—From itself?

Senator HEFFERNAN—From people who are not farming it, and are saying, ‘I’m not too sure.’

Mr Ison—Yes, neither am I. No, I think now that we farm emus nationally, then surely we can develop a national scheme to allow us to send skins from here to Victoria to be tanned, and New South Wales to be manufactured, to send it back here. Surely we do not have to get import-export permits, intrastate ones, every time we want to shift the product around domestically. We could simplify it a lot with the state bodies just having a source document to say, yes, the product was sourced, as CALM does here for us, from a licensed emu farm, and that document then is enough to satisfy all the other states. The fact that we have to apply to each state to say that here is a document—to get a document from them—and then vice versa to get it back out of that state, to get it back to Western Australia, is just ludicrous. Then to export it we go through the whole scenario again, through the federal—

CHAIR—Queensland growers had the same kind of series of hoops. Even to shift it from the farm 50 kilometres at one stage required a permit of some sort.

Mr Ison—I think 17 documents was our record. We had to get 17 different documents to export a product.

CHAIR—We have done a bit of this, but let me just get it clear on the record, because it is important: in industry overview, emu products supply versus demand, 3.1, emu meat. Currently the orders for farmed emu meat products are greater than the supply available. I was trying to reconcile that with the schedule given to us by—

Mr Ison—Peter O’Malley?

CHAIR—Yes. That shows in emu meat 1992-93—an increase from 1992-93 to 1993-94, and then a decline. I am wondering if you can just explain.

Mr Ison—Yes. As I said before, I think the problem that we have is selling all three products or selling—we do not have a problem marketing the meat currently, but it is playing catch-up with the development of oil markets and leather markets to ensure that we can actually kill for meat which we have a market for.

CHAIR—All right. I just wanted to make sure we had that clear. I have got a question here about the large stockpile of second-grade leather, but you have just answered that one. Obviously part of the debate that we are having here is between those who want

to farm and those who do not. I notice that in fact you say this is a hotly-debated issue, and on page 5, adequacy of federal government regulations—it is under that, but here you say:

Recently industry faced a barrage of misinformation from a conservation group suggesting that farming emus, kangaroos and crocodiles would have dire impact on wild populations, the environment and Australia's standing the world.

It was disappointing that the group was unable to substantiate any of the claims made and thus dropped the issue like a hot potato. We are obviously wanting both sides of this debate in terms of evidence, but we want hard evidence. Do you want to comment—because there is a fair bit of it in your submission—on how you see that debate?

Mr Ison—We had a situation in Western Australia about 18 months ago where we had a newspaper article published suggesting that farming of emus and kangaroos for a whole myriad of reasons should be disallowed. Some of those reasons were emotional, some of them were environmental. Unfortunately when we actually sat down with the particular group that wrote it, they backed off on all the issues because they could not substantiate any of them. Yes, we have documented what their allegations were in our documented evidence as to what we believed, and like I said, we came to the agreement that they pull their head in.

CHAIR—Is that documentation available to us?

Mr Ison—Yes, I can get it to you.

CHAIR—I am not wanting to continue the debate, but it is important to this committee that we get the hard evidence on all sides certainly recorded. If we could have that, that would be very useful, thank you.

Mr Ison—By all means. As it is stated in my submission, there are a lot of emotional issues that come into farming native animals or the utilisation of native animals. The distinction really needs to be made between—is it an emotional issue or is it a commercial issue?

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Ison—If it is going to be an emotional argument, an emotional issue or emotion on numbers of culled animals, then let us focus on that. Let us not beat around the bush.

CHAIR—Some of the evidence we are examining tomorrow in Adelaide, but you have talked about the conservation of macropods. You seem to be confident now that the counting methods are quite accurate, given the period that we have been doing it.

Mr Ison—Yes. Certainly from the evidence that CSIRO has presented, and they have been doing it for a number of years now, they are fairly confident that their figures are accurate.

CHAIR—That is still mainly helicopter counts, is it?

Mr Ison—Light aeroplane actually, yes.

CHAIR—Because that debate still goes on too, and it does affect whether or not you have an export market, particularly in kangaroo products.

Mr Ison—Yes.

CHAIR—In terms of research and development, I see here that Yellabiddy has invested well over \$300,000 in the development of these export markets. Do you get any R&D assistance from the federal government or state government programs?

Mr Ison—No, we have not. There are a number of different programs that are available for small business development, whether it be primary based or just in small business grants. We fortunately have not required that assistance. We have had the financial capacity to be able to go out and develop our markets on our own steam, for want of a better way of putting it. I think as a greater industry, certainly there may be some need, but I do not see that necessarily coming from the support of a government institution. It is a commercial industry, and the industry needs to prove whether or not a particular producer or marketing company is economically viable. To be propped up I do not see as being a good investment for either the federal government or a state government. It is a catch-22.

CHAIR—Yes, sure. I think your words might be quoted in speeches at times.

Mr Ison—I will not rephrase that, but what I will simply say is I think the money that is being spent at the moment by the agricultural department and by CALM and the government-based institutions is being spent in the development of farm technology, being spent in the development of product development, in standards, in quality standards, in quality assurance, to then leave a quality-assured product at the end of the scenario that can be marketed. I do not necessarily believe that it is the government's role to then come in and say, 'And we'll spend all our money marketing it for you too.'

CHAIR—I was not being cynical about your evidence. It is valuable to get that sort of evidence down on paper. One of the other debates we are involved in—it sort of comes in to the whole of your submission—is the whole conservation value of the commercial utilisation of wildlife. It seems to me that you see a conservation value in what you are doing, without stating—you do state it in terms of kangaroos and certainly in terms of biodiversity, although you would say: 'The biodiversity of wild emus is

endangered by captive bred birds with dominant genes sets escaping back into the wild.’ Would you like to just spell out what you mean there?

Mr Ison—Actually I think the word ‘not’ plays a fairly major role there.

CHAIR—I will read it. You state, ‘Biodiversity of wild emus is endangered by captive bred birds with dominant genes sets.’ There should be a ‘not’ in there?

Mr Ison—Yes.

CHAIR—That was why I marked it, because further on the ‘not’ comes in.

Mr Ison—Yes. The captive breeding of emus is fairly close to wild populations, and I think the guts of what we are getting at there is the simple fact that we are three generations removed from wild birds. Emus will breed for 15 to 20 years. It will take a hell of a long time for us to breed a bird that is genetically terribly far different from a wild bird.

CHAIR—I was interested also that no hormone or growth stimulant is used, and in fact the inference I get from you is that because of the leather and oil product it would not be helpful.

Mr Ison—No, certainly not. To grow the bird quicker may not be of any benefit if we do not get the oil and the leather to a standard. To grow them like chickens in 10 weeks is not an economically viable situation for the emus.

CHAIR—I notice another comment you make which relates to our previous witness about releasing animals back into the wild. That is apparently being done at one other farm that has collapsed economically. You are not aware of that?

Mr Ison—I am not aware of that.

CHAIR—All right.

Mr Ison—The inference from that is that a bird released back into the wild is going to have some impact. Is that the inference?

CHAIR—That is what you are saying here and I was just trying to relate that with the fact that this had happened, but it depends of course on the seasons and what wild population there is, where they are being released and so on, does it not?

Mr Ison—Yes, there are a lot more issues I think. The fact that maybe some birds escape back into the wild, considering the current population of wild emus out there, you would have to release a hell of a lot of emus back into the wild to make a substantial

impact.

CHAIR—You also talk about the interest from a major cosmetic manufacturer intensifying. How is the emu oil used in cosmetic manufacture?

Mr Ison—It is used as a base oil, predominantly as a carrier oil. Emu oil has some fairly unique properties in skin penetration or dermal penetration and it is used as a carrier for other products, in things like face creams or day creams, vitamin E creams.

CHAIR—I see our time has actually gone. Are there any other questions? There being no further questions, thank you much for very extensive and well-thought-through evidence. I believe it was very helpful to the committee.

Mr Ison—If I can be of any other help, please contact me.

CHAIR—The debates will continue, I am sure.

Mr Ison—I am sure.

[11.34 a.m.]

GOLDING, Mr Antony Michael, Managing Director, Little Meadows Emu Farm Pty Ltd, c/- Post Office, Waterloo, Western Australia 6228

CHAIR—There is no need to read your submission because we have that in front of us, but if there are any comments that you would like to make, please feel free to do so. Have you only just arrived?

Mr Golding—Yes, I have.

CHAIR—I was going to ask you to comment on the previous witness who is perhaps a commercial competitor of yours.

Mr Golding—Not really, no.

CHAIR—You work together?

Mr Golding—We work together.

CHAIR—That is good. If you would like to make any preliminary comments, please feel free.

Mr Golding—At this stage, probably Graeme has summed up most of where we are coming from as commercial farmers, marketers. I must stress that probably I am more focused towards the marketing viewpoint. We were the first commercial emu operation in Australia or for that matter the world to actually have a processing licence to process emus, to take the emu farming through its natural progression from farming the birds to actually creating products that are marketable and saleable to the world. It has been a long hard road doing that and we have invested a hell of a lot of money both in the production of marketable products and actually marketing those products to the world.

CHAIR—Your submission has some controversial statements in it which we probably would want to tease out a bit.

Mr Golding—Well, there we go.

CHAIR—But that is not a problem for this committee. We are becoming aware of the debates and we need the evidence. We need to hear from people whichever side of the debate they are on.

Senator O'BRIEN—Mr Golding, on the first page of your submission you say, 'The world market is very much oversupplied for emu products.' Are you referring to all emu products or just some?

Mr Golding—Yes, up until recently that has been so. Our company has just pulled off a reasonably big deal into a northern Asian market that should dry up a fair bit of the emu meat that is available in Australia. Basically the mentality of people that went into the industry was to make a quick dollar, not focusing at product development, which our company did and Graeme's company did. A lot of farmers went out and produced birds thinking that there were markets available, which was wrong thinking, and the money that was spent on farming has not been spent in the marketing arena where it needs to be spent. In my opinion I think the cart was put before the horse in overproduction of birds before going and finding markets for the products.

Senator O'BRIEN—Is that because people were told it was one of those get-rich-quick schemes?

Mr Golding—Yes, very much so, by certain sectors of the industry who had a vested interest in selling birds rather than trying to develop the industry through its natural progression and where the industry should head.

Senator O'BRIEN—The evidence we have heard today suggests that Western Australia is further advanced than other states in terms of development of its emu industry. Do you have any comments about that?

Mr Golding—Yes, that is probably true simply because we were the first state to legalise emu farming and so we had that jump-start. In all reality if we had been sensible we should have the only emu farming industry in Australia still in Western Australia, but that has flown.

Senator O'BRIEN—Or run away.

Mr Golding—Run away, yes. There is plenty of guys in the east that are marketing. No, I should not say plenty. There are a few people in the east that have also identified the fact that unless we market the products we are not going to have an industry and it will be floundering. It has floundered fairly heavily over the last 12 months or so, but I can see some direction starting to develop now, for sure.

Senator O'BRIEN—So you do not see much potential for growth of the market for the product? Is that what you are saying?

Mr Golding—Yes, very much so, but if this industry had invested—and when I say this industry I include farmers and government that put a lot of money into this industry, into quarters that I personally do not believe it should have but I am entitled to my opinion.

CHAIR—You are.

Mr Golding—Yes.

CHAIR—Very much so.

Mr Golding—If we had, as an industry and as a government, invested as much money in marketing as we have invested in trying to farm these little suckers we would be a lot more advanced. We would have a better understanding and knowledge of our end products and developed them through a lot more than they have been today. There are very few companies in this industry that have concentrated on marketing and, you know, it takes a lot of dollars to market, it does not matter what you market, and until you have a market it is no good producing product.

Senator O'BRIEN—There is a proposal, as I understand it, for a levy on processed birds to fund further marketing. Are you aware of that proposal?

Mr Golding—I have heard talks. Those talks have happened over the last 10 years that I have been involved, or nine years that I have been involved in the industry. Yes, certainly that probably needs to happen. When I say the whole industry, the farming sector of the industry is contributing towards the marketing of the products as we do in the beef industry and we do in the sheep industry in Australia.

Senator O'BRIEN—Do you think that is a controversial proposal?

Mr Golding—No, not at all.

Senator O'BRIEN—It has been a proposal for a long time. It has not come to fruition.

Mr Golding—No.

Senator O'BRIEN—Any reason why?

Mr Golding—I think generally the industry has lacked direction both in itself, and the government funding that has gone into the industry has been very fractionalised and I believe lacked direction in forcing the industry where it should go.

Senator O'BRIEN—You say in your submission :

One of the biggest problems that affects the viability of the industry are the vast sums of taxpayers money poured into two Aboriginal communities in West Australia and Queensland to assist and to establish emu farms and market their products in detriment to others in the industry.

Would you care to elaborate on that statement?

Mr Golding—Yes, I believe that a lot of that money has been wasted and could have been better utilised by the industry as a whole rather than by the Aboriginal sector of the industry in the developing of marketing strategies, plans and helping with the marketing of emu products generally.

Senator O'BRIEN—I thought that some of those proposals were an attempt to establish viable employment opportunities for Aboriginals in remote areas such as Cherbourg in Queensland to provide employment in a high unemployment region. You do not think that is a viable use of Commonwealth funds?

Mr Golding—We are getting into fairly controversial issues with employment.

Senator O'BRIEN—That is what we are here for.

Mr Golding—Yes, fair enough. Sure, there is some, you know, but I think there are vast sums of money that have been spent and wasted in trying to establish that and do that. Look at the money that went into Wiluna. What have we got there now?

Senator O'BRIEN—I do not know. What have we got at Wiluna? We have been to Cherbourg but we have not been to Wiluna.

Mr Golding—Wiluna basically has closed down. There is a the person who has taken over the lease of that property, and it is now as far as I am aware out of Aboriginal hands. It is being managed by or taken over by another party.

Senator O'BRIEN—So that has been a failure?

Mr Golding—Yes, for sure.

Senator O'BRIEN—The Cherbourg operation—are you familiar with that?

Mr Golding—Not entirely as I am with the Wiluna one, but to a certain extent. But, look, you are getting into rumour and innuendo and I do not want to be a part of that.

Senator CONROY—When you say vast sums, what vast sums are you—

Mr Golding—The figures that have been touted around by government instrumentalities are around 30 million over the last past few years.

CHAIR—he rest of the industry in Queensland seems to be fairly well integrated now with the Cherbourg operation, which we were pleased to see, and they do have an abattoir at Cherbourg that is operating very successfully. So we would hope that might be a better model than Wiluna by the sound of it.

Mr Golding—I hope so, because it is a lot of money that I believe the industry as a whole could have utilised. Rather than picking one sector of our nation, it could have helped a lot of us.

Senator O'BRIEN—Sure. I am just taking from your submission perhaps an industry concern that there is funding of part of the industry to the detriment of the non-funded commercial farms. Is that a fair way of categorising your concerns?

Mr Golding—Yes, I believe so. I cannot see why one sector of the community should have vast sums of money and another sector not have the same sort of opportunity.

CHAIR—Yes.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Can I dwell on that point. One of the biggest problems you say that has affected the viability of the overall industry is this money poured into the Aboriginal communities in the—

Mr Golding—No, I am not saying it has affected the overall viability. I am saying it could have been better utilised.

Senator HEFFERNAN—‘One of the biggest problems that has affected the viability of the emu industry are the vast sums of tax money’—that is what you say in here.

Mr Golding—Right.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Why is that, because are you not competing on the same market. There are other aspects to that government money and I do not want to reflect on that at all because I am not across the figures, but if your industry is viable—the one you are in—why worry about your opposition?

Mr Golding—Well, why should my opposition be built—abattoirs and tanning facilities—and we are not given the same sort of opportunities? I have had to fund my operation through my own means and I have got someone out there who has not got the same sort of commercial costs that I have had to bear over the years.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Yes, but if they are failing—in your words—and you are winning. Does that not mean it has not affected the industry, the overall viability of the industry? It just means, in your view, that they have been given a handout which they have wasted, but it has not affected the overall viability of the industry, surely. You are saying it has?

Mr Golding—Yes, I think if that money had been utilised more fully across the industry that the industry would be more viable today, for sure.

CHAIR—Would be further ahead.

Mr Golding—Yes, well and truly. Yes, no doubt whatsoever.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Yes, I guess that is all that I would seek to follow on from this submission, thank you.

CHAIR—Could I just pick up a couple of other issues that get away from the controversial stuff. We have to deal with it so it is valuable to get your opinion.

Mr Golding—Yes, fine.

CHAIR—I would be interested if you would tell us a little bit more—if it is not a commercial problem—about the small tannery in Victoria that ‘developed very high quality tanned emu skins for accessories such as wallets, belts, purses, et cetera, and have spent the last seven years trying to produce high quality tanned emu skins for the fashion industry’. Is that starting to take off? It seems to be a note of optimism, what you are saying there.

Mr Golding—Yes, I believe that the long-term investment that we have made as a company—and Graeme’s company has been involved in to a certain extent—is starting to show some fruit, but we need to take it to the next step of actually getting a good range of products developed and then introduced to the world. Unless, as an industry, we pick up a big name label from around the world to pick up this product—

CHAIR—Country Road or something?

Mr Golding—No. Let us try Yves St Laurent or—

CHAIR—Bigger?

Mr Golding—Yes, a lot bigger, and that is the commercial reality: unless we get someone—and I am talking specifically leather now—to pick up on the leather and make a huge commitment to develop products from that—and it is a beautiful leather that has some very good attributes—then this industry will struggle for a long time until it happens.

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Golding—On the leather front, probably the leather front is the one that lags behind more than anything today in our marketing efforts.

CHAIR—What about garments? I have seen some garments with emu leather used as part of the garment. Is there a market there?

Mr Golding—Yes, for sure. I believe there is a market there, yes, but we have to have a leather that is as good as—

CHAIR—Consistent.

Mr Golding—Consistent and as good as its main rival leathers, or not necessarily its main rival leathers—as mainstream leathers. You get your nubucks and those sorts of things and your Spanish merinos, and the tanning in New Zealand is absolutely magnificent these days.

CHAIR—I do not know whether Yves St Laurent would be a bit nervous about leather because of the whole worldwide debate about the use of animals in fashion garments. Of course that is a matter for debate as well.

Mr Golding—Yes, for sure, but that has tended to come and go over a period of time. I think we are utilising a native animal that has some unique characteristics and I believe that we have the potential to utilise everything that comes from that bird. We are not going to waste—you know, we are not just killing for the meat and throwing other products away.

CHAIR—Yes, it is all used. I found this was an interesting comment:

Because of past governments' lack of foresight many of our native species have found their way into overseas zoos and wildlife parks without being first sterilised, thus allowing other countries to benefit by the commercialisation of our native species.

Is that where the emu product probably developed from?

Mr Golding—Yes.

CHAIR—From zoo animals?

Mr Golding—Yes, in the American industry.

CHAIR—It is very big in the USA, is it not?

Mr Golding—Yes, it is huge, and Europe—there is quite a big operation in France now. There are many countries that are starting off. New Zealand is quite big now. China is certainly looking at emus in a big way.

CHAIR—Right. The Queensland emu growers were talking to us and at this stage would prefer that there was a ban on any further export of live animals or genetic material, but were open maybe to lifting that in the future. Do you have any comment on that?

Mr Golding—Yes, some two years ago that the debate was here in Western Australia—and I must admit that I will stand up and say that I was one vehemently against the export of any genetic material from the emu from Australia. I have changed my views in the last six months. I believe that the pigeon has flown, so to speak, and there probably rightly is an opportunity there for the industry to make some money to then put back into the marketing side of things. Anywhere in the world can get emus, emu genetics from other countries, why should we not now take advantage of the money that is available, and will not be available for very long?

CHAIR—All right. Thank you, Tony.

Mr Golding—Thank you for the opportunity.

Senator HEFFERNAN—A nice strong submission.

CHAIR—A strong submission, yes. That is always useful to us because we need to get the debate out on the table.

Mr Golding—Yes.

CHAIR—It helps us.

Mr Golding—Okay, thank you very much for the forum.

CHAIR—Thank you.

[11.55 a.m.]

DAVIES, Ms Carol Ann Rhys, Managing Director, Heritage Wildflowers, PO Box 114, Belmont, Western Australia 6104

CHAIR—We thank you very much, Carol, for agreeing to come. We certainly went looking for you because we have been aware, and getting a lot of evidence about the whole issue of particularly West Australian wildflowers, and the fact that there is a much bigger market overseas in people growing our wildflowers in Israel and places like that and selling them, than we are able to tap into from Australia. At least that is our understanding.

Ms Davies—Thank you very much. In addition to appearing as the Managing Director of Heritage Wildflowers, the longest-established wildflower exporter in Western Australia, I note for the committee that I am also on the executive committee of the West Australian Wildflower Producers Association, and I am an adviser to CALM on the WA Floricultural Industry Advisory Committee. I am here today on about two days' notice, so you will have to excuse—

CHAIR—Yes, we understand that. We went and looked for you and we are very grateful you are willing to appear, because this is obviously—particularly in our hearings today—developing into quite a big issue.

Ms Davies—Yes, I have made five copies. I would like to basically just read this statement to you and then we can expand on it if you feel there is anything that needs to be said after that.

CHAIR—Sure.

Ms Davies—My evidence is in regards to the particular aspect of native flora at this hearing and I come before you in my capacity as the Managing Director of Heritage Wildflowers, the longest-established wildflower exporter in Western Australia, a member of the executive committee of the West Australian Wildflower Producers Association, and as a member of the West Australian Floricultural Industry Advisory Committee to the Department of Conservation and Land Management.

Western Australia has for the past 35 years been trying to establish a profitable export industry based upon the commercial utilisation of our unique native flora. Most of the high profile success stories through the media on this industry have been very short lived. It is still very much a cottage industry in Western Australia with a very large turnover of both growers and wholesaler exporters. Last week's *7.30 Report* on ABC TV mentioned figures that would appear to be more realistic than ones that have been used by both industry and government for justification of various agenda in the past 15 years. They were that the world market in WA native flora is currently valued at \$400 million and of

that Australia's share is \$40 million—a mere 10 per cent. This would indicate that Australia has, for various reasons, missed the boat yet again.

Discussions with our state regulatory body, CALM, have shown that there is absolutely no state or federal legislation in place to stop our entire unique genetic resource base from being taken or sent overseas and rode out commercially in countries such as Vietnam, China and India within the next five years. With the advent of micro-propagation techniques, commonly known as tissue culture, any legislation to limit seed export would seem minuscule by comparison.

In September this year the Kings Park Wildflower Festival will have a deputation of approximately 38 Japanese government officials, agronomists and plant breeders who will, following their inspection of the considerable collection of flora at Kings Park, then spend a further week to the north of Perth inspecting the genesis and species in the wild. This will be their third annual visit to Western Australia and they are not coming here as advisers to our cut flower industry.

The floricultural cut flower export industry acknowledges that current export regulations of Environment Australia do not impinge upon our ability to export cut flowers, both cultivated and through the management plan of CALM. There does however appear to be a number of teething problems associated with the issuing of export licences from Environment Australia in that it can take up to four months for these to be issued. The process of a WA applicant applying to Canberra, and that application being referred back to CALM in WA for confirmation, would appear to be a waste of time and effort. It is suggested that WA export licences first be cleared by CALM in WA before being forwarded to Canberra for issue.

WAWPA continues to encourage growers to broaden the range of cultivated commercially viable native species and CALM continues to monitor and manage the harvesting of species from the wild. There is however an urgent need for Commonwealth research and development funds to be made available to this industry in order that they target industry's needs for the long term and not short-term research projects for research's sake, as is the current situation.

The current cut flower export industry is tied up in three major lines of waxflower, kangaroo-paws and Banksia. Over 90 per cent of these are from cultivated stands. Over 60 per cent of flora exported is still harvested from the wild and efforts to move towards cultivation of these species is hampered by the lack of funds available to industry. It is believed that Commonwealth funds could be more cost-effective if they were directed towards the private sector, such as providing an incentive for growers and propagators to actually get the plants in the ground, as opposed to them being in laboratories. Commonwealth R&D funds should be demonstrably industry-driven in order to develop a commercial viable cut flower export industry for the future.

International protocols safeguarding our unique generic resource space should be put in place and they should not be limited to plant breeders' rights of minute variations of hybridised commercial lines that are already under cultivation and not under any threat from harvesting from the wild.

CHAIR—That is the kind of submission we needed. Thank you very much. I think that is right.

Senator HEFFERNAN—I think you have done well.

Senator O'BRIEN—I wanted to ask if you could elaborate a little further on the international protocols that you are talking about in the last paragraph. What do you mean?

Ms Davies—Yes, that is a very difficult one, because I have had a lot of discussions with CALM about how we could possibly do this. I can give you a case, like when these people come they say, 'How about a bunch of that in the next box of flowers you send us, or a bunch of this?' Micro-propagation—I mean, forget about restricting seed export. The horse has bolted really, but only on the surface. We have got a genetic resource base here of over 12,000 varieties. When I first came into the industry about 14 or 15 years ago we had over 300 commercially viable lines. I look at my selling sheet now and there are seven on it. It is sort of like the research has not gone into the commercialisation of these things from the wild.

It has actually for 10 years that I know of revolved around 800 varieties of Geraldton wax, and the customer wants to know is it pink, purple or white. So no work whatsoever has been done on trying to get the base broadened, and I do not know how we can stop it from getting away. But it is something that needs to be put on the Commonwealth's agenda. I mean, in Western Australia we have Conservation and Land Management who in 1993 changed the CALM Act—not the Wildlife Act but the CALM Act—to cater to having a commercial deal with the Germans and their development of smoke bush for AIDS and pharmaceutical purposes, and that could be extended to cover other varieties, but it did not actually include the cut-flower industry, so we have got these hefty fines.

Everybody thinks it is all being protected. If an Australian citizen picks a flower on the side of the road, they are likely to lose their house and car and be in prison for two lifetimes or be beheaded, you know, as will happen to any German scientist who dares to smuggle anything out of the country. But we welcome the agronomists and plant breeders here and say, 'Take it.' It is really difficult to come to terms with this so-called protection of our genetic resource base and what is actually happening overseas.

Senator O'BRIEN—You say the horse has bolted—that was one of the terms you just used.

Ms Davies—Yes.

Senator O'BRIEN—Can I take you a little further from there. Is what you are saying really we are not going to stop people growing our plants overseas and selling them as cut flowers, but we have to develop more of our species here and develop new markets for our own product?

Ms Davies—As soon as we do that they are going to be—the first bunch of flowers that lands on the overseas market that they like, it will be in a tissue culture lab within 24 hours, being cut up and propagated. We have a situation of the Centre for Australian Plants—which has been set up with a representative from CALM, AgWest, Kings Park Board and UWA—but their direction appears at this stage to be in the PVR-ing of various waxes, and they say in the future they will be looking at plant breeders' rights on other things. But they can only get PVR put in place if there has been some human intervention. They cannot do it on natural selections from the wild, and it is the natural selections from the wild that are of the most concern.

The argument comes back that, 'Well, we've got merino sheep from Spain, we've got wheat from here, it's a world genetic resource base,' but I do not know that that argument is really valid.

CHAIR—It is not valid in terms of those who develop the products, that they then get protected. They certainly have got the protection, so why should not our growers have some protection?

Senator O'BRIEN—If they develop.

Ms Davies—The Centre for Australian Plants will develop these lines, and because there is not a commercial base in Australia to buy their plants to make them self-funding, then they will be sold off overseas anyway. So we could sell 25 or 100,000 plants in Australia and that would saturate the market here. So in order to be cost-effective, they have got to sell them off overseas anyway.

Senator O'BRIEN—So in the absence of some international protocol which prevents the taking of tissue culture from purely native plants, there is no way we can protect our species?

Ms Davies—No, I do not believe there is. I am still trying to think of a way, but it is something that really needs to be considered, and it needs to be considered quickly. We are all racking our brains.

Senator O'BRIEN—Do we have advantages in terms of seasonal growing of these plants?

Ms Davies—We thought we did. We have been very placid in the last few years thinking that, ‘Oh, it’s okay for Israel and California to have our plants. That’s fine. We complement each other,’ but of course Israel sells to South Africa and California sells to Peru and the labour factors involved in these things are considerably less than what they are here, and so, yes, South Africa has very large plantations already and we are still trialling our new varieties in South Africa. Western Australia first of all lost out to the eastern states with the large wild flower plantations that happened in—

CHAIR—Lots of kangaroo paw in Queensland.

Ms Davies—Yes, and Victoria and South Australia—exactly. It is getting broader and broader and we are getting less and less.

Senator O’BRIEN—So the only way of protecting an existing species would be to prohibit its export under any circumstances.

Ms Davies—And that is the end of the cut flower industry, is it not?

Senator O’BRIEN—And only to export variations of that product to which we would attach plant breeders’ or varietal rights.

Ms Davies—There are virtually only three lines—well, two lines, the waxes and kangaroo paws—that have actually been hybridised adequately to fit into that.

Senator O’BRIEN—Yes, I understand that. I am extrapolating and saying—

Ms Davies—Eventually, yes.

Senator O’BRIEN—that the only way you could protect our species was actually not to allow it to be exported at all, and only to allow the export of varieties that had been developed from that, to which PVR rights are attached.

Ms Davies—Yes, you could be right there, which again would be virtually the end of the export market.

Senator O’BRIEN—It would not if it worked that way, but it would certainly curtail it for a long time.

Ms Davies—Yes. It is difficult.

Senator O’BRIEN—Just finally, what you are also saying is that we do not have any natural advantages in terms of the production of our own species.

Ms Davies—Yes, we do. We do have that.

Senator O'BRIEN—We do?

Ms Davies—The history of this industry is that in the 1960s we sent all of our seeds overseas, in the 1970s we potted them up in plants, in the 1980s we tissue cultured them; now in the 1990s our top scientists are taking overseas jobs to show them how to get it right. People who have come to prominence in Australia on R&D funds are now being employed overseas; for instance in Japan to develop pink Sturt peas for the Japanese market. All of that research was done on Commonwealth funds here in Australia. That is only one of them. There are many like that. Sometimes I think, 'She'll be right, mate.' It will not be.

Senator O'BRIEN—No. Thank you.

CHAIR—You say that:

There is however, an urgent need for Commonwealth Research & Development funds to be made available to this industry in order that they target industry's needs for the long term and not the short term and research projects for research's sake, as is the current situation.

I have a number of questions about that, but the first one would be what do you mean by research and development funds for long-term needs?

Ms Davies—The long-term needs would be to have a broader base other than wax, kangaroo paws and banksias. That is the current situation. There are, I would say, a range of approximately 300 at this stage that are listed on CALM's export management plan that all come from the wild, and there are difficulties in cultivating them which need to be looked at so that people can put them into the ground. But not only that, because all of the research funds have gone into developing 800 Geraldton wax varieties in the last 10 years—

CHAIR—Is that literally?

Ms Davies—Yes, that is literally. Yes, definitely. The whole thing is a little bit of a joke, and the industry is quite concerned about it, as are members of the Conservation and Land Management Department. They are trying to eventually close the bush off to commercial utilisation, and things getting in the ground, and nothing is getting in the ground and the boys in the laboratory are messing around with waxflower when again the market only wants to know, is it pink, purple or white?

CHAIR—They do not need 800 variations.

Ms Davies—No, with minute variations on old varieties. That is a major issue here. However, they are trying to get around it by saying that it is industry driven, and it is not industry driven. David Evans was over here from RIRDC only last week and was not concerned that the range is not being broadened. He felt that there was still more need

and more work to be done on waxes, and it is not doing anything for the genetic resource base or for the industry.

CHAIR—It is reductionism at its worst, is it?

Ms Davies—Well, that is one of the words I have heard.

CHAIR—So that is what you mean by the sort of short term research projects for research's sake, rather than for the sake of an industry.

Ms Davies—Yes. It is definitely not industry driven. They have attempted to involve industry in these groups and created an amazing paper chase within our industry, and now they have also created a seat chase by forming committees and groups and subcommittees and subgroups, so that you would have to clone yourself 20 times over to keep up with them, you really would, and you are trying to buy and sell flowers.

CHAIR—Well, we are glad to have the original here to talk to us about it.

Ms Davies—I am sorry about this.

CHAIR—No. We need to hear.

Senator CONROY—You gave an example before of the pink Sturt pea. I think you said that they have taken scientists from Australia and taken them to Japan. How is that Japanese operation run? Is it government funded in terms of R&D, or government funded for the next stage after R&D?

Ms Davies—Not from Australia. It would be totally a Japanese exercise.

Senator CONROY—No, what I am saying is, do you know how the Japanese are doing it? Is it Japanese companies or is it the Japanese Government?

Ms Davies—I am not too sure, but I can find out if it is relevant. Yes, certainly. Names and things like that are available.

Senator CONROY—Yes. I am just wondering whether the Japanese Government have got a more proactive position in terms of trying to develop the industry and attracting people in, or is it purely commercially-driven?

Ms Davies—Right, okay, whether it is government or industry driven. Yes, sure.

CHAIR—There are two more questions. One question that is pretty important is, in terms of our own West Australian market, in terms of the demand for your product, is that still holding up, or is competition from overseas cutting into our market here?

Ms Davies—Yes, competition is part of it, but also since the late 1980s, there has been a determined push by Austrade to get us involved in the Japanese market, and we have been led to believe that this is where the future lies. I myself only traded with the Japanese for one and a half seasons and realised that I would follow all the rest of them out of the game if I continued. There have been a lot of bankruptcies of export companies involved with Japan, but still they are saying, ‘Japan, Japan, Japan’. It is not true, and it never has been. All of the planeloads of flowers, all of the propaganda of the late 1980s—and it still goes on now, directed towards Japan—is a joke because the Japanese will buy Japanese before they will buy anything else.

CHAIR—Presumably they must have good labelling then.

Ms Davies—Nobody is really making any money out of Japan because they have a rigged auction system in Japan that is controlled by the Japanese Triad. That is not really an auction system. The president of the Cut Flower Association of Japan is also the main importer for the auction system and owns the fumigation plant at Narita airport.

CHAIR—They are very good at vertical integration.

Ms Davies—Sorry, yes. So you have got this ‘can’t win’ situation. After you have been hit with a fumigation which is 10 per cent, if you do 10 and only get one fumo it will just keep you in there enough to think, ‘If I just send one more and I don’t get a fumo, then I’ll be in front.’ They never let you get in front. They just keep you there with that slight edge.

They were the main advisers to this industry in the last eight to 10 years. I have been advising the opposite to what they have been advising for the same period. They told everybody, ‘Plant as much as you can,’ and as soon as you have planted as much as they want, then they will tell you how much they will pay for it. You know how they operate. They have done it with our iron ore, they have done it with everything else. They pick off the little ones, then go for the big ones.

CHAIR—It is called non-tariff barriers, if you want another cliché.

Ms Davies—Yes.

CHAIR—I can see the frustration in terms of research and development. Does the industry itself have any funds available that it can use and perhaps control itself?

Ms Davies—We would like to see the current funds being cost-effective, being utilised in the right way, and once that happens, once that is turned around, the industry will definitely fit in with the current situation of funds coming from the industry.

CHAIR—You would be a bit cynical at the moment, putting your money into the current system.

Ms Davies—Yes. We have campaigned actively against a national levy on the floriculture industry in Western Australia because we know it will just get sucked up by the blotting paper. There is no way that they are going to get a national levy from West Australians while they are wasting all of the money they have already got. I asked Professor Considine at UWA, who has headed most of the research in the last 10 years, ‘What has research done for our industry in the last 10 years?’ I was told that was an inappropriate question and I should not ask questions like that.

CHAIR—I would have thought it was pretty appropriate.

Ms Davies—Now I say R&D has done nothing for my business in the last 10 years, so why should I support it? Yes, it is a difficult situation.

CHAIR—It sounds like it. Thank you very much.

Ms Davies—You are welcome.

CHAIR—We are very interested in your submission and we were looking because we have been getting hints of all this, so having it on paper is of great value to us and we certainly will acquaint the government with some of these issues.

Ms Davies—Good luck. Thank you very much.

CHAIR—I might indicate that we had a request for some people just to give evidence, as we sometimes do, on a couple of other issues. We do have some spaces to do that. I would indicate that we will make that time available—particularly to the aviculturalists.

Luncheon adjournment

HORWITZ, Dr Pierre, Conservation Council of Western Australia Representative on WA Threatened Species and Communities Consultative Committee, 79 Stirling Street, Perth, Western Australia 6000

SIEWERT, Ms Rachel Mary, Coordinator, Conservation Council of Western Australia, 79 Stirling Street, Perth, Western Australia 6000

CHAIR—We welcome representatives of the Conservation Council of Western Australia. Thank you for coming. We have Rachel's submission. I would say that we could have a very good conversation with you. Is there anything you would like to say by way of opening comments?

Ms Siewert—I will just outline a couple of the points from which we are coming. I must say I do not pretend to be an expert on commercialisation. Council has quite a strong policy on exploitation of wildlife, and that is the basis from which our submission is coming. There are some main points that I would like to point out from our submission, and that is that we are concerned that commercialisation of wildlife puts unacceptable pressure on native species, that looking at commercialisation puts wildlife in the role of a commodity rather than looking at its intrinsic value, and we believe that all wildlife has an intrinsic value that should not be compromised by commercial views.

The tenet that you can commercialise a species and this will help its conservation we do not believe is a sufficient argument for commercialisation because you cannot guarantee that the money you make out of that particular species will in fact be put back into the conservation of that species. So we believe that is a rather spurious argument. We are also concerned that species conservation value will in the future, if it becomes commercial, be judged by its commercial value rather than its pure conservation value or intrinsic value, and that if you are managing an ecosystem for a particular species for its commercial value, you may in fact compromise that ecosystem, because you are trying to maximise the value of one particular species. You may therefore, as I said, compromise another species or an entire ecosystem.

In fact, some species that are commercially attractive may be, for example, difficult to reproduce or slow growing, and therefore if you want to maximise your short-term returns from that species, people could be tempted to not carry out the proper procedures or to, in fact, over-exploit a particular species. We are also concerned in that we do not believe that the current regulations that are in place are sufficient to adequately manage an escalation in commercialisation, so our position is very strongly that we believe that present export bans should remain in place, and that a lot more research has to be done and put in place before we even consider further commercialisation of native wildlife. That is the basis of our submission. Pierre might like to add some now or go into some discussion.

CHAIR—Pierre, would you like to make some comments?

Dr Horwitz—I would like to make some comments. I certainly would like to offer a couple of comments that might support Rachel's. Firstly, I think it is important that it is recognised that the genetic and material resources in Australia and Australian territories are those of the people of Australia, and that commercial rights should not override that form of ownership. The management of those resources should be management of those resources in perpetuity, which means that we have to ensure that there are adequate controls and regulations to ensure the long term in perpetuity of all the materials that are commercially exploited or utilised. The Commonwealth Government is in a strong position or is in the best position to maintain that strong controlling interest. I have some specific points, but I am sure that they will come out as we go along.

CHAIR—Thanks, Pierre. Who would like to start?

Senator O'BRIEN—Perhaps I will direct this question generally, and either of you who feels most moved can answer. We have taken some evidence in Queensland and in the Northern Territory, in particular about the commercial utilisation of the crocodile. In Queensland the breeding takes place for the purpose of commercial utilisation from stock captured in the wild. In the territory they term 'ranching' the taking of eggs from the wild. In both cases we were told that the population of crocodiles has continued to grow, and that, particularly in the case of the Northern Territory, giving value to the swamplands by allowing the taking of eggs allowed farmers to keep the habitat for the crocodile rather than have an incentive to drain it to use it for other purposes. Have you got any comments about that sort of evidence, which I think is a fair reflection of the evidence we have taken on that subject?

Dr Horwitz—Notwithstanding the sort of evidence that was given and the sort of examples that the Queensland and Northern Territory people gave in their submission—and I do not know what the details were—I think we still have to look in those particular instances at the role that the federal government played in ensuring that the commercial utilisation was not out of control, for want of a better phrase. So, firstly, it may be that form of commercial utilisation has a long-term benefit for both the species and the habitat. It may be that is the case. It is certainly not the case in other instances, and, even in the cases where it is successful, through things like the ANPWS export control, there have been regulations that have ensured the dampening effect, if you like, of something that could have got out of control.

Senator O'BRIEN—Is it fair to say that it is possible that in that case the commercial utilisation of the species has had positive effects on the species and on the maintenance of habitat?

Dr Horwitz—It is impossible to say what the situation would have been without the commercial utilisation. I do not know.

Ms Siewert—My understanding is that in fact commercial utilisation has only

restarted in a relatively short time-frame; it has not been in long-term use. In fact the taking of crocodiles was completely banned for a significant period of time.

Senator O'BRIEN—Since 1974, yes.

Ms Siewert—Yes. They were hunted almost to extinction, and so it is extremely difficult to tell whether commercialisation has in fact had a positive impact because there were controls over it for such a long period of time—to bring the species back. Secondly, it is important to note too our point about lack of scientific data. The crocodile was probably one where there was a significant amount of data; on most other species there is not the amount of data that they have had on the crocodiles. My understanding is that there has been more research on that because the species was so close to extinction at one point.

Senator O'BRIEN—Certainly there were not the large crocodiles.

Ms Siewert—Yes.

Dr Horwitz—Can I just add something to that? Maybe the example is a good one because it demonstrates that industry and commercial interests can be beneficial to the long-term survival of species, but not that commercial interests should be responsible.

Senator O'BRIEN—Yes, if you object on a philosophical basis to using animals or native species or whatever. It does not touch on that argument, I concede that. I guess the question my point was seeking to address is, is it conceivable that there is actually a positive which comes out of commercialisation. I would have to say that, on the material we have seen so far, the industry has presented a relatively convincing case that in fact the benefits have been that the species has regenerated in the wild, perhaps even to the point where it can naturally manage its own limits. It has given a benefit to Aboriginal communities in terms of operating their own egg collection and breeding and hatching facilities, and has spawned a significant industry. It may well involve the protection of habitat by providing an income from habitat that would otherwise be either useless or be drained, so it would have farming use.

Dr Horwitz—I do not dispute that, but I think in the case of the crocodile you are dealing with a very high profile species where the public is very interested. I think if you try and translate that to lesser known species, the species that do not have those sort of international and national concerns, the commercial interests will tend to override what we said at the outset. It is important that we keep a lid on something that is liable to get out of control if we do not.

Senator O'BRIEN—Would it be fair then to say that you can concede—that is not to say that you support, but you can concede—that following a process of selection there are areas where commercialisation can have both a positive economic and a positive

ecological effect?

Dr Horwitz—My personal response to that—I do not know whether Rachel wants to comment as well—is that yes, there can be, but not should be.

Senator O'BRIEN—Yes. It seems that if you break the argument down into those components, the issue of whether we should be, in some people's minds, taking animals for food is an issue whether it is kangaroos, crocodiles or cows.

Dr Horwitz—Yes, but in my response there are numerous caveats that have to be made, and the caveats relate to the profile of the species and whether that profile needs governments for instance to give it a lot of support because it is not going to get the intrinsic support that it deserves from the public or the international community. So the profile of the species I think is very important.

Senator O'BRIEN—One of the arguments that has been put to us is that by giving some species a value you create an economic incentive for private land-holders who own habitat to maintain habitat. The crocodile egg example was given to us, but it could be, for example, areas where the red-tailed black cockatoo in the Northern Territory exist in large numbers, perhaps as a pest, and there are birds in Western Australia who would fit the same category, where eradication may give the land-holder a crop of \$1,000 worth of rice or grain, but taking a limited number of birds from the wild for breeding purposes might in fact give them a greater return.

Ms Siewert—The problem with that though is that it can often be a rather simplistic response to an underlying causal problem. We have got the same problem with twenty-eights in the south-west. Research is going on down there, farmers are actually at the moment taking action to kill them and they are in fact causing damage to balga bushes and plantations they are trying to put in. But what they are trying to look at is what are the underlying causes for those numbers. You have got an upset ecosystem; that is the problem. The answer is not to just take off 'the pest'—we question calling native wildlife pests; I personally have a problem with that—but to look at the underlying causes, and in fact redress them through ecosystem management rather than just selling off the birds.

Senator O'BRIEN—But the problem often is the birds will be there in numbers, to use birds as an example, because there is a crop there that they can feed off, so it is going to attract numbers. So the solution may well be to not have crops there. But how do you convince the private land-holder?

Ms Siewert—That is not seen to be the problem and I am just trying to recall some of the research. It is very preliminary stuff, some of the findings that are coming back from the south-west, but it is not as simple as saying that they are going to eat the crops just because the crops are there. They are replacing their food supply; there is an imbalance in their diet and that is why they are going after the crops, because of this

imbalance in their diet. So if you can address those problems rather than just knock off the twenty-eights, I would see that as a much better approach. Then, hopefully, you are also addressing some other problems in the ecosystems so you are actually talking about total ecosystem management.

Senator O'BRIEN—You are talking about something which is easy to say in the context of broad land areas. Is it realistic to say we are just going to get this total ecosystem management in the commercial landowning environment that we have?

Ms Siewert—I do not think it is as simple as that. I am not saying that it is simple but I do not think commercialisation is simple either because there are a lot of caveats, as Pierre was saying, on it. And there is a lot of money that needs to be spent before you go into commercialisation. For example, there has been a significant amount of research on crocodiles. I am not saying we support commercialisation for each species; I am just saying that if that happened you would need a significant amount of resources in study and also regulatory control—all those sorts of things—so commercialisation is not simple either.

Also, we have got in Western Australia significant landscape disruption and we are spending a lot of money putting that right. So we are talking about landscape ecosystem management on a large scale in Western Australia at this very moment in terms of salinity and putting back native vegetation. We should be addressing those problems at the same time.

Senator O'BRIEN—It may be that is possible but I suspect there is going to be a lot of experimentation with the process. I am not familiar with the problem with twenty-eights but there is a widespread problem with different sorts of birds around the country in large numbers being seen by the farming community as pests on particular crops. It is the same, I suppose, with kangaroos and wheat crops; wallabies in Tasmania with trees growing; and things like that. It is pretty common. You have got opportunities for native species that have been created by man. We have taken their habitat; we have taken their natural food; we have grown something in its place; they come and eat it; and we see them as pests.

Ms Siewert—Yes.

Senator O'BRIEN—Now, whether we do or not, the question is: is there a solution which can give value to those species and ensure that there is a disincentive for killing them off for the farmers? That is the way it is put to us.

Ms Siewert—If you commercialise a species the incentive then is to keep making money out of that species. So if you were taking a pest species away—and this is what is happening with goats—

Senator O'BRIEN—They are not native, are they?

Ms Siewert—They are not native but the example is still valid. The idea to eradicate goats was to put a value on them. Now there is a debate ranging fairly solidly in the pastoral community between those that want to eradicate them and just think they are bad—and we would be one of them—and those that want to make a buck out of them. So in fact they want to keep a small herd going so that they can make some money out of them. If you are talking about a pest bird, for example—pest being a word, as I said, I do not like using—if you are commercialising that species, is not therefore the pressure on to keep it being a pest so that you can make money from it? So it is still therefore impacting on a person's operations.

Senator O'BRIEN—You kept using the word 'eradicate' there. Is that not what we are trying not to do?

Ms Siewert—Yes, you are right.

Senator O'BRIEN—Goats we want to—

Ms Siewert—Goats you want to eradicate.

Senator O'BRIEN—And rabbits.

Ms Siewert—In terms of a particular bird being a pest, we want to stop it being a pest. Presumably, farmers want to stop it being a pest. I certainly would not want to eradicate a native species but you certainly want to stop it being a pest. We would argue that commercialisation is too simple an answer.

Senator O'BRIEN—In that it is not going to be the complete answer.

Ms Siewert—No. The other argument is that when you are talking about putting the money back into conservation of a habitat there is no guarantee in fact that will happen.

Senator O'BRIEN—There are no guarantees that things will happen. One of the arguments that is put to us is that there will actually be an incentive for the land-holder, particularly where it can be demonstrated that you can get a certain economic return by maintaining habitat, which seems to be the critical issue in the preservation of most of the endangered species. If there is actually a return guaranteed for the land-holder if the land-holder preserves habitat for one sort of species—it will usually spin off that there will be a number of different species who can live in the habitat—then there is an incentive for the land-holder to maintain the opportunity for the continued existence of a number of species.

Dr Horwitz—I think that is one of the scenarios and that particular scenario, if you look at the Australian landscape, has not held out very well. You would have thought

that over the last hundred years the pastoral community and the agricultural community in general would have had that ethos that if you protect your land, if you look after your land, if you manage it well, then the advantage is going to be propelled to your children, to your grandchildren and so on in perpetuity. But if you look at the landscape, that is certainly not what has happened.

So I wonder whether we can really take that any further. You can say that a lot of the reason why we have had such degradation on a vast area is lack of knowledge. The lack of knowledge situation is not going to go away, particularly when it relates to species. There is so much we need to know about each particular species: their long-term cycles, their short-term cycles, their life history, their ecology, their parasitic load, what sort of exploitation rates they can endure or cannot endure, whether they can be modelled. There is an enormous amount of information that we do not have and it is going to take years and years. So, effectively, we have to manage them now in a way that is going to avoid the mistakes of the past.

Senator O'BRIEN—I think they are good words. We do have to manage them now so that we avoid the mistakes of the past. Some of the mistakes of the past have been simple—'Let us eradicate these animals because they are a threat to crops.' I guess that is where this argument turns. The example we were given in the Territory about the red-tailed black cockatoo was a rice crop at a place called Tortilla Flats—a John Steinbeck title actually—where the farmer was prepared to kill a host of birds for a \$1,000 rice crop. The national parks permitted the taking of 50 red-tailed black cockatoos from what a witness estimated was a flock of between 5,000 and 15,000 birds for the purpose of establishing breeding.

What that farmer would do would be to try and kill as many birds as possible to preserve the \$1,000 crop, yet those birds at the moment sold overseas would probably raise \$5,000 a breeding pair. So what was being put to us was that actually if the farmer were permitted to ranch those birds—let us say he did not take the pairs but he established a way of getting some birds to breed, he took eggs and sent them off—he could probably make more out of his land that way than he could by growing rice.

Ms Siewert—You have also then got to look at the ethics. We have got a fairly strong ethical position on these sorts of things too and a lot of our members would not accept that you take native species out of the wild and sell them into captivity. So that is also an important issue for us in terms of its intrinsic value as a wild bird, and you cannot put a value on intrinsic value. I do not believe you can. So that is also an important point for the community. They do not like selling our native wildlife into captivity.

The other fundamental question too is whether growing rice in an area like that is an acceptable sustainable agricultural practice. So you are killing off birds for a particular agricultural practice that is not necessarily ecologically sustainable anyway.

Senator O'BRIEN—What you are saying then is that you tell the farmer he cannot use his land.

Ms Siewert—There are certain activities that I do not believe are ecologically sustainable in the landscape in the long term. In that particular instance I cannot comment because I do not know the Northern Territory environment. I would suggest there is a need to look at what sort of activities are ecologically sustainable in the agricultural landscape.

Dr Horwitz—I think it is also worth pointing out that 15,000 to 20,000 black cockatoos have got an enormous potential to the tourism industry. That is a spectacle.

Senator O'BRIEN—That is right.

Dr Horwitz—Whatever we do we have got to balance it with all of the other issues.

Senator O'BRIEN—Is that commercialisation of native species?

Dr Horwitz—It is in a way, yes.

Senator O'BRIEN—I think it is. It may not be of the same consumptive use.

Ms Siewert—It is nonconsumptive, noninterventive commercialisation of native wildlife.

Senator O'BRIEN—So I guess there is that caveat on your part on utilisation, the terminology that you used, and the other issue that we have been debating but perhaps I have taken up a fair bit of the committee's time and maybe other people have got questions.

Senator MARGETTS—There are some specific issues in Western Australia that perhaps you might like to talk to the committee about. The Department of Conservation and Land Management will be speaking this afternoon. Unfortunately I will have to be away by the time they are here. They have been involved with some commercialisation activities themselves and there has been some concern expressed in the community that in some ways commercial breeding of wildlife in Western Australia has sometimes been an excuse for removing habitat. Could you comment on any aspect in relation to current practices of commercialisation from groups like CALM?

Ms Siewert—There was some years ago an outcry over taking blue bonnets from the natural environment and commercialising those, allowing breeders to breed them. Concerns there were that it was not put out to the public before it occurred, that tenders were not specifically called, is my understanding. There was some concern about the way

that the process was handled. There was concern about the lack of scientific information on the blue bonnets and the supporting data—the sorts of things that Pierre was talking about earlier—the fact that the issue has not been widely debated in the community and concern about whether this is the best way to look after species that are endangered because it is my understanding that those were endangered species that we were talking about.

There has also been the sale of numbats, for example, interstate to John Walmsley's Yakamia sanctuary, or the two sanctuaries that he has got. There was concern about how that was handled and in fact what the money is spent on. Does it go back to, for example, numbat conservation? Those sorts of things. There is a very strong concern in the community about wildflower picking. Although that is not fauna—it is flora—it is still—

CHAIR—We are interested in that.

Ms Siewert—There is still a lot of concern about, in particular, wildflower picking in Western Australia; its impact on the habitat, spread of disease, dieback, aerial canker—CALM can fill you in on some of these things—lack of regulation and the desire to move wildlife picking in fact onto farms, so you get out of the natural environment and onto farms. There is concern that a large area proposed for a national park, Mount Roe—it was proposed as a national park in fact under the CALM AHC process that started in 1992. That in fact has not been put into a national park. It has been made 5G, which is basically the lowest form of conservation reserve for 10 years so wildflower pickers can pick in there. We do not believe that is appropriate. That area has high conservation value. In other words a commercial activity is actually determining what is put into the conservation estate, so it is not getting maximum protection.

Senator MARGETTS—Do you see that such things as commercialisation of wildlife are following this general commercialisation of government activities, a concentration on those things that bring in revenue?

Ms Siewert—As most people know, I managed to put up-front that we do have problems with the Department of Conservation and Land Management, in particular its forestry management operations. Its commercial activities and its production activities are very difficult to separate from its conservation activities and we have a problem with that. We believe that its conservation activities could be compromised by its need for its production role as well.

But in terms of the current climate, CALM is increasingly having to become commercial. For example, at the moment it keeps maintaining that it doesn't have enough money to manage its national parks and nature reserves and so it has been put in a role—and I cannot remember the name, I am sorry—where it finds a lot of its own revenue. It does not get as much money from CRF as it used to. So a concern is that the production

role joined in with the conservation role, we have some strong concerns about that, and the Conservation Council has a policy and paper on that, and I can provide that to the committee. Our concerns are CALM's dual role and there are concerns that increasingly that could be caught up with the commercialisation of wildlife. As I said, the wildflower area is a particular concern of ours.

Senator MARGETTS—I am getting the feeling from evidence you gave previously that you would believe that whatever your views on the commercialisation of wildlife, that each species should be dealt with separately and should have to obtain an individual permit, if it was going to, with conditions attached. Am I misreading it?

Ms Siewert—At the moment our position is that we do not believe that is possible, so under the current circumstances we believe that the ban should be maintained, and in fact commercialisation should not be progressed in Australia. Pierre might want to add to that, but that is our current position because we do not believe overall, given the information that we have, the regulatory processes that we have in place, that we are capable of dealing with it. A lot more community debate has to go on before we progress it significantly.

Senator MARGETTS—The other really tricky question becomes issues of rangeland management and appropriate farming. There has obviously been a lot of publicity about the culling of emus, kangaroos or whatever; species that are otherwise common species that have been attracted to the greater supplies of water that are available on farmland or rangeland that might normally be available during a dry season. The numbers become imbalanced for a number of reasons. Does the Conservation Council have a position in relation to farming of emus or—

Ms Siewert—We have a position on the killing of kangaroos and that was specifically developed because of the proposal to commercialise the kangaroo but also rangelands. While I accept that there is a kangaroo problem in the rangelands, I do not accept that the simple answer is commercialisation of the kangaroo. The rangelands are suffering from a huge number of problems. Total grazing management in the rangelands is absolutely essential and therefore you have to manage kangaroos. But just shooting kangaroos will not solve the problem in the rangelands. Even if you shot every kangaroo that existed in the rangelands it would not solve the problem.

The basic problem in the rangelands is that there are some areas that are basically economically and ecologically non-viable. So it is very simplistic to just say the kangaroo is the problem. There are some rangeland areas that need to be, in our opinion—pastoralism phased out and some other activity, whether it is just pure stewardship and management that happens; maybe that is it. In terms of kangaroos, when you are looking at commercialisation and shooting, my understanding is that the economic returns at the moment are quite poor; that you change the population dynamics. For example one particular industry, pet food for example, say, 'Economic returns are low. You want the biggest strongest male.' That necessarily, the way kangaroo populations work, can change

population dynamics. There are other industries—I understand if you are going for human consumption they like the young males. There again you are changing population dynamics.

So while we do have a policy that accepts some kangaroo killing where there is absolutely no alternative, it has to be done in a humane way and it is only as the last resort. We maintain that you need to go for much better rangeland management rather than going for the simplistic, 'Let's the kill the kangaroos' argument.

Senator MARGETTS—Just one other aspect: you mentioned the twenty-eights and they have obviously been quite a successful species in lots of ways, their adaptability to particular conditions and perhaps their ability to take advantage of other species which have not done so well. Some people are recognising that it might be a lack of flowering gums through mismanagement or other management practices of forests, but also there is a potential problem in trade overseas. If it is a very successful species here, there is a potential problem overseas.

Ms Siewert—Just in feral, you mean?

Senator MARGETTS—Yes.

Ms Siewert—Like we have in New Zealand.

Senator MARGETTS—Yes.

Ms Siewert—Yes, that is a significant problem. It is also tied up with the fact that if you export a red-tail black to put in a cage then you are also responsible for its end use to that extent. So if you are exporting these species overseas, you are introducing a feral into another country. Is that your point?

Senator MARGETTS—Yes.

Ms Siewert—Yes, well, we have done in New Zealand—

Senator MARGETTS—Perhaps they should go with warning signs.

Ms Siewert—Yes.

Dr Horwitz—I guess the reverse of that situation needs to be considered as well, and that is that under the new trade agreements that we seem to be getting into, it is quite easy to envisage a situation where Australia is encouraged very strongly to introduce species. Our traditional response to that is to say, 'We will look to the species that we have in our own backyard first, rather than introduce a species.' In that sense it is a question of the best of two evils.

CHAIR—I have got a couple of questions just in general terms. We just touched on tourism before. There is a growing interest in our native wildlife in terms of tourism, and the best of that I guess we could call ecotourism. You are not opposed necessarily to the commercial use of native wildlife in that sense?

Ms Siewert—In terms of people wanting to come a photograph it, I do not have a problem. If people want to come and shoot it, I do have a problem. For example, there are rumours circulating around, for example, that big-game hunters want to come in and shoot crocodiles. I do not think that is appropriate. But if you are talking about shooting it with a camera we do not have a problem as long as it is managed.

CHAIR—I will get on to that in a minute. In terms of the way this is done, it is not only shooting with a camera; in Alice Springs we visited the Desert Park which is a very large development which has native animals, some in captive situations, others not captive; on display but free, and others are semi-captive. Do you have any position on that? I know that is a difficult question if you have not been to this particular place but it certainly was commercial utilisation and creating a great interest for tourists. I guess what I am saying is the display of native animals in the best possible situation versus animals in cages, which I think nobody really is in favour of these days.

Ms Siewert—We do not have a specific policy on it. That would probably be termed a zoo in one respect. There are various ranges of opinion and as long as ex situ species or environments are not being used as a replacement for in situ conservation, like we do not maintain—

CHAIR—I know what you mean, yes.

Ms Siewert—Yes. I have to give my personal opinion because we do not have a policy on it.

CHAIR—That is all right, everybody else is.

Ms Siewert—I think zoos in the manner that you are talking about, a park, have an important role to play in educating our young and overseas people and, in fact, adults into the importance of our native species. So if it is done in an ethical, compassionate, humane manner, where the species are allowed to run free, they are not contained in cages, I could see a role for it. That is my personal opinion but I know other people in the conservation movement have a very different opinion to mine. So I cannot in this instance claim to be speaking on the Conservation Council's behalf. But in that case it does in fact open up people's eyes to some of our species. But there is also only a certain species that could, for example, live in an extended range captivity—can actually live in those.

CHAIR—I do want to get on to the trophy hunting one because I think it would be useful to get your response to that. But before I do that, bush tucker, particularly of

edible plants, is a growing industry in Australia, and we have taken some evidence on that. One of the concerns raised about that was that if bush tucker became very popular the concern would be overexploitation by overharvesting. However, if there was cultivation of bush plants for, say, a bush tucker industry, would you have a response to that or is that a bit too esoteric?

Ms Siewert—We have discussed it quite considerably with people working in arid lands—there is a particular arid lands campaign going—and also in our council, and we share concerns that have obviously been already expressed to you, and that is overcommercialisation of bush tucker. In other words, if you are taking it from the natural environment, it is the same with wildflower picking; you can overexploit it. The other aspect for us is also Aboriginal knowledge and understanding, use of their intellectual property. I am not saying we have an answer but that is a pretty important point; that is how much Aboriginal communities get out of bush tucker and being able to put the resources into the community. I do not think that issue has been adequately dealt with and it is an issue that should be dealt with.

CHAIR—We did have very extensive submissions from particularly the Northern Land Council and the Central Land Council expressing those reservations, but at the end of the day saying that if they were sufficiently involved in, say, the taboos that are attached to certain species and consultation and that the communities could benefit, they could see themselves perhaps going down that road.

Ms Siewert—Yes. There needs to be pretty adequate management plans.

Dr Horwitz—Just in terms of culturing, there are suites of impacts that are associated with culturing that could easily spread back into wild communities as well that need to be considered. That is why it is really important to have an overseeing role in whatever is happening. I mean, if wild material is taken out for breeding purposes or for culturing purposes, that should not impact on the wild populations, but then the culturing process in itself is the one that does have the possibility of spreading disease back into—

CHAIR—Certainly those reservations were also expressed. Let us go to the leg break in this game of cricket, so to speak. In respect of the whole trophy hunting issue, what was of interest to us was that it was one of the Aboriginal communities that have been involved in this in the Northern Territory, and it was for the taking of buffalo at that particular point. It was a very lucrative market for them because they charged \$360 a day for accommodation plus. Would you have any problem with the taking of buffalo?

Ms Siewert—Buffalo is a pest. They need to be eradicated as a pest. Council has a policy on feral animals, and that is that they should be eradicated but on a humane basis.

CHAIR—Right.

Ms Siewert—Whether trophy hunting of buffalo is humane—I do not think it is.

CHAIR—That was the question we did not really ask.

Ms Siewert—I think you probably stress the animals quite significantly. Then the other question is, when you have hunted out all the buffalo what do you do then? Do you then allow them to come in and shoot other things? Do they come in and hunt kangaroos? Can they come in and hunt crocodiles? I do not think that is the way that we should be promoting and using our wildlife. Council does have a policy, as I said, on ferals, but also that any culling is done on a humane basis.

CHAIR—I guess I can guess the answer to the question on crocodiles, but that same community is very interested in culling.

Ms Siewert—We would be very strongly opposed to that.

Senator MARGETTS—There comes a point where hard hooved varieties of species in the end might be creating more problems in the environment for soft hooved varieties. Has there been enough work, do you believe, or what sort of work has been done in Western Australia in relation to farming of soft hooved animals as opposed to hard hooved animals?

Ms Siewert—I am aware that there is some kangaroo work being done.

Senator MARGETTS—Or emus.

Ms Siewert—Or emus. There are obviously emu farms already existing, and I understand that some of those are profitable. But I do not think that all our farmers can turn around to emu farming otherwise they are not going to be profitable.

Senator MARGETTS—No.

Ms Siewert—Kangaroos, I honestly do not think that you would ever have a successful kangaroo farm.

Senator MARGETTS—You would have to have very high fences.

Ms Siewert—Yes and they stress out. It is just not in their make-up to be able to be farmed. I think there are probably niche markets that are being studied. There is obviously ostriches. They are promoting those. The work that is being done to my knowledge is being done as supplementary, not replacement. In other words, in pastoral areas for example sheep farming has economically been going down for years and years, and there have been plenty of reports about that. So alternatives are done as a supplementary to sheep rather than as a replacement.

Senator MARGETTS—So they are running sheep and emus.

Ms Siewert—No. Some specific properties have gone over totally to emus. I know of an Aboriginal enterprise for example in the goldfields where they are running emus as their main line of business, and I do not think they are running sheep on that particular property. So some are going into converting over, but not everyone is going to be doing that, and their other things are certainly done as a sideline rather than as a replacement.

Senator MARGETTS—From a farming point of view it is probably a good way to create a dust bowl, I suppose.

Ms Siewert—In terms of?

Senator MARGETTS—Farming emus. It would probably be a good way to create a dust bowl.

Ms Siewert—Yes. Well, it depends on the—

CHAIR—Depends on the number.

Ms Siewert—Depends on the number and things like that.

Senator MARGETTS—Yes, and management I suppose, yes.

Ms Siewert—And I must say that the emu farm I went to in Kalgoorlie was in fact being extremely well managed.

Senator MARGETTS—So it is a management issue.

Ms Siewert—So it is a management issue. But, as I said, the answer to your question is, I am not aware of any research being done as a replacement for cows and sheep on farms.

Senator MARGETTS—Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you. I think that is all, and we have got to watch the time. Unless there is anything you want to say in summing up?

Ms Siewert—No, I think we have answered the question. The only thing was, I was asked to apologise for Joan Payne who was going to come from the Waterbird Conservation Group. I understand she has sent you a letter.

CHAIR—Yes.

Ms Siewert—She unfortunately had another commitment she could not get out of.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Rachel and Pierre. We appreciate your evidence, as we do all evidence.

Ms Siewert—Thank you.

CHAIR—Before I call the next witnesses, could I just indicate that we will not be breaking for afternoon tea, which will give us an opportunity to catch up a little bit of time. Because a number of people who have made submissions or who have not made submissions would like to talk to the committee, what we propose to do is to make an opportunity at the end of the hearings for that around 4 o'clock. We will be inviting people, at this stage depending on the number, probably to speak for a maximum of five minutes. There will not be any questions, but it will enable you to make some comments on what evidence you have heard today or things you believe the committee should hear.

If you want to do that, we will have to formalise it to a certain extent. Would you see Pippa Carron or Andrew Snedden of the committee secretariat. They will get you to fill in a form. So anyone who would like at the end of the session to speak for five minutes to the committee on any of your concerns, we are very happy to hear you. If there are going to be too many, we might have to cut that time down a little bit, but at this stage I think five minutes each would be sufficient. If there are a number of people coming from the same kind of perspective, if you talk to one another you might like to deal with different aspects of the same perspective rather than just repeat the same thing. Is that clear?

[2.22 p.m.]

ANDERSEN, Ms Diana Janette, Owner, Kimani Aviaries, 360 Aldersyde Road, Bickley, Western Australia

CHAIR—Diana, you are very welcome, and it is good to have you. We actually have quite a few bird people here.

Ms Andersen—Yes, I recognise a few people.

CHAIR—We are very keen to hear what you have got to tell us. Can you please tell us the capacity in which you appear.

Ms Andersen—I am an aviculturist, specialising in the breeding of Australian birds, and I currently trade under the name Kimani Aviaries.

CHAIR—We have your written submission, so there is no need to read that. Would you would like to make any opening comments or statement.

Ms Andersen—Yes. I have just prepared a statement which covers a couple of things, in addition to the submission I put in, but I have also supplied copies of the slightly revised submission. In recent years advances in avian veterinary medicine and avicultural management techniques have resulted in dramatic increases in the numbers of birds bred in aviary situations by Australian aviculturists. This has created a surplus of birds to the current market requirements in Australia in many species of the birds kept in aviculture. A corresponding downturn in the market has seen a drop in the last three years of up to 50 per cent in the value of some of our Australian birds.

Under such conditions commercial breeders are finding it extremely difficult to meet costs, and they are also experiencing difficulty in disposing of surplus stock. Several species of parrots in Australia are considered under threat of extinction in the wild, and yet these birds are considered secure in aviculture because they breed extremely well under aviary conditions. Such species include major mitchells, hooded skull and shoulder parrots, princess parrots, all on the restricted licence and some on the endangered species list. Under current market conditions, these species could decline in aviculture very rapidly if there is a lack of interest in people keeping them and if aviculturists are forced to basically prevent the birds from breeding because of an inability to dispose of their surplus birds.

The costs in aviculture are extremely high. It has traditionally been the ability of people to sell some of their progeny to recoup some of the costs that has kept the hobby from dying down further than it has, and it has made it more accessible to a wider cross-section of the community. Many of the species currently doing well in aviculture are in great demand overseas, as are colour variations of our Australian parrots and cockatoos.

While these occur naturally in the wild, they occur in minute numbers, and it is only through the efforts of aviculturists that these birds have increased to substantial numbers.

Under the influence of CITES regulations and under pressure from animal rights groups, countries such as the USA are increasingly being forced to import only birds from aviary-bred situations, known origin and with very little risk of disease to both humans and to the very sensitive poultry industry. Australia, currently being free of newcastle disease and having screening techniques and treatment techniques for the zoonotic disease, chlamydiosis, would be considered an ideal country of origin for importation from other countries.

Some Australian breeders have recently been approved by CITES and ANCA for the export of high priority exotic species. Under current restrictions the market overseas is being supplied by smugglers and the black market, and the conservation cost of these practices is very high, not only in the loss of birds and eggs, but probably in some respects more importantly damage to nesting sites of endangered species. Smugglers take much more than their market requires because of the high mortality of their shipping practices, and they do permanent damage to nesting sites in their efforts to collect eggs from the wild. In black cockatoos for instance it is considered a decline in nesting sites is one of the causes of their drop in numbers; so this sort of damage has to be considered serious.

The approval for export of aviary birds where the status of the species is secure in aviculture—I am not suggesting that we start shipping out things that we have hardly any of ourselves—would inject vitality into a struggling industry and would be considered a valuable export industry for Australia. With the availability of DNA we can now prove without a doubt the origin of our birds, and I suggest that any sensitive species such as Naretha blue bonnets—it has been proved in the past that we can without a doubt trace these birds back to their origin. Therefore I believe the environmental cost would be non-existent, and as well as that the smugglers market would basically disappear.

Another area that I touched on in my submission was ecotourism. I am currently setting up my facility as a breeding and research facility, a way of collecting data on the breeding of Australian birds, especially the high priority birds. It is also designed to involve the rehabilitation and release of injured black cockatoos. While it is hoped that I can generate some income from publications and from workshops, guided tours, that sort of thing, it is primarily an export market that would ensure that I could continue to do this. I am not independently wealthy and therefore it is the breeding of the birds which would substantiate that sort of an establishment. That is my spiel.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. That was very helpful. Can I just bowl the first ball. The whole issue of smuggling is one that is being raised constantly before this committee, and obviously there is a lot of anecdotal evidence but not a lot of hard evidence about smuggling. Now, I have no doubt that it goes on, but it would be useful

for this committee if we actually could gauge the level of damage caused by smugglers. Have you any idea? That is a strong statement you make.

Ms Andersen—Yes. I have been present when CSIRO and CALM workers have shown photographs of damage caused to black cockatoo nesting sites. Recently—I think it was within the last two years—couriers were caught with vests carrying 48 black cockatoo eggs on their chests. People have been gaoled.

CHAIR—Is this going out through Perth Airport?

Ms Andersen—Yes, it was going out through Perth Airport. The local contacts—the couriers obviously were in trouble, but they also gave up their sources as well. I am quite sure that we were not lucky enough to catch the only one that went out, so basically the birds are turning up overseas so one has to query where they are coming from. Basically the smugglers market is small in comparison to the potential worldwide market because given the risks that the smugglers go to, the end price is extremely high. I am not suggesting that because a pair of black cockatoos might be worth \$40,000 or \$50,000 or whatever, depending on the species overseas, that someone is going to be prepared to come to Australia and purchase them at that price. They are going to want to come over here and purchase them at the market price here because of the high costs involved in shipping them legally.

However, this will bring the price down and therefore make the birds accessible to a wider community over there, in addition to the fact that the birds travel in a far more humane manner. As I said, if you place restrictions on the origin of the birds and being able to justify those origins of the birds, then we are not likely to be causing any other damage as well by motivating a market to be dishonest.

CHAIR—I was interested in what you said about the fact that you are both breeding birds for commercial use but also for research. The experience I have had in listening to evidence before this inquiry is that nearly all of the commercial operators do have some kind of research element to what they are doing or certainly recognise conservation values in what they are doing. That really though is not necessarily adding to your economic benefit. Why would you—

Ms Andersen—Why do I do it?

CHAIR—Yes.

Ms Andersen—Because of the welfare of birds and as a bird-keeper. I am primarily a bird-keeper. I am concerned with the welfare of the birds. I am concerned with their lack of care through ignorance in captivity. I am concerned with their welfare out there in the wild, again through ignorance. I believe that the only way of improving their lot in life—birds traditionally are a bit like goldfish; you buy one and when it dies you get

another one. They are extremely intelligent creatures. They have a lot more value in life than a disposable item. I believe that educating the public is the only way that you will improve their lot in life. It is the only way that you will make many species survive the human race in general. So I am just as concerned with the \$10 bird as I am with the expensive bird in terms of the welfare of the bird.

Yes, the research side of it and the publication side of it—I have already co-authored one book and I have travelled around the country lecturing. It is that dissemination of information on their care and welfare that is important to me. So, yes, that is not a financially viable aspect of it. What I see is that export is a way of keeping the industry alive and therefore allowing me to do what I want to do on the research and educational side of it.

CHAIR—So you would be happy if it was possible to export live birds given those other qualifications you put around that?

Ms Andersen—Yes.

CHAIR—And would you like the federal legislation changed to allow that to happen?

Ms Andersen—Yes, I would, but with restrictions in place. I think there need to be safeguards. I mean, a lot of these things can vary according to the status of the birds we are talking about. Logic prevails in pest species and things like that. If you want to prove that birds are all bred in captivity, one way of doing it is close-banding, so then the argument is, well, close-banding needs to be done when they are extremely small, so therefore the argument would be that you can take them from wild nests when they are extremely small and hand-rear them.

Well, on cheaper birds that is an awful lot of work and that is obviously what somebody has to do, but logically if you look at breeding data up to this time, if someone has five pairs of galahs and is shipping out 200, 300 or 1,000 of them, well, obviously something is not quite right. The higher up you go in terms of the status of the birds—for instance, almost any Naretha blue bonnet at the moment, because of the activities of CALM—

CHAIR—Stop a minute. For eastern staters, what is that? A number of people have said ‘blue bonnet’. What sort of bird is that?

Ms Andersen—It is a small parrot which exists only in one area on the Nullarbor. It is not as endangered as it was originally thought to be due to—

CHAIR—A ground dweller, is it?

Ms Andersen—No, it is not a ground dweller but it does come in for water and

feeds off the ground. Now, due to the efforts of a landowner on the Naretha station who provided a facility for the birds to be able to drink without drowning, the numbers have increased a great deal, but they were very limited in captivity. So basically aviculture has got together with Conservation and Land Management and said that they would like to bring some of these birds into captivity. The program was approved. It has been a great success.

The birds were taken under the supervision of CALM. They were DNA tested before they were ever handed out. Their genetic imprint, their DNA imprint, is kept on record, and the birds were shared up amongst a group of aviculturists. Now, the breeding success of those birds in captivity has been extremely good. Any of the birds can be traced back to the original birds that were trapped at any stage through the DNA testing. It has made them a great deal more available in aviculture, and it has brought the price down to something that is more reasonable.

CHAIR—So you are able to sell some of the captive-bred birds?

Ms Andersen—Yes. The program is now considered terminated and CALM no longer owns any of the birds. They were put up to public tender. But I have a pair that I can go into CALM and find out where they came from by their DNA testing and their identification rings.

CHAIR—Good. Senator O'Brien, do you have any question?

Senator O'BRIEN—No, I do not think I have any questions. I think, if I understand the evidence that has been given, the only question I have was on a comment you made about the inhumane export of birds. The only example you gave was the export of eggs.

Ms Andersen—Sorry. Yes, there are other consignments of birds that have been intercepted. One charming gentlemen in England actually sent them through the post. A large number of galahs were sent through the post. Needless to say, they did not survive the journey. The concern is that they are leaving from the north coast by boat—

Senator O'BRIEN—Right—of Western Australia?

Ms Andersen—Yes.

Senator O'BRIEN—By boat.

Ms Andersen—Yes, rather than through the traditional method of stuffing them in a tube and putting them through the airport.

Senator O'BRIEN—Out of Broome or Derby, or just isolated?

Ms Andersen—I am not aware. It is a very large coastline to control.

Senator O'BRIEN—It sure is.

Ms Andersen—Yes. So my argument is that the birds are getting through and Australia is not benefiting from it, the environment is suffering as a result of it, and you are dealing with a group of people who have the ability to supply that market with no environmental costs at all.

Senator O'BRIEN—And in Queensland they also have guns, we are told.

Ms Andersen—Yes.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Regarding smuggling, we have heard lots—not hard evidence—on smuggling. Do you think that for the level of smuggling that is going on over here there would be corruption involved at the government supervisory office level?

Ms Andersen—I would not like to comment. I have no bases of fact on which to say. I really do not mingle in smuggling circles.

Senator HEFFERNAN—But my point is that if everyone says there is smuggling, you would only have to have half of Dick Tracy, if it is true, to go out there and catch someone, surely. Why has no-one bothered in a big way to clean it up? I mean, we had a guy in Queensland, Mr Chairman, who came to me after a hearing there, and he pointed out on the map where he had a little tourist operation and he said, 'The plane comes over at 3 o'clock in the morning and that's the airfield it lands on.'

Ms Andersen—Yes. It is just one of those things. There was a program some time back on the ABC about a smuggling ring in America that was broken up that had Australian connections. I cannot remember the name of the program but it is available through the ABC.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Well, I will put it a different way. Do you think it would be possible to smuggle birds out without bringing yourself to the attention of any supervising government official? Do you think that the resources are spread so thinly that it would not come to the attention of anyone, a local policeman or—

Ms Andersen—Yes, I would say so. I mean, you are talking about the habitat of the birds being sort of three-quarters of Australia. You can travel around out there for an awful lot of hours without running into anyone. That is provided these people connect with a buyer at the other end who is prepared to arrange for them to be picked up and delivered at a designated spot. It is one thing to say, 'Well, they're going out through government channels' or something like that—

Senator HEFFERNAN—No, that is not what I am saying.

Ms Andersen—But if they are simply leaving the country—

Senator HEFFERNAN—But if the industry was entirely fair dinkum about it, would they not go out and have a beer at the local pub, or buy a loaf of bread in a local store and say, ‘What’s this stranger doing in town? What’s he up to? Where’s he camped?’

Ms Andersen—There are people out there in the desert and the bush and whatnot, but you do not have to go far for these birds. I live in a bushy area outside Perth and I walk my dogs every day. Almost every day in the region where I walk I am flown over by a resident group of Naso red-tailed black cockatoos. They are a subspecies of black cockatoos which are under a great deal of pressure over here. They do not breed particularly well in captivity; breeding results have been very poor, largely because there is not a lot of stock available to aviculture either. Captive breeding programs are hoping to help that sort of situation.

As I said, each day I can go out and walk and a large percentage of that time I will come across the flock. If I was fair dinkum about following them around I could probably find out where they nest. As I said, if I then left the country—I am hypothesising—and found a market for them, no-one is going to be concerned at me stepping into the local shop in my own area. You know, it is not as though these birds only exist out in a remote region where nobody is going to—

Senator HEFFERNAN—Is there no attempt by the industry itself to identify the smugglers? Most cases are broken by public information.

Ms Andersen—Yes. I would say that it is one of those things—that you either are or you are not. Although I am aware that it goes on, I do not know anyone who personally does it.

Senator HEFFERNAN—But surely you would know someone that did know someone that did.

Ms Andersen—If I knew someone that did know someone I could sort of say, ‘Well, I think that person might know someone,’ and that person you go to says, ‘No, I don’t know anyone.’

Senator HEFFERNAN—Yes, well, there you go.

Ms Andersen—Yes. It is one of those things. As I said, my proposal is not only to stop smuggling. What I am saying is that we have got an industry that basically is in a great deal of trouble here which has potential export earnings, and as a by-product of this we could stop the smugglers market at the same time.

Senator HEFFERNAN—So would it be fair to say that if we introduced regulation and exporting you would do away with the smugglers?

Ms Andersen—Yes. Why would anyone go to the risk when the market is already being catered for? It is not a viable option from inquiries I have made through people who are dealers and large breeders and whatnot. I spoke to a dealer this week who said he could sell any Australian bird in any quantity at this point in time, and he was as happy to ship budgies as he was to ship anything else. Now, basically your smugglers are not interested in shipping budgies because they are not worth enough.

I recently spoke in Sydney with a woman who is very high up in the American Federation of Aviculturists, and they are going to court to battle continuously with animal rights groups over there for the right to keep birds. As I said, under government regulations America is no longer allowed to import wild-caught birds. As I said, I am personally opposed to wild-caught birds, because I do a little bit of work with injured wildlife as well, and a wild-caught bird is not a pleasant sight.

Now, it was her opinion that the market in America is so large—I could not see the problem with restricting it to aviary bred birds—that they consider that with some of the species kept in America the gene pool is too small to sustain their ongoing survival in captivity, so therefore they need new blood from somewhere.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Do you think there are many aviary bred birds smuggled out?

Ms Andersen—No.

Senator HEFFERNAN—What makes you so certain?

Ms Andersen—I would say basically the aviculturists themselves. You are dealing with, again, the majority of them being very concerned with the welfare of the birds. I would not stuff one of my birds in a tube, no matter how much money you paid me. So, firstly, you are dealing with people who are primarily interested in the welfare of the birds, and, secondly, the birds that are worth the risk at this point in time are giving the aviculturists a return—some of the few birds that do not fall into the category of having dropped 50 per cent in price, so basically if you can sell them here, why take the risk of stuffing them in a tube.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Selling the golden goose?

Ms Andersen—Yes. So that is one of the aspects, I think. It is people who do not want to pay for them at all who will look at smuggling as an alternative, and also people have no regard for animal welfare.

CHAIR—Diana, that is very useful evidence and I think some of your colleagues

may speak to us a little bit later and add to that.

Ms Andersen—I am sure they will.

CHAIR—Thank you again for coming and for your submission.

Ms Andersen—That is all right. Thank you very much. Do you want the revised three copies?

CHAIR—Yes, thanks. There being no objection, this revised submission will be received and published.

[2.49 p.m.]

ALLEN, Mr John, Avi-Ark Pty Ltd, 1982 Powell Road, Baldivis, Western Australia

CHAIR—You are very welcome, John. We have your revised submission. There being no objection, the committee is happy to receive that and have it published. Are there any comments you would like to make by way of introduction?

Mr Allen—I appear on behalf of both Avi-Ark and the Pet Industries Joint Advisory Council (WA). Firstly I would like to thank the committee for this opportunity. On behalf of the bird community in Australia it is a welcome opportunity to have a say. Also apologies for the poor quality of the fax transmission that has been previously tendered and I hope my resubmission will address any problems there.

CHAIR—It is in excellent condition.

Mr Allen—All I can really do is add to what Diana Andersen has already said. She has done us a great service. There may be some fiddly bits that I can help the committee with. I would also like to offer my services in whatever capacity to the committee and the research staff if there is anything that I can do further down the track while you are preparing your final report to the Senate.

I really cannot add to what Diana said, save to open myself to questions from the committee, particularly probably from the work I did while I was with the Department of Agriculture on the Rural Industries Research Development Corporation's sponsored project in conjunction with ACIL Economics. That opened my eyes up particularly to the extent of the world market in Australian birds—avicultural birds in general.

I have to respectfully take the committee to task by limiting the terms of reference to merely Australian birds, because at the end of the day, as I have outlined in my submission, the business mix of a particular avicultural enterprise is not limited to the bird's origins. A person may wish to have as part of their product line red-tailed black cockatoos from Central Australia and sun conures from Central America, whatever turns out to be the most profitable. It makes as much sense to separate those birds on the basis of geographical origin as it does to separate horticultural species in nursery production. If I could just make that point, I am at your service.

CHAIR—It was a difficulty for the committee too. It was just a matter of trying to limit the inquiry in some way, put some fence around it, or it would probably last well into the next century.

Mr Allen—I also make that comment with utmost respect.

CHAIR—The other issue of course is that controversy surrounds the collection or

exploitation of native wildlife rather than exotic species, but we take your point on board. It was an artificial division that we made.

Perhaps I could start with questions. My eye went immediately to species laundering. You would agree, or at least you have emphasised the fact, that we can now, with DNA profiles, really determine whether a particular bird is bred in captivity or not. That answers one of the main objections to the export of native wildlife. Is there anything you would like to add to what Diana told us? You could sense our interest in smuggling simply because it has been raised so often in this inquiry. I do not know if there is anything you want to add to the evidence she gave us.

Mr Allen—Yes. I will be frank. I know some bird smugglers. I actually dealt with one and I still consider him a personal friend. His name is Bill Grumball. He has just recently served an eight-month sentence for bird smuggling. I think that was one of the cases that Diana referred to. He put me on the spot a little too. At the time that Bill was engaged in that activity I was working on this RIRDC, so to a certain extent I think we have all benefited from Bill's folly because I do not think there is any question that he actually knew what he was talking about when I was gathering my data from him. He knew the market quite well. I did not actually realise why he knew the market quite so well.

I should add that I was not part of Bill's operation. I was not at that time, and I am still not, a corrupt individual—at that time I was not a corrupt government official. Bill's information was particularly useful and he pointed me in lots of directions within Australia and overseas. I should say too that Graham Taylor, who was also prosecuted by the Commonwealth in the 1970s, provided useful information to me as well. He was prosecuted, as I understand it, for breaches of quarantine regulations, or the act at that time. He operated a facility out of Cairns and I understand all his birds were destroyed as a result of smuggling operations.

I do not think we can ignore those people; they know what is going on and I do not mind admitting to the fact that I talked to these people. I think there are probably lots of people, aviculturists, that talk to smugglers and do not actually realise they are talking to smugglers, whether it is in relation to birds or other stuff.

CHAIR—Sure. I notice under the heading of 'animal welfare' you feel that sometimes the debate about animal welfare gets confused with the debate about prohibition of any commercialisation of native wildlife. Do you want to expand on that at all? It obviously is a debate that we are dealing with here all the time.

Mr Allen—Yes. The welfare issues presumably come up if we are talking about ranching of wild stocks—that is, the taking of eggs or young birds and raising them in captivity. The animal rights activists would argue that that exercise imposes some sort of trauma on the birds but I think that is being a little bit anthropocentric and

anthropomorphic. How do you prove that?

What would concern me in that operation is the habitat destruction that comes with that. Conservation and Land Management have documented the damage that occurs to breeding sites when that occurs. I would suggest though that there are other ways around this. I have referenced in my submission some of the work that has been done in the neotropics. By harvesting the wild stock and actually providing substitute nest sites you enhance the breeding opportunities of these wild birds so that damage to existing nest sites is not an issue and the breeding opportunities for the wild stocks are actually enhanced.

As I understand it, one of the main limiting factors within the environment—and this is the neotropical situation but I would imagine that it applies pretty much to Australia as well, perhaps more so—in relation to the breeding rate is not so much food resources and mates but the availability of breeding sites. I could probably expand on that. That was one aspect that I took up with a number of land care groups when I was with the Department of Agriculture—the opportunity to preserve remnant vegetation and breeding sites and to reverse the trend of clearing away dying and senescing trees, which are the main sources of nesting sites if we are talking about parrots.

CHAIR—We did, somewhere in one of our hearings, get some evidence about the Gouldian finch, so I am interested in you raising it here. What you are saying of course is that Gouldian finches are very common in terms of bred birds but wild populations are still in decline although trapping has been stopped. Is there any attempt to return Gouldian finches to the wild? Is that an option?

Mr Allen—It is certainly an option but to the best of my knowledge that has met with some hostility from some circles in the conservation movement. I believe there are technical solutions around the supposition that the captive Gouldians will introduce disease into wild stocks. I am sure that could be remedied.

CHAIR—That was the claim that was made.

Mr Allen—There may also be a reluctance on the part of the government avicultural industry, if I can call it that, to share the kudos if there is private involvement in reintroduction of wild stocks. Wherever these programs have been initiated they have usually been done by government agencies, whether it is the Lord Howe Island rail—that was a successful captive breeding program—or the orange-bellied neophema program in Tasmania. They tend to have been done behind closed doors with little avicultural input from the private sector.

CHAIR—In terms of the export of live wildlife, particularly birds—and I presume you mean those bred in captivity—you believe that would be beneficial rather than negative in terms of both economics and conservation values?

Mr Allen—I did not actually seek orders from overseas when I was gathering price data, but those orders that I did receive were quite mind-boggling. They came from Europe for certain birds. If you asked us or the average person in the street who had some knowledge of it, we would say there would not be a demand for those sorts of birds, because they are wild caught. There are all sorts of arguments about what would happen to the demand for the birds after a period of constant supply of wild stocks. This chap will seem to be unconcerned by that given that he had access to a market of 5½ billion people whereas we here seem to be limited by a market of some 18 million.

Senator HEFFERNAN—I just wondered in relation to the bird breeding industry at large whether you have a continuing dialogue with the likes of the Conservation Council of Western Australia?

Mr Allen—No, my involvement with the Conservation Council within the state was indirect, through my involvement in one of its affiliates, which was the Avicultural and Wildlife Association. I understand at one time it was an associate member, but that was going back into the 1970s. Yes, there seems to have been a schism there between aviculturists and the NGOs.

Senator HEFFERNAN—You say that you know smugglers—which I am pleased to hear because surely there must be plenty of bird breeders who know them—as you say, some of them unwittingly. Do you think that there would be breeders who smuggle?

Mr Allen—Yes.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Do you think there would be complicity with government employees in that process? I am unaware of the process of smuggling a bird out but do you think that people would be turning a blind eye to assist the process?

Mr Allen—No. I think the average person is quite scared, and in fact I would imagine the authorities derive a lot of their intelligence from informants within the avicultural industry. But, to answer your question with something that is on the record, I think there was a review or an investigation into National Parks and Wildlife in South Australia in either the late 1970s or early 1980s, and that involved the state agency as well as federal government officers as well. I think a lot of people took early retirements, but not a lot came out of it.

Senator HEFFERNAN—And I do not suppose the game has changed in the meantime, has it?

Mr Allen—No, but it is documented. I should say, with all respect to the government officers present, there would be a little bit of reluctance for people to be entirely frank and candid. I understand that testimony here is given under privilege but it still does not—these people are active in the industry and—

Senator HEFFERNAN—Yes. So the industry at large would have reason to be dirty, as it were, on any breeder that was smuggling, because they would be getting umpteen times the amount of money, I suppose, for the same—

Mr Allen—Yes, I think it would be very much ad hoc, if it is occurring. If it is not ad hoc then it is done with government involvement, at an official corruption level. It could only be done in an organised manner, as organised crime, with some sort of government involvement. If you are talking about organised crime, you are talking about a sustained level of supply of product, and that cannot go on without some sort of government knowledge of the event. That is why I hope that it is on an ad hoc, one-to-one basis, with a few random cases of breeders dealing directly with people overseas.

Senator HEFFERNAN—But in any event, if the market was opened up with the window of opportunity that exists, which seems to me to be a short-term gain, it would end that trade?

Mr Allen—Could you explain that, Senator?

Senator HEFFERNAN—Well, if you are allowed to export them legally, obviously the smugglers would have to find something else to do.

Mr Allen—Yes. Well, that is the great idea of this whole scheme, if it can be approved by the Commonwealth, that it pulls the rug right out from underneath their feet.

Senator CONROY—Even though the prices that are quoted are, as you say, fairly high, surely flooding the market in fact would see the prices or the values of all those birds currently significantly reduced.

Mr Allen—That is right, yes.

Senator CONROY—So the returns on those exports would not be as significant. If I supply all of that demand I could get that value, that return, but if we deregulate and allow everybody here just to start going open the price would be bid down pretty quickly.

Mr Allen—That is right, to the point where you would get, even within the avicultural community, opposition to organised trade and exports and imports, because—protectionism is the best way of describing it, and the scuttlebutt in the United States is that that is what they are concerned with. There is a lot of opposition to Australian exports to the US, but it seems when the opposition comes from aviculturists in the United States, it is obviously protectionism.

Senator CONROY—Self-interest.

Mr Allen—And it is interesting that they have interesting bedfellows, because

when it suits their purposes it just so happens that that particular avicultural lobby joins forces with the animal rights lobby, and that is probably about the only time they have much in common.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Half of something surely is worth more than all of nothing.

Mr Allen—Yes.

Senator O'BRIEN—I have a couple of questions. I noticed in part of your submission you talked in a rather critical way about the people who oppose the export of wildlife and you used this passage:

Tying up the issue in lengthy field research projects will not provide any improvement to the wealth and welfare of rural and regional Australia. It will provide a few well-paid positions to city-based academics and bureaucrats and is procrastination and obfuscation by lobbyists who have a moral objection to any use of wildlife and/or animals.

I take it you mean that, rather than make any general concessions, they would want a research project on every particular species that is to be exported from Australia. Is that what you mean?

Mr Allen—That would be my view—that you would probably have a series of impact statements to be furnished. We could probably find a private consultant, or that could be done by government, and that would delay things a couple of years. Then you would have to have a little bit of action research and that would go on for another couple of years, and meanwhile the academics are churning out papers and padding out their curricula vitae, but not a lot is being done for the industry itself. That is why I was so pointed in that paragraph.

I think the role of Michael Kennedy in this has become quite clear—through the New South Wales based Humane Society; I think he calls it the International Humane Society. I understand he had some official or unofficial role at CITES at Fort Lauderdale, and it was of concern to me and others in the area that he was so close to Senator Faulkner at the time—via Tony Fleming, I believe, in the minister's office. How do we approach a problem like this when you have lobbyists who are so vehemently opposed to any change, and they are so close to government, particularly the government area that seems to have this case, which was then ANCA and is now Environment Australia.

Senator O'BRIEN—Are you saying that these lobbyists remain so close to Environment Australia that they cannot hear other views?

Mr Allen—The lobbyists have the ear of government. That is my view. There was a hope that that would change with the demise of the Keating administration, but I understand that the same consultants have sway. I hope I am wrong.

Senator O'BRIEN—You use an example in your submission about an experience in the Moluccas where cockatoos were exported to replace the income base for rice farmers, and then you say:

Sadly, through animal welfare and 'dark green' lobbying in Washington DC, the cockatoo's CITES status (based on bogus field population data) was elevated.

Then you go on with the story. Where can we find some more detail about that particular experience?

Mr Allen—Can I have the permission of the committee to furnish that at a later date?

Senator O'BRIEN—Certainly.

CHAIR—It would be very good if you would, yes.

Mr Allen—I can certainly forward the hard copy to Pippa, if that is all right. If I can just go into that a little bit, those Moluccan cockatoos were part of a sustainable harvest. The rice paddy farmers were poisoning and shooting the birds. It is the same story as in our wheatbelt. The birds were impacting on these people, and it is a subsistence existence at best for those rice farmers. A market for these birds opened up in the United States and the farmers stopped poisoning and shooting the birds and taking the surplus.

It provided the opportunity for biologists to monitor the field populations and make sure the industry was sustainable and the birds were not impacted upon, so that the farmers lived on the interest rather than the capital; they just took off the cream. What happened was—I am not sure if it was one of those unsavoury alliances which seem to pop up between US aviculturists and the animal rights groups—that lobbying in Washington managed to get the CITES status of the birds in question elevated to the point where they could no longer be imported into the United States.

It turned out that the field data that was used by the lobbyists was actually out by a large factor. I think they put forward a field population of 2,000 and the field population was actually 200,000. That is very unfortunate for the birds now, and also unfortunate for those subsistence farmers.

Senator O'BRIEN—And in terms of the American situation, we have heard evidence elsewhere that in fact now wild caught species may not be introduced to the United States at all, endangered or not, because of American legislation. Do you have any knowledge about that?

Mr Allen—I think there are quarantine provisions in the Lacey Act. I do not know what the full title of it is, but there is endangered species type legislation in place that

prohibits imports into the United States, and I am waiting for the world trade office to have a look at that. That is all I have, thank you.

CHAIR—I think that is all. Thank you, John, again for your frankly stated opinion—that is really what we need in this committee—and for your written submission as well. We will read the new copy, because the other is a bit hard to read. Thank you for your attendance.

Mr Allen—Can I just add one other matter.

CHAIR—Certainly.

Mr Allen—The Pet Industries Joint Advisory Council of Western Australia has endorsed my submission; they would have liked me to have spoken to it, but I have more or less covered everything and I do not want to take up any more of your time. I should say that PIJAC Western Australia represents 60 pet outlets, breeders and wholesalers in Western Australia. PIJAC Australia would like also to make some sort of submission to the committee, if that is possible, perhaps at a later date, perhaps in Sydney or Melbourne. They would like to put the position for PIJAC Australia on behalf of their 600 members.

CHAIR—Would they supply us with a written submission?

Mr Allen—I believe so.

CHAIR—Yes, that would be very welcome. Senator Heffernan does have one more question.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Yes. You say you know a bird smuggler. Do you actually know any corrupt government officials—

CHAIR—He asks leading questions.

Senator HEFFERNAN—who could facilitate smuggling?

Mr Allen—No.

CHAIR—You are not obliged to answer the question, either, I might add.

Mr Allen—Well, I am one for sticking my neck out. If I knew, I would tell you, and if I learn of any I will certainly tell you.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Good.

CHAIR—It is of interest to this committee because we keep getting all this evidence and—

Mr Allen—Absolutely. But I would say it is in both their interests and the smugglers' interests to—well, like I say, it is an ad hoc thing, very much one to one, and I think they would be fairly guarded.

CHAIR—Yes, all right, thank you again, John.

Mr Allen—No, you are welcome. Thank you.

[3.15 p.m.]

McNAMARA, Mr Keiran James, Director of Nature Conservation, Western Australian Department of Conservation and Land Management, Hackett Drive, Crawley, Western Australia 6009

WYRE, Mr Gordon John, Manager, Wildlife Branch, Western Australian Department of Conservation and Land Management, Bentley Delivery Centre, Western Australia 6983

CHAIR—You are both welcome. Conservation and Land Management gets mentioned in federal parliament from time to time. We have a written submission from CALM and there being no objection from the committee, that will be received and published. If you would like to make any comments on your submission, or even take us through it—because I think we have only just got it—we would be very happy with your direction in that regard.

Mr McNamara—Thank you, Chairman, and thank you for the opportunity to appear before the hearing. The department I represent is responsible for the conservation and management of wildlife, both flora and fauna, in Western Australia. We are also responsible for Western Australia's system of both terrestrial and marine conservation reserves, and for forest management and production. I apologise that we did not complete the submission in advance of this hearing, but we have provided one today and we would be more than happy to provide any follow-up later that the committee might wish.

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr McNamara—Our submission briefly illustrates the range of commercial use of native wildlife in Western Australia, and that includes kangaroos and crocodiles, emus, aviculture, native wildflowers and seeds, wildlife displays and a range of nonconsumptive uses, through nature-based tourism, primarily. There is also of course native timber, sandalwood and fish utilisation, but I understand those are more or less outside the committee's main term of reference or main area of interest.

CHAIR—Mainly just simply because we had to draw the line somewhere.

Mr McNamara—I appreciate that.

CHAIR—But that does not limit your comments if there is something significant that you need to tell us.

Mr McNamara—I would like to make a number of comments that address some of the policy issues before the committee. Firstly of course it is the prerogative of governments and parliaments and the political process to determine what wildlife use can

occur. Wildlife conservation agencies such as ours certainly provide advice in that process, but we do not make the final decisions. We have a range of species for which use is allowed, but at the same time we have others for which it is banned. A couple of examples in Western Australia are the cessation of recreational duck shooting and commercial finch trapping over the last 10 years or so.

But, having said that, certainly as a general position and philosophy, the WA government and our department support the sustainable use of wildlife. That is a position that is reflected in policies adopted by the Australian and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council. That is the ministerial council that the Commonwealth and state and territory environment ministers make up. And also it is reflected by the IUCN or World Conservation Union, of which our organisation is an agency member.

In particular we believe there is considerable merit in the proposition of conservation through the sustainable use of wildlife, as enunciated by IUCN and by CITES, the convention on international trade in endangered species, and as demonstrated by the recent history of crocodiles. Another example, the field harvesting of native flora, is also a good example of sustainable use of wildlife aiding conservation, because in our view, giving a commercial value to natural bush stands that are harvested provides a real incentive to landholders to retain remnant bush.

My own personal support for the proposition of conservation through sustainable use is reinforced by my own experience as a member of Australian delegations to CITES, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the International Whaling Commission, and by my involvement in IUCN, particularly through its crocodile specialist group and its sustainable use initiative network. I believe it is now apparent internationally that some of the thinking in Australia often seems to be somewhat isolated from modern international thinking and trends in that area.

Having said that, I am certainly not suggesting for one moment that use is the answer in absolutely every case.

One deficiency that I acknowledge in this area is that we really lack good quantitative information on the value of different forms of wildlife use, both in overall terms and to local economies, and in both financial and employment terms.

There are just two other points by way of introduction I would like to make. One is that in examining the question of whether or how to use wildlife, conservation, animal welfare and ethical considerations are all valid, but I think we should use our best efforts not to confuse one of those issues with another, and they often are mixed up in the debate about wildlife use.

Finally, turning to the Federal Wildlife Protection (Regulation of Exports and Imports) Act 1982, it is true that the act allows for the use of wildlife. However, our

experience of its administration suggests that it has been used to restrict or prevent use even when there is no conservation issue at stake. We believe the act should be reviewed to explicitly recognise sustainable use amongst its objectives, to improve ease of administration, and to remove the blanket ban on live exports of fauna for commercial purposes. The ban does not of itself serve a conservation purpose, and we believe it would be preferable for cases to be considered on their merits rather than by way of a blanket approach.

Just finally, the Western Australian Wildlife Conservation Act is a 1950 piece of legislation. It is also now quite dated, and a review is under way with the aim of introducing replacement legislation to the Western Australian parliament next year. Sustainable use provisions will certainly be addressed in that review.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. We have heard a lot of evidence that impinges on what you are saying to us, so it would be useful for us to maybe tease some of that out a bit more. Senator O'Brien, do you want to begin?

Senator O'BRIEN—Yes. I asked some questions this morning of the Department of Agriculture, and they referred me to you. Is that a common occurrence?

Mr McNamara—Yes.

Senator O'BRIEN—Perhaps following generally the theme I was following, I would like to know whether your department could give me any details on the number of people who might be employed in some of the wildlife industries. For example, in relation to management of kangaroos and kangaroo shooting, do you have statistics of the people who are licensed to shoot?

Mr McNamara—As I said in my opening statement, I think it is one area of deficiency. We certainly can provide figures on the number of licensed commercial flower pickers, the number of licensed kangaroo shooters and dealers, the number of licensed wildlife parks and so on. We do not necessarily have information going on from that about the level of employment that flows from it. But Gordon Wyre manages the branch that administers our wildlife act licensing, and may be able to provide some additional figures.

Mr Wyre—No, not at the moment. It is something we can take on notice and can certainly provide those to you.

Senator O'BRIEN—I would appreciate it if you would.

Mr Wyre—The other thing is that we did have a review of kangaroo processing conducted by a consultancy back in about 1992-93, and they touched on that sort of issue. As Keiran said before, it is one of the big deficiencies that we have in working out what impacts changes in legislation will have on those industries, calculating the flow-on

effects. Obviously we can get estimates, but putting a correction factor on those estimates is difficult.

Senator O'BRIEN—Yes. In terms of kangaroos, is work being done about actually farming them rather than harvesting from the wild?

Mr Wyre—The term 'kangaroo farming' I think is one that you need to define. Kangaroo farming might mean that you keep kangaroos in a closed-in environment such as your emu or deer farming situation, and that is not really appropriate, given the biology of kangaroos. I think if you asked anyone who has looked into it they would say that kangaroos have this capacity to react negatively to stress and actually get muscle breakdown as a result of stress, so when they are regularly handled in your sort of intensive livestock situation they just cannot adapt to it. But in terms of free-range harvesting, using kangaroos as a resource on a rangeland environment, that certainly has been looked at from time to time, and various organisations across Australia, including the Wildlife Management Society of Australasia, are looking at having policies in favour of encouraging that sort of industry to operate.

Senator O'BRIEN—We had some evidence earlier today that in given market situations you can have pressure put on different sexes or size animals in the species. Has your department any information about those sort of trends.

Mr McNamara—Yes. The department has published information relevant to that in the past, and we have a record going back to 1970 of monitoring the size of the kangaroo harvest, the location of the kangaroo harvest, the sex ratio and the average carcass weight, as well as what they call the catch per unit effort or the take per unit effort. And independent of that harvest monitoring we have direct aerial survey data on effectively a triennial basis going back to 1981. All the analysis of those data indicate no detrimental effect of the sort that you are alluding to in that question. The kangaroo populations have certainly fluctuated, primarily according to seasonal conditions, but remain widespread and abundant.

Senator O'BRIEN—Are you aware of any scientific papers which have been published which dispute your findings?

Mr McNamara—I used to more closely study the kangaroo situation some years ago, before I was in my present position as Director of Nature Conservation here in CALM in Western Australia. For example, in the early 1980s I was in what was called the National Kangaroo Monitoring Unit in the then Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service, now Environment Australia. I was certainly conscious of some of the papers that were being written and some of the propositions that were being put at that time. It is not a field of science that I now follow closely, but I am not aware of any scientific papers that have widespread scientific acceptance that seriously suggest adverse effects in terms of the sex ratio and the size or age class that the kangaroo industry might favour.

Senator O'BRIEN—Are you saying that there may be some papers that do not have widespread scientific acceptance that say that?

Mr McNamara—I am certainly aware of people with scientific credentials in the past who have explored that line of thinking and made those sorts of suggestions, but it was certainly my view at that time, and is still, that the majority of scientists who have expertise in wildlife management generally and kangaroos in particular do not support that line of thinking. Gordon is now certainly closer to the topic than I am, and may have some additional comment.

Senator O'BRIEN—Feel free if you can add something to that answer.

Mr Wyre—Yes. I think again it depends on terminology. Talking about scientific papers, there are people in the scientific world who have expressed concerns that the level of harvesting within Australia could possibly be having an impact. What is missing is the detailed analysis and research, looking at the actual data on the populations on the ground on a broad scale. You have got to take into account that we are managing kangaroos over more than a million square kilometres in Western Australia. We have been monitoring harvests now, as Keiran said, since 1970, and the change in sex ratio is not significant, from that information.

Also you have got to look back at first principles of harvest management. The actual harvest percentage that we are managing for each year is somewhere between five and 15 per cent of the population, and just from theoretical biological statistics it would be very difficult for that level of harvest to have a significant impact on the overall sex ratio of the population. Certainly it is not disputed that kangaroo shooters will target large male animals—they are paid by weight and size of skin, so they definitely target the large males. And across species there is a difference in sex ratio where you have got big sexual dimorphism or difference in size between sexes, such as in euros. They are virtually all male, because the females are not commercially viable to harvest. But again, even with that, we are only harvesting around 10 per cent of the estimated population.

Senator O'BRIEN—Or 20 per cent of the males. Is that what you are saying?

Mr Wyre—Yes, and the breeding strategy of the big kangaroos is a dominant male strategy. You only need one male per five to 20-odd, perhaps a higher number, of females, to successfully breed, so it is not a big issue.

Senator O'BRIEN—On the subject of crocodiles, on the evidence we have received so far, there is only a small industry operating in Western Australia at this stage, on farms in the northern part of the state at that. Do you have any information on the size of the industry in this state at this stage?

Mr McNamara—There are two proprietors operating three premises. One is

actually located in Fremantle, here in Perth, but the primary farming is on two farms at Wyndham and at Broome, and those have been in operation for a number of years now. I inspected both of them in June in fact in a trip to the Kimberley. Both of them are progressing well. They were certainly going through the period of building up to the desirable stock levels. They are certainly turning out product, but they are not at full production stage.

We once again have statistics on their current holdings of stock and on the output of recent years. By comparison with the size and history of farms in the Northern Territory and Queensland, they are more in their infancy, but if you want to draw a distinction between the Northern Territory and Queensland, as a matter of policy on our part they are deliberately based on the ranching approach that CITES has endorsed, and that is the taking from the wild and the raising in captivity of eggs and/or hatchlings rather than a closed system captive breeding cycle.

Senator O'BRIEN—Are those eggs and hatchlings taken in Western Australia entirely?

Mr McNamara—Primarily. Certainly the Wyndham Crocodile Farm has in the past brought eggs in—and maybe hatchlings; I do not recall specifically. They have certainly brought saltwater crocodiles in from the Northern Territory in the early years. We simply do not have a saltwater crocodile population of a size comparable to that in the Northern Territory, where, I suspect you might have heard last week, there are now estimated to be in the vicinity of 70,000 or 80,000 saltwater crocodiles in the wild. Our crocodiles were knocked about pretty badly by unregulated harvesting up to about 1970—like they were right across northern Australia—and our numbers are in the low thousands rather than numbers of the order of the Northern Territory. But nevertheless they are still sufficient to sustain a harvest.

Senator O'BRIEN—Does your department monitor the number of crocs in the wild?

Mr McNamara—Yes, we do. It is an essential part of any wildlife utilisation program, and certainly of a program that deals with a species like the saltwater crocodile, given its history of over-exploitation and listing under CITES. The CITES rules require various standards, including monitoring of harvested populations. We have an annual program concentrated in the east Kimberley, the Cambridge Gulf, Ord River and other rivers of the Cambridge Gulf system area, and that has been going annually since the early 1990s. As well as our own field staff participation in that and their normal patrolling and so on, that program is conducted under contract to us by Wildlife Management International. It is Grahame Webb's company that I believe you may have heard from last week.

Senator O'BRIEN—We certainly did.

CHAIR—You know what he is thinking by the time he tells you.

Mr Wyre—Just for comparison, and I brought some statistics along, our non-hatchling population, as Keiran said, in the Cambridge Gulf system and the areas that we monitor hovers around 600 crocodiles. There is a bit of variation around there, as you would imagine, in the annual surveys. You have got the Ord River which has got roughly 400 of those and about 200 in the rest of the Cambridge Gulf system. So it is a tiny population compared to the Northern Territory. But nevertheless, with a small-scale harvest out of that population and regular monitoring, it can be sustainable.

Senator O'BRIEN—Has there been monitoring of the species by size?

Mr Wyre—Yes. As part of the standard monitoring surveys, data is prepared on the size of the animals that are counted, and that roughly approximates to age.

Senator O'BRIEN—Does there continue to be a growth in the number of larger saltwater crocodiles?

Mr Wyre—There tends to be growth in some of the mid-level of crocodiles. You do not get too many of the larger crocodiles, and there are various theories behind that. One of the theories is that a large crocodile in a small environment will become a dominant animal, and that will successfully out-compete other crocodiles who try and get into that territory. So you get a few dominant large male crocodiles, and the others do not really get to that size because they do not get the food or resources in the prime habitat.

Mr McNamara—I would like to make one additional point there though. The body of information on crocodiles and their biology and their numbers, and the reaction of their numbers to harvesting strategies, is now extensive and well-established from the work across northern Australia. We certainly do not believe it is necessary to repeat that work at the Western Australian level to answer the same questions that have already been answered in the Northern Territory. So we have a monitoring program that is calibrated against information from a range of studies, and we believe that is more than adequate for our purposes. We do have size class monitoring but it is not as extensive as the detailed work on some of the rivers in the Northern Territory, but we refer back to that standard.

Senator O'BRIEN—Is your department in any way involved in the monitoring of farming of emus?

Mr McNamara—Yes. The fundamental split, if you like, of activity and responsibility between ourselves and Agriculture Western Australia was determined back in the mid-1980s. The agriculture department orients its efforts towards research and extension and advice and so on in the areas of animal husbandry, product development, market research, transport of animals and those types of things. Our primary responsibility arises from the wildlife conservation act. We licence emu farms, we inspect them

periodically to see that they comply with licences, and we have prime responsibility for ensuring that the policy position that operates—which is a closed cycle captive breeding operation, not an operation based on ongoing takes from the wild—is complied with. And it is our responsibility primarily to satisfy the Commonwealth government, under the Wildlife Protection (Regulation of Exports and Imports) Act, that those standards are being met.

Senator O'BRIEN—What is the policy in relation to the release into the wild of captive emus?

Mr McNamara—It is not something that we would favour. I do not know that it has been seriously put to us as a proposition, but you may be referring to the Wiluna case which I understand might have been raised earlier today. Gordon Wyre might wish to comment on that.

Mr Wyre—The standard licence requirements are that emus are not released into the wild. The only situation I know where emus have been released into the wild is where they were illegally taken in the first place. We were able to identify that they were wild-bred emus. We have got emus that have been bred in captivity over a number of years; they are bred specifically for a purpose and they are genetically, if not visually, different from the wild populations.

In relation to Wiluna our wildlife officers were made aware of the financial situation of that enterprise and the fact that they were having difficulty feeding their stock and there was some talk of stock being released into the wild. Inspections were undertaken and a wildlife officer just recently took the view that there was insufficient food to keep the last of them alive. There were 250 emus that had not been sold after the operation had gone into receivership. It is my understanding that he then proceeded to shoot all of those 250 emus because he was of the view that there was insufficient feed to keep them alive—that they were all in a poor state, and it was the only humane thing to do.

Our understanding is that—and we have not got the final report from him—no emus were actually released into the wild. The emus ceased being cared for, which is really the situation. They were abandoned, basically.

Senator O'BRIEN—What about the process of removing the claws or toes, the flange of the toe?

Mr Wyre—That is an animal husbandry issue.

Senator O'BRIEN—So it is not your issue.

Mr Wyre—We leave it to the experts at Agriculture Western Australia as to what is an appropriate animal husbandry standard. My understanding is that they do that to

protect the skins, that there is quite a bit of damage from emus in a captive environment clawing each other, and that they feel that it is an acceptable procedure.

Mr McNamara—Yes. It is not just the animal husbandry element that Agriculture WA takes the lead on; the associated issues of animal welfare are ones that Agriculture and the industry work through rather than our agency.

Senator O'BRIEN—We have had quite a lot of evidence about native birds. I think we have been told that you have on a number of occasions permitted the taking of native birds from the wild for the purposes of breeding stock.

Mr McNamara—Yes, I think there are several elements to that. I did mention in my opening remarks that there was a history, for example, of commercial finch trapping in Western Australia that stopped in the mid-1980s. That was a Kimberley based exercise. We have had an ongoing—certainly since my arrival in Western Australia in the mid-1980s and going back before that—a policy that licensed about three or four bird trappers to trap several parrot species that do cause damage to primary production, primarily fruit growing and some other agricultural production. That continues with, I think, three trappers now at a relatively low level. Once again we can give you those figures but it is in, I think, the low thousands, if even that much, of birds per annum. That has been an ongoing program across several species that do go into aviculture.

We have had a couple of more specific programs that are described in the submission that we have given to you. One is the Naretha bluebonnet program. That was a species that was of particular interest to some people in aviculture. It was a species that we had some concerns about in the wild in terms of its apparent rarity out in or on the fringes of the Nullarbor. It was a bird that we were concerned about because it was targeted by some aviculturists and as a consequence there was poaching from the wild. Poaching is not just a matter of taking birds or eggs but often results in the destruction of nests or habitat by the cutting down of the trees or at least of the limbs off the trees. That happens with some other species as well.

So several years ago we embarked on a program cooperatively with a number of aviculturists in Western Australia to take, I think, 40 Naretha bluebonnets out of the wild and commence a captive breeding program. This has proven to be successful in terms of providing the supply that the avicultural fanciers wanted to have. We believe it has reduced, if not eliminated, the pressure on the wild population in terms of that poaching that was going on, and it has returned a direct benefit to conservation in terms of knowledge of the status of that population by the genetic and other scientific studies that we did in association with that operation. It has provided some funding by virtue of the payments that the aviculturists made that have been ploughed back into avicultural management and research. There are some other programs of similar ilk that have now commenced.

CHAIR—In terms of native flora, we have had two submissions today that were a fair way away from one another. One was from the Conservation Council, and they are not very keen on the collection of material from the wild. I think the main concern they have is that the overharvesting of flora in the wild could threaten some of the species. Do you have a comment about that? How do you make sure that there is a sustainable collection?

Mr McNamara—In the full submission we will provide the Western Australian wildflower management program, which is approved under the federal legislation, together with the departmental policy statement on commercial flora harvesting. I agree fully with the Conservation Council that harvesting—or more specifically unregulated or unmanaged harvesting—could threaten the status of species and the habitats in which they occur. I agree absolutely with that. One of the main efforts we have made, I believe, in the last 10 years is to progressively improve the management of the commercial flora harvesting industry in Western Australia.

We have improved our administration and our enforcement and inspection. We have improved our scientific knowledge base. We have evaluated a series of species that were of conservation concern in that respect, species that were being picked but where that gave rise to concerns on our part. A number of those have been removed from the listings that are available for harvesting. We have improved our liaison with industry and other interests through the Western Australian Flora Industry Advisory Committee, of which Gordon is current chair.

Our fundamental position though is one that allows for—as does our legislation—harvesting of native flora from the wild if it is done on a sustainable basis, and we believe we have the program in place that achieves that.

I would just like to make one particular point in that respect. One of the things that we have said in our submission is that there is a pressure from various sources to ban the bush picking of native flora and to meet the needs of that industry only through conventional row cropping of the plants.

We have in Western Australia quite a number of people who use the bush remnants on their farms and so on to harvest banksias and other species. And consistent with the philosophy, if you like, that I outlined earlier on—of support for the notion of conservation through sustainable use of wildlife—we find it entirely consistent with that proposition that, if that can be carried out sustainably, it actually provides an incentive for those farmers to retain that remnant bush on their farms. It is another reason why it should not be cleared.

In that respect I think that a blanket approach of denying that harvesting would have an adverse consequence for conservation values in some respects. That is not to say that in some of the particular species I talked about earlier, where we have withdrawn the

ability for people to take them from the wild—we have both engaged in research ourselves and supported research by various tertiary institutions to promote row cropping or cultivation of those species, because if you are going to withdraw something from industry and if you want to remove the inclination at least of some people to operate illegally, you have got to try and develop the alternatives.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Do you have a similar program for bush tucker?

Mr McNamara—No, not in any direct sense. It is not something that has been a major focus, if you like. The legislation in Western Australia certainly provides for Aboriginal people to take native flora and fauna for food for themselves but not for sale. So if you want to go beyond that and engage in the taking of native fauna or flora for food purposes, as far as our legislation is concerned and our licensing regime is concerned, you come under that in the same way as any other commercial user of those species. It is not an area that we have particularly researched.

Mr Wyre—The fundamental basis of the flora industry management program is that any harvesting of flora products from the wild should be sustainable. It is not just flowers for the export trade and domestic trade; it is seeds and branches, bits and pieces for bush tucker or whatever. All of that can be harvested. It can be harvested, if it is from crown land, under a licence from us or, if it is from private land, through a sale permit provided that it is sustainable and we undertake investigations.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Do you have a paper that sets all this out?

Mr Wyre—Yes, that is the management program. As I said, if it is not sustainable and we have evidence that it is not, then it is phased out or closed immediately, depending on what the threat is to the species concerned.

Senator HEFFERNAN—You do not think that, with the coming phenomenon and advanceability of bush tucker, you should be having research in that context?

Mr Wyre—I think, as you say, it is an issue that is growing and it is a diversion from the traditional markets for flora.

Senator HEFFERNAN—In my view it could be like the windmill—the feed disappears from around the windmill.

Mr Wyre—Yes.

Senator HEFFERNAN—From the edges of the various corridors the bush tucker will disappear if you do not have a program to deal with it.

Mr Wyre—That is right but it is covered under the current flora management program because, as I said, no matter what part of the plant is harvested, it has to be

harvested in a sustainable fashion. We have undertaken investigations. It is just a basic tenet of biology that any species will produce either more seeds if it is a plant or more young if it is an animal than are necessary to replace the parents unless there is something drastically wrong in the environment. We set the harvesting. If the harvesting is having an impact to change that effect, then the harvesting can be closed.

CHAIR—This is still staying with the flora. We had evidence from—and I presume you know her—Carol Davies.

Mr Wyre—Yes.

CHAIR—She made a couple of statements that I would just like to run past you and get your comment on. The first—I think she was quoting a media statement, and I certainly read something on the weekend about it—was that the world market in West Australian native flora is currently valued at \$400 million. Of that, Australia's share is \$40 million, a mere 10 per cent. Do you know whether those figures are roughly accurate? If they are, is that a concern?

Mr McNamara—I do not know whether the figures are accurate. The last figures that I have seen are Australian Bureau of Statistics figures of some years ago about the value of the Australian industry. Even within the ABS figures it is difficult to distinguish, for example, introduced protea sales from sales of native flora. As to the share of the international trade that we do or do not have, I think it is a matter of concern and regret for the nation that that has happened. My understanding is that much of our flora is grown in places like Israel and has been for a long time. The genetic material that has allowed that to happen I think has been out of this country for a long time.

CHAIR—It has escaped!

Mr McNamara—Legislated approaches that seek to stop or regulate that sort of export are not an area that I am particularly expert in but, notwithstanding your legislation, it is a difficult area to police.

CHAIR—I think Carol would say that it is also very difficult to legislate. However, she did comment—and again if you are able to comment on it it would be good:

Discussions with our State regulatory body, CALM, have shown that there is absolutely no State or Federal legislation in place to stop our entire unique, genetic resource base from being taken or sent overseas and rowed out commercially in countries such as Vietnam, China and India within the next five years.

But then in discussion with her we could not work out what legislation would in fact have any effect. Is that a concern of yours? Does the department have any comment or any response to that situation? I guess it is just something that is very hard to legislate on.

Mr McNamara—To me in a practical sense it would be very difficult to achieve the intent behind Mrs Davies's question or statement without virtually a blanket ban on the taking of flora from the wild for a range of purposes. Flora is taken for the sorts of reasons we have just talked about—cut flowers and seeds and so on—and also for scientific and other purposes and for propagation in a wide range of circumstances. I do not really have anything to add to that.

Mr Wyre—I think the way to answer it is to turn the problem around and try and do something more positive about it rather than to prevent it happening—to get in there and for Australia to compete internationally. We have the advantage that while we have lost a lot of genetic material in the past to Israel, I understand South Africa is now actively involved in growing our native plants and we are actively involved in growing South African native plants here. It is a bit of a catch-as-catch-can situation. There is certainly phenomenal potential for Australian native flora resources to be developed for marketing and to be marketed overseas.

I think that any sort of realistic comparison of federal money that has gone into research and development of native flora, compared to some of our exotic fauna species, would show that it is a pittance. I think that is the way to attack it. With germplasm and reproduction of genetic material you only need a cutting or a leaf for a plant to be smuggled out or taken over as a bunch of flowers: you can actually grow that plant overseas or you can smuggle out seeds. Obviously it is very difficult to stop. I think if we got in there and developed the markets ourselves, and we are doing that marketing, then we surely will have a competitive advantage.

CHAIR—I think that in fact was the conclusion Carol Davies came to as well, except she did say there is a need for Commonwealth research and development funds to be made available to the industry. But she did have a bit of a swipe at the kind of academic research projects that may not have a lot of benefit for the industry. Would you agree with her that research and development of our own species is probably the more positive response to the problem?

Mr McNamara—Yes, I would agree.

Mr Wyre—I think it is not just a simple problem. There are many issues and you are looking at trying to get coordination across Australia as to what are important flora resources and trying to develop an integrated research and development marketing package for those. We have got situations where we have got Commonwealth funds being put into developing strains of native Western Australia flora that can grow on eastern Australian soils so that they can market them for export. It seems to me that that is a way of digging a hole for yourself, if you are trying to compete across Australia before you compete on the international market.

CHAIR—I commented that there is an awful lot of kangaroo paw being grown in

Queensland.

Mr Wyre—Yes.

CHAIR—Which is the same problem.

Senator HEFFERNAN—What sort of liaison do you have with customs on the smuggling question?

Mr McNamara—CALM's Wildlife Branch has a group of designated wildlife officers. 'Wildlife officer' is a specific appointment under our legislation; it gives the appointed people the powers that go with being law enforcement officers, and that is their primary function. We have about 32 or 34 wildlife officers on a permanent basis state-wide. We have other officers who have wildlife officer authorisations. Certainly the wildlife officer group in Perth who oversee that function have good relations with a range of law enforcement agencies, including Customs and the Australian Federal Police.

The interaction there is regular but I would not be able to go much further than that. I think there probably have been times when on a specific operation or occasion communication has not been as good as it should be. I sometimes feel, in some of the cases that get referred through to me, usually after the event at the prosecution stage and the stage when there is some publicity and so on, that sometimes the federal agencies that detect an illegal export do not necessarily collaborate fully with the state agency in terms of the initial offence of illegal taking. They do not necessarily collaborate fully, and sometimes it gives the appearance of wanting to capitalise on the publicity and the credit that might go with a good pinch.

Mr Wyre—I would just like to add to that that one of the frustrations I have had as manager of Wildlife Branch is that ever since CALM was established, and the Wildlife Protection Act was introduced, there is an ability under the act for state officers to be appointed as inspectors under the federal act and to have whatever powers the federal minister determines are appropriate in terms of enforcing that federal act. We have been trying to negotiate for our wildlife officers, who are fully law enforcement trained, to be appointed as inspectors under that act but we have had very little success in getting cooperation from the Commonwealth in terms of any additional costs associated with officers undertaking inspections under their federal legislation being reimbursed to the state.

So we have got, if you like, a stand-off situation where we are saying, 'We want to have our officers appointed. You've got no-one in the field virtually except for roving customs officers or Australian Federal Police who can undertake inspections. We'd be delighted to do some inspections for you. It would be a matter of a phone call to a local wildlife officer, who could race out and do an inspection more or less overnight rather than flying someone in from Canberra or Perth or whatever. But you'd have to come to the party in meeting some of our costs of doing that.' We have hit a stone wall there.

Senator HEFFERNAN—So is there no formal liaison or committee set up to do away with the—interagency jealousy, shall I say?

Mr Wyre—I would not say it is interagency jealousy. I think the fear is in one agency: if you appoint people under another agency to do some of your work and you pay them some money to do it, what is going to happen to the resources you have got for doing that work? That is a concern. There is communication between the Chief Wildlife Officer and Customs and other agencies, and we certainly have special investigations done jointly. What I am saying is that we investigate in terms of legislative breaches under our legislation; they investigate in terms of their legislation. There is no commonality.

Senator HEFFERNAN—To an uninformed outsider would it seem to be a flawed system?

Mr Wyre—I would suggest yes.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Would that be one of the reasons why aviarists know smugglers but the smuggling goes on? Do you have blokes in the field in the areas where the smuggling occurs that could assist Customs blokes that are in and about the same area?

Mr Wyre—I would be careful of language. We certainly know that smuggling goes on. We get the evidence of nests being vandalised. We have inspections where we know that there are a certain number of eggs in a nest and we come back and do another inspection and the eggs are not there. The assumption would be that someone who is involved in the avicultural trade has raided that nest. The difficulty is getting the evidence to mount a prosecution case. We can take protective measures and monitoring measures and hope to get a bust, if you like, but it depends on actually having evidence.

Senator HEFFERNAN—There is no bush telegraph, as it were?

Mr Wyre—Yes, certainly. We get a lot of information from people in rural areas of suspicious activities going on, of vehicles and strange people seen doing things with wildlife, and that is followed up and we get a reasonable success rate and prosecution of those.

Mr McNamara—We get extensive information of that sort, but, as Gordon has indicated, there is a difference between suspicions and who people say might be operating illegally and so on, and getting the evidence to successfully deal with that. We did have a marked improvement in that area a number of years ago, and it has been written up in an article in the department's magazine, *Landscape*, that we could provide. That was with the use of DNA fingerprinting in the case of white-tailed black cockatoos where a number of aviculturists in and around Perth had white-tailed black cockatoos illegally in their aviaries. Those birds can be difficult to breed and each year a number of those

aviculturists were producing one young for each pair that they held, and saying that they were bred in captivity.

We had our suspicions about those things on a number of occasions; we worked with a professor at Curtin University here in Western Australia with DNA fingerprinting and we were able to prove—by going out to the nesting trees that we knew of in the wild, by fingerprinting animals and then by checking against what was turning up in aviaries later on—that the birds that were being claimed as captive bred were not captive bred. There was a series of successful prosecutions that turned that type of behaviour around at that time. I think it proves the point that you not only need informants and surveillance; you sometimes need sophisticated techniques and so on to deal with those sorts of things.

Senator HEFFERNAN—When you say there has been some success, how do you measure that success? Have you had one prosecution, 10 prosecutions in the last 12 months or whatever? How do you measure it when you say, ‘We have had success’?

Mr Wyre—Yes, I wish I could answer that question. It is one of the things where, as in most government agencies, and commercial enterprises as well, you are continually looking for performance indicators on how successful you are being. It is a matter of having a yardstick to measure yourself against. All we can endeavour to do is look at what seems to be the incidence of illegal actions in the wild and our rate of successful prosecutions or claims against people undertaking those crimes. To get the real statistics of what real impact illegal activities are having you need all that data, and we have just got no way of gathering that data.

Mr McNamara—We publish our prosecution statistics in our annual report each year and I certainly recall a figure being quoted to me in recent years of something like 2,000 detected breaches of one sort or another, often very minor breaches of say a licence condition, in a 12-month period; with 200 or so of those resulting in what we would call a formal breach report—that is, a formal writing up and referral through to our senior wildlife officers and our chief wildlife officer. And perhaps half of those would be prosecuted. That is the sort of statistic that has been around in Western Australia. The level of prosecution might be slightly less than that now, but, as Gordon alluded to, what is your successful performance indicator in prosecution? Is it more of them or less of them?

Mr Wyre—I will just go back to that Naretha bluebonnet situation. We had a situation there where for a number of years we were getting reports from pastoralists in the area that trees were being damaged and it was quite obvious to them that birds were being taken, if not eggs being taken, and the trees being damaged. At that time we had one Naretha bluebonnet legally held under licence by an aviculturist in Western Australia. We went out to the program and we took 40 from the wild. We were able to demonstrate by genetics that it was an outbreeding population of very significant size. We have now got in the vicinity of 200 Naretha bluebonnets in captivity and we have not had reports of

nest robbing situations in the last few years. That is a way of getting around it. Instead of going in and trying to catch a person in the act of pulling an egg out of a tree, you reduce the market for that activity.

Senator HEFFERNAN—So what would be the impact of opening a gate for export of black cockatoos? Is the sun going to fall out of the sky?

Mr McNamara—We in CALM and ministers that I have worked for have, on various occasions, put to the federal government—both in ANZECC, the ministerial council, and directly in the review of the Wildlife Protection (Regulations of Exports and Imports) Act—that that ban on live bird exports should be lifted. Beyond that it is not a matter that we have devoted, if you like, a huge amount of attention to, because the ban remains. Should it be lifted we would look at how various exports from captive bred or wild sourced birds might take place and what species might or might not be suitable for that.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Would it not be, Mr Chairman, of interest to this committee to have that now—for you to give us that advice on the scenario that the gate got opened?

Mr McNamara—I think there are a few fallacies in this general area. First, it would not solve damage to primary production type problems, for those species that damage primary production. It would be, in my judgment, of minuscule effect in that direction. The belief that prices might be sustained at very high levels is probably also one that I suspect would be unlikely to come to pass, and the degree of lucrativeness—if that is a word—might not be as high as many people probably believe. In terms of our ability to properly manage a program, enforce a program, I think technology has now got to the point where, with implantable transponders and DNA fingerprinting and so on, it would be quite feasible to run programs of either captive bred or wild caught birds being sent overseas without any adverse impact on their conservation status in the wild in Western Australia.

There are other issues to be dealt with—issues of animal welfare, the care of those birds, their susceptibility to stress in transport and so on—and those are real issues that have to be worked through for the different species and the different circumstances. There are also issues at the level of the importing countries as to whether they might want some of the birds that people might be thinking about sending—in terms of them becoming pests over there. There is that range of issues to work through, but the fundamental point in my view is that it would be quite feasible to design and run and administer and enforce a program that would not have any detrimental effect on the conservation status of the species in question.

Senator HEFFERNAN—When you have previously made submissions to Commonwealth on opening the gate, as you say you have, you did not put a scenario of

the impact.

Mr McNamara—Not in detail. I am aware that—

Senator HEFFERNAN—I wonder if that was one of the reasons why the gate did not get opened.

Mr McNamara—The rejection of the notion at several meetings that I have either been at or been closely aware of was fairly abrupt and swift. That perhaps has been at the ministerial council meeting level. The matter was discussed at length with, I think, Mr John Ley, the reviewer of the federal Wildlife Protection (Regulation of Imports and Exports) Act, when he conducted his review in the latter 1980s or early 1990s. I cannot recall the time precisely. It was discussed at some length with him. He did, if I recall correctly, advocate some loosening of that provision in the federal legislation—in a fairly cautious sort of way, because he saw the political difficulties in achieving the change. He was cautious, but I do recall discussing it with him when he came to Western Australia for the purpose of that review.

I am also conscious that the avicultural associations, various individuals within the avicultural circles and the Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory have put more detailed propositions in that direction. We have not felt it was warranted, in terms of our allocation of resources, to put that effort in. We have largely directed our input at that policy and at that policy level—

Senator HEFFERNAN—It would be an interesting study, I think, Mr Chairman, because probably you would discover that some of these countries that have nice little earners from the smuggled genetic pool would discover some new non-tariff barrier so that if you opened the market they would not take them anyhow.

CHAIR—You are getting cynical, Senator Heffernan.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Yes, that is how it works, isn't it?

CHAIR—All right, that is all. We thank you very much, Mr McNamara and Mr Wyre. Your evidence is very useful and helps us to keep the whole evidence we are receiving in some sort of balance.

Mr McNamara—Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you.

CHAIR—There are a couple of things we were hoping you would supply us with.

[4.15 p.m.]

POLGLAZE, Mr Richard Ernest, Curator of Birds, Multiplex Construction's Egerton Stud, 12571 West Swan Road, Belhus, Western Australia

CHAIR—Richard, I just remind you that we would like you to make a statement. We have a limit of five minutes. We hope that will be enough. We will not ask you questions because we do not know how long that would blow it out, but we are very happy to have you appear before us.

Mr Polglaze—I wear two hats today. The first is Multiplex Constructions, and I am the curator of birds at our large stud in West Swan where we have a \$3 million set-up for birds. I also represent a private group of aviculturists who are interested in export. There are a few things that we want to point out. One of the points is that there is a lot of hearsay to say that aviculturists do not care actually about conservation. That is not true. Aviculturists do care and take an active role in conservation.

I personally look after injured cockatoos, mainly black cockatoos—the white-tails—for the Department of Conservation and Land Management. We bring in injured birds and we fix them up and send them to different places. Quite a number of these birds we keep, and I am actually doing a study on artificial nesting sites. There is a fair amount of pressure through land clearing. It takes around 200 years to make a log suitable for a black cockatoo. Through logging and pastoralism and farming there is a lot of pressure on the wild environment; hence there are still a lot of black cockatoos in the wild. They have diminished, but a lot of the birds in the wild are older generation and there are not the juveniles coming through to take over. When those older birds do die out, you are going to find quite a dramatic drop. This has been proven through a museum study. There is a man actually doing a study on the birds. I worked with him and we talked quite a bit.

There was one of the points that Senator Woodley wanted spoken about in there—the discrepancy between federal and state laws through the Australian Nature Conservation Agency exotic bird registration and us in Western Australia, aviculturists, through our CALM legislation. We are governed by two rules. We have to apply all the federal rules and then basically there is quite a blanket ban on most exotic birds in Western Australia. There are only a limited few we can keep. That is one of the points you wanted pointed out.

Some of the other points are these. Captive bred or raised birds do transport well. Of course when birds are smuggled people want to avoid detection so birds are put in anything they can, and most of the birds die. If birds are not put in proper cages and supplied with food and water—which normally they are not supplied with when they are smuggled—they die through overcrowding, stress. When a bird is transported it normally stresses, but only through overcrowding. If you put the birds in the right environment, you give it food and water, a perch to sit on, there would be no problems sending the bird wherever you like.

Another comment we would like to make is about wild birds. There are a lot of people who say you cannot catch a wild bird—it is no good in captivity; it never settles down. I would like to put on the record that they do settle down. Of course you get your cases where a bird just will not settle down. For example if you caught a bird or you had a bird given to you that had lived in the wild for 40 years or so, it is doubtful whether that would settle and breed, although it would to some extent settle down. I have personally had wild birds of both *Cacatua* and *Calyptorhynchus*—*Cacatua* is the white cockatoos like your corellas, your galahs, your sulphur-crested, and *Calyptorhynchus* is your black cockatoos. I have had both mature birds breed in captivity for myself. I do know of a lot of cases where that does happen. A bird will only propagate if it is happy in its surrounds and its environment. You can get a wild bird or whatever and so long as you look after the bird properly the bird will propagate, because it is their way of ensuring their own, to make sure that they last.

In relation to export, we feel that export should be approved. It will create new employment and it will also benefit more Australians than just the exporters themselves. By establishing large breeding complexes, pure subspecies of birds can be maintained. Therefore if some natural disaster occurred in the wild, we will have pure genetic stock to release. For example, someone mentioned the Gouldian finch. In our own state, in the Kimberley region, they were decimated by a little mite that lives in their throat called the air sac mite. It was killing the wild population. Aviculturists banded together and donated a lot of pure bred stock—it was captive bred. Through CALM they were released in the wild and the birds are now doing well.

CHAIR—That is in the Kimberleys?

Mr Polglaze—That is in the Kimberleys, yes. By putting a commercial value on wildlife, it will ensure its safety, because if something has a price people tend to value it. Instead of just saying, ‘There’s a galah; let’s shoot it,’ they might say, ‘There’s a galah; we can . . .’—you know. If export is approved, all birds for export should be DNA fingerprinted and microchipped, with stiff penalties and forfeiture of export privileges to those who do not adhere to it. As has been proved by CALM, they can prove if a bird was captive bred or if it was not, just through DNA fingerprinting.

There was some mention of a white-tail program that CALM did. It has only been over a one-year period so far; the program is in its infancy. They took some eggs and nestlings from the wild. It was proven that taking those birds from the wild had absolutely no impact on the wild at all; the birds all rebred.

Smugglers are active in WA, as has been proven to you before, and there have been convictions made here. We believe that smuggling will not be eliminated unless import and export of birds into and out of Australia is legalised. That is all I have got.

CHAIR—And within your five minutes. Well done.

Mr Polglaze—I will breathe now!

CHAIR—Thank you, Richard. That is good.

[4.20 p.m.]

D'CRUZ, Mr Geoffrey, Birds 'n' All, 17 Bennett Street, Caversham, Western Australia

CHAIR—Thank you for appearing. We are glad to hear from you.

Mr D'Cruz—My name is Geoffrey D'Cruz and I appear as a bird dealer and also as an aviculturist. I am one of these guys that wears two hats. As an aviculturist, hearing some of the submissions this afternoon, I have been left wondering which way the whole process is going. Speaking on my own part, I think that aviculturists belong to two categories: those who are concerned genuinely with aviculture and the conservation of birds, and those who see the dollar dangle.

Some people will stay as aviculturist and persevere in the breeding and maintenance of pure species for their own pleasure and nothing else. Others will take that to the next step and try and earn an income from it. For the former, fine, I do not have any problems. With the latter, okay, it is acceptable—my view is that it is acceptable—provided it is done within a managed sense. I do not believe the authorities in WA—and I have heard CALM speak today—are sufficiently resourced to manage this process.

As a dealer, wearing the other hat here, I am often approached by people who want to sell birds that they have bred, and I know damn well that they have not bred them entirely from their own stock without having some birds introduced from elsewhere. The exact source is highly questionable but it is not my job as a dealer to inquire about it. The word used is 'cover'—that is the common language that is used. If you have got a pair of Naretha bluebonnets or you have a pair of black cockatoos, regardless of the subspecies, and you acquire one from the wild, well, you have got three or four or five and the DNA fingerprinting process is not sufficiently established to be able to detect that, unless someone dobs the person in. So there are those people who are doing it legally and there are those people who are doing it illegally.

As a dealer I am often approached to supply birds, both locally and interstate, and I have also been approached by people who can access these birds in the wild. The cost of those birds in the wild is probably one-10th of the value of the birds bred by aviculturists, and the person who wants to buy the bird obviously wants to buy it at the lowest possible price.

I have to live with myself, and I have never purchased a bird from the wild. Suppose the person said to me, 'Look, I can go and get that for \$200 or \$400 instead of \$4,000.' There are people in this room who I have actually placed orders with because I know those people are in fact breeding these birds. There is no DNA to prove this; it is simply the fact that I happen to know these people, I know that they are genuine breeders, and I am supplying the birds at that price.

Also, from the aspect of smuggling, I know I have been approached on two occasions directly by people who have made inquiries as to the possibility of taking native birds overseas. They have not actually asked me to help them with it, but just inquired as to the possibility and the extent to which they can do it. In fact only three weeks ago I was approached by an airline steward who asked to take eggs overseas. I said, 'I don't even want to know about it.' In terms of the level at which this is occurring, I am sure it does, and it is not always the person approaching me directly: it is a phone call—and it is usually about 10 phone calls—before the person does arrive.

It does happen. I think that in terms of meeting the demand overseas, I totally support the two previous speakers that I have heard, which are Polglaze and Di Andersen. If we manage the breeding of these birds in a captive environment where they are DNA'd, and that is managed satisfactorily and sufficiently by CALM people—and I do not believe that with their existing resources they can do that anyway—then, yes, we should be looking at the possibility of exporting these species, provided it is monitored sufficiently.

On the aspect of conservation I totally support the conservation groups to the point or to the extent that some species can be returned to the wild. We have to ask the question, 'Why can't they be?' They talk about the possibility of reintroducing diseases. Why can't these birds be tested? We have talked about the Gouldians, for one. If they are diminishing in the wild, what are we doing as aviculturists to ensure that that wild population is maintained at some level? Why isn't more research being done in that area, rather than simply saying, 'Okay, they're dying. We can't do anything about it. The price of the Gouldian is dropping.'

Similarly, with the Naretha bluebonnet program, those birds were taken from the wild; they were bred in captivity and the numbers increased in captivity. What happened with that at the end of the day? Aviculturists made a buck out of it; the price of the bird dropped. Okay, the possibility of smuggling is diminished because there are more bred in captivity, but export is not permitted, so we are back to stalemate. We need to look at those issues a bit more deeply than we have.

The white-tailed program is another one where I believe CALM are presently in the process of taking young chicks from the nest. The conservation concern is that this should not be done. I do not know much about white-tailed black cockatoos, but I understand they lay two eggs and the parents usually let one die and the second one is reared. If that is the case and one egg is taken or one chick is taken, perhaps that is conserving the birds in a strange sort of a way. Why can that not be permitted?

There are many issues that we have touched on, or I have heard people touch on today. I do not believe that sufficient research has been conducted; I do not believe that we need to draw conclusions and make decisions in the absence of complete information and lack of statistics. I believe there is a way, and I totally support the exportation of birds provided it is managed, and managed well. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you, Geoffrey—again within your time. Very commendable.

[4.30 p.m.]

HERLIHY, Ms Astrid, 6 Nanganaway Street, Kalamunda, Western Australia

CHAIR—Astrid Herlihy, thank you. You have been here all day?

Ms Herlihy—Yes, that is right. I wanted to listen.

CHAIR—I still can only give you five minutes, or a little bit more maybe.

Ms Herlihy—That is fine. I did not really prepare myself; I did not expect to be talking. I am a member of various animal welfare and animal rights groups, and also conservation groups. I have been a volunteer with the conservation group for treating waterbirds, and I have done that for 15 years. I can say that I have never ever made money out of animals, and in fact it costs me money to care for the animals. I do that at the grassroots level. I pick waterbirds up from lakes and take them home and rescue them, take them home and rehabilitate them and release them again in the wild. Some of the statements I have heard today are totally abhorrent to me, especially about using animals as a resource, and the utilisation of wildlife—that is pretty bad wording, I think.

But there are people of course who have the greed and the callousness to make money out of animals. The issue that concerns me the most is people talking about nest robbing, taking eggs out of nests. I am greatly concerned with the quality of life for all creatures on this planet, and we do not have the right to do this. I take the liberty to speak on behalf of the wildlife of Australia because they cannot speak up for themselves. I would like to apologise on behalf of the human species for what we have done to this country. In a mere 200 years we have destroyed or made extinct about 38 animal species, wildlife species, and 150 plant species, and we continue to log our forest and destroy whatever we can.

I just feel that we need moral values. The biggest issue is the human population. I am also concerned about Aboriginal people, and at least what they have done. They might have used the wildlife for their own uses over 40,000 years but they only took what they needed. I do not eat animals and I do not wear animal products, but I do feel at least they only took what they wanted and what they needed, and they kept their own population down—something that we have not been able to do.

For example, kangaroos are one wild species that control their own fertility in adverse situations; human beings have not been able to do that. I think the most constructive thing a lot of people can do is give out condoms, perhaps, to control our overpopulation, because what we are doing is really taking the habitat away from other animals, and then we want to make money out of them as well, exploit them. For example, with emus, we are expanding into their habitat, destroying it, and then, for our own use, to support ourselves in a commercial way, creating suffering and pain for these

animals, which is something I do not think we should be doing on this earth.

I have read through some of the reports and there was nothing about moral values, for example, or ecological values, or respect for animal species. My personal opinion is that humans are a freak of nature and they really should not be on this planet unless they can live in harmony with other species—which we cannot—and we seem to have this dominion over other species and cannot seem to live with them; we have to exploit them and use them and make them suffer, and be involved in the export trade or whatever.

I would also just like to say that I feel the federal government, even CALM and every wildlife body as well, should have a population stabilisation policy. Right across the planet, it took 100,000 years for the human population to reach two billion, and in one generation we have gone from two billion to over five billion. In another 50 years we will go to 10 billion on this planet and no other species will have a chance to actually be able to have the habitat, to live here. I feel—and I hope I will not be here by that stage—that we will only see the wild animals in this country, and the rest of the planet, in zoos or on farms, like emu farms and crocodile farms. Let's face it, crocodiles have been here for millions of years, and they do not need us. Nature does not need us; we need nature.

It is about time people started learning to live with nature, to respect nature, to respect animals, and realise that we are on this planet but for a short period, and we have to learn to respect it and respect the millions of other species we have to live with and which we destroy every day. Every minute we destroy a plant or animal species, and that is a very frightening prospect.

I have taken the liberty to speak up on behalf of the ones that cannot speak up for themselves, and I am sure the animals on this planet would thank me for that, if they could.

CHAIR—And we thank you, too. Thank you very much, Astrid.

[4.35 p.m.]

ZAMPOGNA, Mr Michael Joseph, President, Animal Liberation (WA) Inc., 1st Floor, 10 Pier Street, Perth, Western Australia 6000

CHAIR—We have certainly got five minutes for you.

Mr Zampogna—My name is Michael Joseph Zampogna. I am the President of Animal Liberation (WA) Inc. In all kinds of commercialisation where profit is the incentive, animal welfare is inevitably at risk, and we found that this is not the only risk. For example, a fact sheet distributed by what was then known as the agricultural department of WA noted that emu farming could be undertaken on bushland that had not been extensively cleared. However it went on to note that by the time the birds were mature at the stocking densities recommended the bushland would be virtually destroyed.

This type of information calls into question the advice of those who call for the commercial use of native animals as environmentally friendly or as an alternative to the environmentally destructive farming of hard-hoofed introduced species. There are already more than enough sources of food from animals. Extending the range of edible species just to titillate jaded palates at home and overseas cannot be justified. How many other nations kill and eat their national symbols?

Confinement of non-domestic animals frustrates the animals' natural instinct and can cause suffering. Even when captive bred, wild species never become fully adapted to artificial conditions. All existing domestic animals retain their basic behavioural needs, and we can see this on any farm. If intensive methods are used to farm wild species, this intensifies their frustration and suffering. There has been a backlash—as you may well know—against intensive farming, particularly in the egg industry.

Transportation to slaughterhouses is stressful, and there are doubts about humane slaughter. The safe transportation of birds in particular cannot be guaranteed. A three-year study from 1980 to 1983 by the London-based Environmental Investigation Agency on the importing of wild caught birds into the UK showed a mortality rate of between 73.8 and 88.8 per cent. They also found that immense suffering was endured during capture, awaiting sale, shipment, transportation, and after sale.

Captive breeding of wildlife to suit market demands may diminish the need to conserve the wild species and therefore the need to preserve the habitat, possibly leading to extinction in the wild. Taking animals from the wild to support industry can also lead to overexploitation to satisfy market demands, and could result in reduction of species to dangerous levels. Wildlife in captivity also requires special care. They are vulnerable to stress and disease, resulting in high mortality, particularly among caged birds and some reptiles. The close confinement of birds in cages frustrates natural instincts, and many pet birds which flock or strongly pair bond in the wild are kept in solitary confinement—for

example, cockatoos, budgerigars and finches.

Wildlife should not be exploited as pets. In 1985 CITES resolved to work towards the elimination of collecting wild animals for the pet trade. Also the ready supply of some animals is likely to reduce prices and make demand for rarer, harder to breed species increase, and their prices even higher. This could increase smuggling in those particular species. Also it would be harder to police. If you have a blanket ban, at least you know that any sort of native species going out is one thing. It is hard to detect if you have a small number of eggs which may be from a rare, endangered species in with a whole pile of eggs from birds of other species.

Also animals regarded as pests in Australia, particularly birds, which are hard to control once they are loose, may become a problem in other countries if released, or even if only small numbers escape. Commercialisation should not be seen as a solution to pest animals, as many of these animals become pests due to human mismanagement and error. We must move away from what we have seen in GATT, where animals are seen as commodities and national wildlife protection laws are seen as unnecessary barriers to trade, to a situation where pinning a commercial value on cockatoos, kangaroos or any other animal in Australia and its territories is not necessary to guarantee that species' survival.

Animal Liberation is opposed to the invasive commercialisation of wildlife. All our wildlife, endangered or not, should not be sold for the call of the dollar. It is an integral part of our environment and our ecosystem, and uniquely identifiable of what makes this country so uniquely Australian. I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to give comments to this hearing.

CHAIR—Thank you, Michael. We do thank the people who appeared at the end. We did say there would not be any questions or responses, and that was deliberate because that would open the debate again, and we are out of time. I declare the committee hearing closed, and we are happy to talk to any of you individually.

Committee adjourned at 4.40 p.m.