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Submission to the Senate enquiry
“ into the Australian Wool Innovation - expenditure of funds under statutory
funding agreement”

concerning statements made by Mr Dorber as reported by Hansard on 26th June 2003

Dear Sir/Madame,

I would like to make a submission as follows

In the evidence recorded by Hansard on the 26th June 2003, the witness, Mr Colin Dorber makes the following statement

“**Mr Dorber**—In the very beginning—the first three months—there was only me, and I made all the recommendations. As staff came on, particularly senior staff, we started working together. A number of board members made themselves available outside of board meetings to work with us. For example, one of the earliest things we did was to implement the Innovar concept project and proposal assessment model that Senator Stephens referred to the other night. It was my initiative to go to the board and recommend that the Innovar model be introduced. It is a very effective model, and it was used in every instance, including on the famed and poorly named woodlot project. Those records were placed in front of the board so that, when they made a decision, they had the original project proposal, the Innovar score sheets, the reports of the project officer and the program manager, and my recommendations arising from that.”

With regard to this statement, I was one of the directors of a company called Innovar who were commissioned by the board to establish a management system and operating procedures that were to become the basis for the management of R&D projects established by the newly formed organisation “AWI”.

Firstly, this was not an initiative of Mr. Dorber, but rather an initiative of the board prior to his appointment.

Secondly and more importantly, a key part of this system involved a basis for scoring projects and being able to evaluate the best projects for funding. To the best of our knowledge this was not universally applied and was not necessarily followed where applied. To start with, it was only applied to On-Farm projects, not to projects that Woolmark were funded to run or other Post-Farm projects.

Further, I am aware of at least one significant project that had been funded by the previous organisation, and which had scored amongst the very top few projects in AWI's portfolio of On Farm projects. Here the scoring was completely ignored and the project dropped. This project was a project contracted to a company called Agrica, called the “Wool Profit Map” that evolved from an earlier piece of research conducted by Professor D Samson of Melbourne University.

The basis for this project being dropped was never publicly made clear. Mr Symon stated back in a letter to Mr Dorber after a meeting between Mr Jim Symon from Agrica and Mr Dorber that:

1. You stated "a lot of people do not see the benefit of the WPM project". No doubt we are interested in whether those "people" have the qualifications for making such judgements and on what information those judgements were based. We would be disappointed if AWI's professionalism in evaluating projects was driven by hearsay or by unqualified judges. At the same time, if the WoolMap project should be replaced by much better projects that are accurately assessed with a consistent method of assessment, and if AWI needs to reallocate funds due to a shortage, we could well understand AWI having reasons for finalising the WoolMap project.

Mr Dorber was never able to demonstrate why the project was to be dropped and in order to get his way, had the project cancelled and fully paid out a year earlier than the contract was drawn for. In other words the contract was fully funded by AWI, but was stopped as it had become politically unsuitable. This cost the Woolgrowers over \$200,000. Fortunately, Agrica honoured the use of growers funds and completed the project anyway.

As I also understand, the board were given very different reasons why the project was to be cancelled.

This begs the question as to how many other projects were treated in a non transparent and un-substantiated way.

As a consequence of witnessing some of Mr. Dorbers methods, Innovar directors decided to withdraw Innovar's services and Innovar never completed its contract with AWI.

To the best of my knowledge, AWI under Mr Dorbers management implemented project decisions that carried a lot of Mr Dorber's personal opinion or opinion from others outside AWI, rather than through a rigorous unbiased assessment.

Yours Sincerely

Mr John Grant

Director
Innovar Pty Ltd

15th August 2003