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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

Main Committee

COMMITTEES

Primary Industries and Resources Committee

Report

SPEECH

Wednesday, 17 March 2010

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

<p>Date Wednesday, 17 March 2010 Page 133 Questioner Speaker Sidebottom, Sid, MP</p>	<p>Source House Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p>
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Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (12.20 pm)—I agree with many of the comments the member for Farrer has just made in relation to this overall topic and the object of this report from the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Resources, *Farming the future: the role of government in assisting Australian farmers to adapt to the impacts of climate change*. Like the member for Farrer, I hope that people find this report of use. I can say as a proud member of this committee that it was a real eye-opener to listen to the face-to-face submissions that were presented to us, to read a number of the submissions and visit many of the sites.

I will make a few comments in relation to the report, adding to what I mentioned yesterday at the media release and media event associated with it. Before I do, I congratulate all the members of the secretariat involved with the report. I have been on this committee for a number of years and I find them to be highly professional, very supportive and very good at their job.

Irrespective of the political, public debate that was going on, is going on and will continue to go on in regard to climate change—unless some people think that the issue has somehow disappeared because of Copenhagen—about the extent of human contribution to carbon dioxide levels and greenhouse gases, the majority of farmers that we met have been going about the practical business of adapting to changes in weather patterns. People argue about what has caused the changes in weather patterns—although personally I think the science has pretty well established what is going on there contrary to the contrarians, particularly in this place, and some of the conservative press. The major issue for farmers is that they have to go about adapting to changing climate conditions, and that is what they have done. We saw the full range, including those that essentially are unable to cope for a variety of reasons with these changing circumstances, and that has inevitable consequences for them individually, for their families and for their communities. Unless mitigating factors come into play then many of those enterprises will be uneconomical, will consequently become totally unviable and will fall over.

Right the way through there was a whole range of responses to climate change. This report highlights many of them, and they are very exciting. It shows that many of our farmers and farming communities are very adaptable, very innovative, very progressive and very good at what they do. What they seek is support wherever that is necessary and available to assist them to get on with the job of doing what they do best.

I mentioned before the tension between the political debate and the realities of climate change. The tensions that exist on farm are also highlighted in this report. In particular, I would recommend chapter 2, headed ‘Managing decisions on the farm’, which highlights the tensions not just in decision making but in who makes the decisions and what types of decisions should be made now and into the future. That became very evident during the inquiry. The report suggests that resources be put into counselling families and business owners in decision making and, particularly, change, including generational change.

People must think their food just pops onto their plate or into their cupboard—that they make it at the supermarket or in the truck that brings it to their place. The whole enterprise of food production and manufacturing in Australia exists outside the metropolitan areas. There is huge social and economic change going on out there, and there is a lot of tension. This report seeks various ways in which to support those producers of our product so they are able to do that in the best way. Unless we support them—and I do not think I am being overly alarmist—our ability to feed ourselves will be greatly diminished.

That leads me to some other tensions that we discovered in this investigation. They are natural tensions, by the way; I am not suggesting for a moment they are not. There are those that find it very difficult to accept change. If you look at the full extent of the climate change argument, it becomes so overwhelming that you think that you cannot deal with it or solve it at an individual level and therefore you tend to reject it, whereas reality says you have to cope with the conditions that you have. So there is an overwhelming tension there. The other tension is between those who do not see it as so much of a challenge or a threat and those who see it as an opportunity, and there are many opportunities for farming the future that are highlighted in this work.

The other tension, which I referred to earlier, is in terms of the production of food. Some of the opportunities for our farming enterprises can in fact be contradictory to the production of food. We could be creating resources which mitigate carbon emissions, greenhouse gas emissions, and create renewable energy and regeneration. Those require land—which may well be suitable for the production of food. Farmers have to survive, so we as a community need to look at that situation and offer them avenues to reconcile these possible tensions, and they do exist. It is very enlightening to see some of those examples here.

Amongst many other things, I found of particular interest, on the social side, the work of Professor Frank Vanclay and Aysha Fleming of the Tasmanian Institute of Agricultural Research. They are social researchers who look at change in relation to farming techniques and climate change. For the record, because I think it is well worth reflecting on, I would like to quote from their evidence to us:

Resistance to change is not just about individual reactions, it is a broader social issue. This means that resistance does not occur within an individual's head, or because of an individual's personal characteristics—education level, personal motivations or situation, skills or beliefs. Resistance is created by common perceptions, norms and values held in society. In our society currently, resistance is being created because climate change is perceived as being:

- 'just' another environmental or global threat,
- too big to influence,
- an unmanageable and inequitable financial burden, and;
- too uncertain to warrant major action.

They go on to say:

Mitigation of climate change is seen by many farmers as a financial burden, rather than an opportunity. This can create anger and stress, because profit margins are further reduced and farmers risk viability.

They then go on to say:

Our research suggests that although the majority of farmers believe that climate change is occurring, there is widespread confusion about its causes, and they are not necessarily convinced by the suggested need for urgent adaptation and mitigation. As a result, we believe that:

1. there is an on-going need for clear statements that the science is decided and the government will act on climate change;

If you go on the nature of this place, there is no hope of that. I have to say that those opposite and the conservative press have done a great job on that. But I have got news for you: nothing is going to change. It is happening and there will be a lot more evidence to show you. I found it pretty interesting—the other mob reckon they are the mob for farmers and rural and regional Australia, and they were the very people against the attempts to provide sane, rational, scientific reasoning behind climate change+----

Mr John Cobb—There is none!

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—I have to say! Put it on the record: 'There is no evidence of climate change.' I ask you! Don't talk on this report, mate! Don't talk on this report, because you do not even believe in it. I and some of your colleagues from that side just wasted a few months on nothing? I ask you! Are you the spokesman for anything but nothing? If I may continue, they go on to say:

2. there is a need for more research into the beneficial actions agricultural industries can take, and active extension of this information to farmers.

The member for Farrer quite rightly pointed out that these extension programs should be practised on the ground so people can see them. If we can support that, that is much better for farmers than our acting in a vacuum. They respond very positively. They go on to say:

However, more than just information is necessary. Support for farmers to implement actions and to work together is needed. This needs to include financial incentives, opportunities for building social networks, collaborations, recognition and rewards;

Indeed, rewarding the work of our farmers is very important. They go on:

3. finally, the social value farmers hold and exercise as 'stewards of the land' needs to be recognised and encouraged.

Again, I would like to congratulate all my colleagues for spending so much valuable time on this report, *Farming the future*. I again thank the secretariat for their excellent work. I hope all my colleagues will take the time to look through this, particularly the member opposite, who seriously needs some education in this.