

Symposium Opening

Julia Telford:

It is my pleasure to introduce the Honourable Bruce Scott, Federal LNP Member for Maranoa. Mr Scott is an experienced representative of rural and regional Australia, having represented the electorate in Federal Parliament since 1990. Before entering Federal Parliament, Bruce was a producer of stud merino sheep, wool and lamb, a grain grower, a Nuffield scholar—and we just were talking earlier about that process. Bruce studied wool and agricultural policies in the UK and in Europe. Bruce has lived all his life in rural Queensland, running a farming business and raising his family in the Maranoa. He is an experienced representative of regional and rural Australia and is absolutely committed to fighting the best for the electorate. For those of us who know Bruce well, we know that he has also been a long-time supporter of ways in which landholders, community, industry and government can work together to gain support, recognition and reward. He was an obvious choice to have officially open today's proceedings.

I joked to a couple of people last night that what wasn't in Bruce's biography was that 25 years ago he also awarded me with a book week award at my local primary school. But I've dealt with the fact that that's not in his formal biography. Can I please ask you to help me in welcoming Honourable Bruce Scott MP to open today's proceedings.

The Hon Bruce Scott MP:

Well thank you very much Julia for that introduction, and to Board Members, Tony Gleeson, and also Jock Douglas, my very long time friend and resident in my own hometown. To you Kerry, can I just say I am a friend of the ABC; you do have friends in Parliament House. And the great program of Landline is one of the reasons that I said that we can't do without the ABC, but so long as the ABC spend the money efficiently it will always have my support. So I am a great friend of the ABC and a great program. And I've got to say that Pip Courtney is doing a wonderful job with some of the programs lately—I think she's transitioned to that job magnificently.

Friends one and all, can I just say it is a great honour for me to have been invited today to officially open your conference here in Brisbane. Can I just say that as a long-time supporter of Landcare—in fact I grew up with a mother, we grew up basically on almost treeless plains and my mother was very protective of any tree on these treeless plains. It might be an old box tree, it looked like it was half dead, but if there was a dam going down the tree must remain and the dam could be built around it. So I've grown up with an empathy for Landcare and conservation farming, and it's one of the things I also looked at when I was a Nuffield scholar studying in Europe, conservation farming.

Can I say that today also, well this year particularly, marks the 25th anniversary of the formation and the launch of Landcare Australia. And to you Jock, and the late Rick Farley who was actually my wife's cousin: that showed real leadership at that time. Because I think many of us in this room, or a number of us anyway, will remember that some of the reaction that you would have received Jock, and those who are promoting Landcare as a need for Landcare in this country, were people who said: Well, we're not going to be told how we're going to manage our properties. We had seen that period of tree wall-to-wall, corner-to-corner land clearing, and those photographs that we used to continually run on news services of those anthills being knocked over by a great chain and clearing land. And of course as agriculture moved west and farming moved west some of the grasslands that were very marginal were being broken up for farming rather than just pastoral pursuits.

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So it is an important year as we look back on those 25 years to see where Landcare has come from and what it means today, and so many more people have now embraced Landcare as part of their management system on their properties.

And the other thing that I think is important to mention in relation to Landcare is with the consumer demand today and their curiosity about where their product comes from—Landcare has a new focus completely in my mind, and perhaps today is another opportunity to re-launch Landcare with some new brands attached to it. Consumers today are very curious and they all walk around with one of these iPhones, and that will give them, in that handpiece, a lot more information than they could have got 25 years ago. So they are connected. They are the consumer. And they are curious.

Friends one and all, can I just say that whether it's hormone-free, grass-fed, or whether it's organic, if you want to get a premium for that product you need to be certified. Let me just touch on organic. If you want to sell organic-produced food in the United States of America, you will have the USDA, United States Department of Agriculture, certify your property as organic. Not Australia's, but you will need the certification of the United States Department of Agriculture. And that sticker will be on that product in the supermarkets of the United States. So to get market access with a product that you believe has got a market opportunity you need certification. And there's more you can add to that certification.

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If you're talking about grass-fed, or you're talking about hormone-free—and hormone-free brings me to the point of access to the European market, EU accreditation. Now for 25 years—it started off with the States and now it's taken over by the Commonwealth for the last 19 years—that you also need accreditation to access the beef market in Europe if you want to get that access to that valuable ... and a market, as I understand, is paying more than our domestic market and some other markets. Once again, you've got to be accredited.

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Now there are opportunities here for that accreditation to bring premiums to producers, but unless you are certified you aren't going to be in that space. Once again, it raises that issue of certification of your property, of the meat processor, that you're hormone-free and your meet their requirements at a saleyards or a meatworks processing plant or where it is going to into those more valuable markets in Europe. You don't get there without certification. And that certification needs to be maintained because there are spot checks, random checks, on those landholders, saleyards and processors, to make sure that you are maintaining that certification or that accreditation, and you can be delisted as an EU-certified property if you don't meet those requirements.

I use those examples because they are important; that is the requirement of a market access in another country. And let's face it, the great opportunities we do have—as you spoke about Kerry—into the space to our north, into China, into Asia, where 1.5 billion people of the world's population who live in our time zone, give us enormous opportunities as we look into the future. But as I've often said, we don't hold a mortgage on that market. We are going to face increasing competition to be a supplier of food into this market. And it's not just about fair, average quality. They have the disposable income and it's growing affluence, but they're also curious to know more about the product. And that's what is going to be, I

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For landholders I know it’s all about profit. If you can’t make a profit you’re not going to produce the product. And if you want to get a profit from the market, I believe that certification is going to become an increasingly important focus from a consumer-led level of that product that you are producing.

Can I touch on Nuffield, and I recently had the Nuffield alumni on their global focus study this year, and I as a Nuffield scholar was always welcoming Nuffield scholars to Parliament House. They were from North and South America, they were from the UK and Ireland, they were from Europe, they were from India, South Africa, they were from China and Brazil, New Zealand and Australia. And they’re very inspirational in so many ways: they’ve got a diversity of products from producing rose petals—you’d think, where would there be a market for rose petals? Well this Nuffield scholar has found a market for it, and she’s producing them—rose petals. Not roses, not flowers, the petals.

But I had some time to sit down with a citrus producer. Now I think we’ve all seen those photographs and those television footages of the oranges and orchards being torn apart in southern Australia; oranges being tipped out with no value or no market. And I said: Well, what are you going to study and where are you going to? She said: Well, we’re already doing it. I said: What are you doing? She said: Well, we’re wanting to access the Chinese market, and we are. I said: Well, how are you doing it? She said: Our orchard has been certified by the Chinese as being able to access their market in China. And I said: What do they do? She said: They come and actually inspect our orchard. The requirements that they want—our orchard and our orange trees to be pruned in a certain way, a certain level of canopy clear of the ground. And once they get that certification, they get market access into one of the largest and fastest growing consumer markets in the world. I said: What do they want? She said: It’s the colour of the orange, it’s the Valencia, it’s the taste, it’s the shape. And they’re prepared to pay for it. And she also said: But we are also entering a market where they are very wary of any product because of the substitutes, not always the natural products, that are sold under the name of a Valencia orange.

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And recently they’re had inspectors up there, or the officials in China the inspectors there, have found that some of the oranges that are marketed as Valencia and they look good, have been spray painted with a product that has carcinogenic properties with it. So the consumer is very, very wary of the product that they are about to buy and prepared to buy. And she said they all have three or four of these—iPhones. And they go to the product and

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they put their iPhone on with their App, pick it up, and it takes them straight to the orchard where that product has come from; certified, certified by the officials in China, certifying the orchard in Victoria, which gives them that market access and that opportunity to sell a product at a premium into this growing market.

I said: Well, are you getting many contracts? She said: Well, they are coming to us now, not we to them. And we've got four importers wanting to import our product. And she said: Well look, go away, tell me what you're prepared to pay, when you want it, and the quality and quantity you want. And I'll give you six weeks to come back to me. Then I'll determine whom I'll supply. So this has turned the whole approach to seeking a market out to the market seeking the producer out, through that certification process into the largest consuming, growing market in our own geographic area.

I use that example of oranges because you could apply it to almost, I believe, any food product. And with this iPhone and the information that the consumer, the curious consumer is demanding, it's possible in nearly all our products. The National Livestock Identification Scheme with tags being able to trace from paddock

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right through to plate is a perfect example where Australia, in many ways, the Australian cattle industry have led the way. But how are we delivering a profit, a greater profit, for other elements of their production systems to the producer?

And I think that's what you're on about today. So can I just say to you all, I wish you well in your deliberations; it really is for me a great honour to be here and share some time with you and officially open your conference. Unfortunately I can't stay till the end of the day but I'll be here till well after lunch. But I've got to say that I've also spoken about this conference and the need for the Commonwealth Government to be involved somewhere. We invest heavily in Landcare; where it's going to in these tight budget times I'm not quite sure at the moment in terms of Commonwealth funding, but the Commonwealth would want to think that there's a dividend to the producer and to the economy of Australia with those dollars into the future.

I've got an apology Julia, from the Agricultural Minister who can't be with us, but I know he's got a representative here today; but an apology from the Agricultural Minister. And I certainly will be reporting back when we're in Canberra next week. So I can tell you that you've got a friend in myself, and you've got many friends in Canberra. The opportunities are before us, but we don't have a mortgage on these developing markets to our north. We can win or we can lose, and I'm sure your conference will find ways that we can better produce and identify whether it's the land or whether it's the product or the certification to gain greater access and more profits to the producer, which at the end of the day is what's going to sustain agriculture into the future.

It is my pleasure now to officially declare open, and wish you all well in your deliberations today. Thank you very much.