

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Tackling Climate Change in Victorian Communities

Bairnsdale—Thursday, 24 October 2019

MEMBERS

Mr Darren Cheeseman—Chair

Mr David Morris—Deputy Chair

Mr Will Fowles

Ms Danielle Green

Mr Paul Hamer

Mr Tim McCurdy

Mr Tim Smith

WITNESS

Mr Allen Sheridan, farmer.

The CHAIR: Welcome to the public hearing. I just want to run through some important formalities before we begin. All evidence taken today will be recorded by Hansard and is protected by parliamentary privilege. This means that no legal action can be taken against you in relation to the evidence that you give; however, this protection does not apply to any comments you make outside the hearing even if it is restating what you said during the hearing. You will receive a draft transcript of the evidence in the next week or so for you to check and approve. Corrected transcripts are published on the Committee's website and may be quoted from in our final report.

Thank you for making the time to meet with the Committee today. Could you please state your name and title for the benefit of the Committee?

Mr SHERIDAN: Allen Sheridan, and I am a farmer.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Allen. We have managed to find some time on our agenda and you asked this morning if you could address the Committee, so it is over to you.

Mr SHERIDAN: Thank you very much for allowing me to speak. My first initiation with climate was when my grandfather had all his sheep out on the road for 18 months in the 1943–44 drought. I have been involved in the rural industry for all of my life, virtually. Having lived on farms all of my life, I have been involved in the rural industry and I think I know it pretty well. I have been on every farm that runs sheep, from Woodside to Traralgon to Benambra to Delegate to Bega and back to Bairnsdale in my previous life.

Ms GREEN: That is a huge area.

Mr SHERIDAN: It is a big area. I have been on every farm that runs sheep.

The CHAIR: Can I ask in what capacity?

Mr SHERIDAN: I was a wool representative for New Zealand Loan at 22, and after that I was a manager of the Australian states at the branch here. I was a manager for 10 years, so I have had a bit of experience in the rural industry. We currently farm 6500 acres of country in three locations: at Bengworden—next door to Jenny, who spoke earlier—and out at Wuk Wuk and down at Traralgon. I am a naysayer—I heard you describe a naysayer before—although we have planted 40 000 trees on our 2000 acres out here.

Ms GREEN: Good for you.

Mr SHERIDAN: And we have 300 acres of country that is covenanted between Bengworden and Wuk Wuk. So we are sort of involved in climate change a bit, not from the point of view of being a climate change believer—and I will explain to you just briefly why I have those reasons—but from the point of view that planting the trees is very beneficial for stock and to break the wind over your pasture.

Getting on to one of my reasons for not being involved in this climate variability rubbish is that it is fairly dry at Bengworden at the moment but nothing like as bad as it was in 1972–73. A lot of the problem with these droughts is that people do not live long enough and they do not know what happened back years ago. They are all saying this is worse—well, it certainly is. All this country blew in 1972–73. Wuk Wuk is pretty ordinary, but at Traralgon we lease our country. We lease 3500 acres, what used to be the SEC firebreak area around Loy Yang. We have been there for 35 years. Two and a half months ago it was the worst season we have seen in 35 years. Right now we have got nearly all our stock down there, and every paddock has got feed on it like that. It is just unbelievable, the season that is there.

I have only lived here for 60 years; I am not a local.

The CHAIR: Close enough!

Mr SHERIDAN: I have reared three children here, and we are still not regarded as locals.

Ms GREEN: Where did you come from?

Mr SHERIDAN: I worked in Shepparton before that, and then I used to follow the shearing industry around as a young fellow. I started when I was 14 in the wool industry. Now I am going to lose my train of thought. Where was I? I cannot think now.

The CHAIR: Fantastic season you are having with the land you are leasing in Traralgon.

Mr SHERIDAN: Yes, and there we are 60 miles away and we have got that season, and here we are here with pretty average—very dry, actually. I have seen all these other droughts we have had here in the last 60 years—that is the point I was going to make—or dry times, droughts and dry times, so I just cannot have that this drought or dry time, depending which way you look at it, is caused by anything else other than normal variability. That is not going to go down too well. Unfortunately most of the do-gooders are gone, but it is worrying to me the amount of money that is being spent. I listen to the ABC, and I get my information from them. I also listen to channel 83, and I get good advice from Alan Jones and his mob. So I am not that narrow-minded that I will not listen to the other side, but I think the amount of money that has gone into this climate change industry, especially by our local councils and all this—

Talking about problems in the district, the greatest problem in this district at the moment is Kalbar mining, not the dry time. If that goes ahead—

The CHAIR: This is the sand mine we heard something about earlier?

Mr SHERIDAN: Yes, absolutely. If that goes ahead and we get a 10- or 12-inch overnight rainfall in that sandy area where they are going to put that and all that rubbish washes down into our Mitchell River and onto our flats if we get a flood, it will be just a disaster. That is all I want to say. Thank you very much.

The CHAIR: Thank you for your time.

Committee adjourned.