***INFORMATION KIT***

***A Million Acres A Year***

**Winner! *BEST GENERAL DOCUMENTARY (SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT)*,the 21st ATOM Awards (Australian Teachers of Media)**

**Directed by Frank RIJAVEC**

**Written by Keith BRADBY & Frank RIJAVEC**

**Produced by Frank RIJAVEC & Noelene HARRISON**

 **52 mins, originally released 2002**

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***A Million Acres A Year***

**SYNOPSIS**

First released in 2002, this remarkable documentary records the massive scale of environmental destruction that occurred in one of world's most biodiverse areas - the southwest of Western Australia in the decades following World War Two.

In this period, successive governments sold off and encouraged the clearing of land for agriculture. During the 1960s alone, a million acres a year were opened up. Much of the land was unsuitable for farming yet the new landholders were obliged to bulldoze and burn the native bush or risk losing their allocation. Most were eager to do so and pressured the government to release even more land. The long-term consequences have been devastating, with industrial farming and salinity turning most of this priceless natural heritage into a biological desert.

Many farmers were caught in a financial catch-22: unviable farms forced them into debt and this prevented them from investing in more sustainable systems. Others, however, began the fight to turn around half a century of gross mismanagement.

Through the voices of people on the land, this compelling documentary tracks the history of this ecological disaster and reveals the impact it has had on the people, the landscape and the unique flora and fauna. It also gives us glimpses of the stunningly diverse bush remnants that have been saved and outlines the case for a new ‘land ethic’.

***A Million Acres A Year -* DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

Our aim was to record something of the psychological terrain farmers traversed on the new-land agricultural frontier, especially as it illuminated their attitudes to the natural landscape they were so rapidly transforming. We wanted to understand what their experience of battling the bush, and growing up and old with it, had taught them. How their relationship to the bush evolved and how their experience may have informed their values.

We found that farmers were acutely aware of just how profound their impact on the country had been and that many had been radicalised by their experience.

The people in the film are strong characters who have been shaped by, or indeed, have set in train the forces that have assailed post-war agriculture: the whim of farm finance and cruelty of chronic debt; fluctuating commodity prices; economic rationalization and globalization; changes in technology and methodology; land degradation and social devolution. Now they face the job of dealing with the mess.

The achievements of farmers who have embraced landcare have been promoted to inspire others and to put a positive spin on the image of rural Australia. While landcare achievements are acknowledged in the film, we have avoided the simplicity of this 'happy ending' because it is clear, that no matter how sincere or hard won these achievements have been, they've had little impact on the bigger picture of land degradation. It seems that we have never had more information or been richer or better educated, yet the state of our environment continues on a downhill slide.

The story of WA's Wheatbelt gives arresting and urgent examples of the catastrophic loss that will continue, both in the natural environment and within people, their families and their communities, if a better way forward is not found. The film concludes that ultimately, dealing with the mess becomes less a question of resources or technology than how our ethics and resolve guide our priorities.

The film is not, however, a 'skull grinning in at the feast', nor does it dwell on the quantitative/statistical dimension of land degradation, as shocking as that is (some of the articles or web sites in the Information Kit provide that background), instead it takes the next step along with some of those who are salvaging some meaning out of their experience - who grin back at the skull, who cultivate and put into practice progressive ideas.

They show us their tilts at redemption and the 'sandplains that ripple in splendour, brilliant as coral reefs' which they have learned to see, and they bring us to earth with recollections of how they tore it down.

Period current affairs provides a critique of the government's push into the 'new-lands', while Government sponsored films from the 1960s evoke the mood of the times with their muscular optimism, reminding us how pervasive and powerful the ideology of 'development-at-all-costs' was, and how dangerous it is.

While ***A Million Acres A Year*** brings to Australians images of the bewilderment and oppression that has characterised the relationship of settlers to the land, this is leavened by epiphany, humour and irony - by recall and expression of the 'moments of truth' that confronted some of our interviewees.

The goal of ***A Million Acres A Year*** is to deepen historical consciousness of what has happened to the land, fill up the memory gaps - it's another gesture at trying to jolt our society from its own history.

- Frank Rijavec

***A Million Acres A Year –* CO-WRITER'S STATEMENT**

You can't fix something unless you acknowledge it is broken. Despite the obvious and massive damage that is occurring to the WA landscape, and despite the scale of the repair programs already underway, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that we are being held back by some widespread cultural assumptions about the issues. This documentary goes to the guts of what we face. It explodes the myth that we merely have to address some of the "mistakes of the past" by modifying the way conventional agriculture conducts its business. It makes it quite clear that the current crisis is a direct result of the unthinking and even callous official approach to land settlement in WA over the last century.

It is increasingly accepted that we must act to prevent salinity devouring huge areas of productive land, but we make the case that this isn't enough. This script outlines the sequence of damage within which salinity must be seen, from mass destruction of a mega diverse landscape to communities being strangled at birth by blindingly over optimistic politicians and bureaucrats. We make it clear that it is not enough to just try and prevent the damage that is having an immediate dollar impact, that a more radical approach is required.

Clear thinking can produce clear results. We make it clear that even when faced with overwhelming problems, the clear thinking and applied energy that comes from a love of the land has an enormous impact. We profile individuals who have taken actions that do make a big difference. We show that enriching and sustainable relationships are possible between people and place.

We need help. Obviously, the scale of continuing damage in WA is such that a greatly increased repair effort is required. Not only does this documentary make that point, but it also provides some clear direction on where this help can be applied. This is particularly important now that degradation and salinity is becoming accepted as an issue of national importance. In the past few years increased government funding has become available, but much of this is applied within the same exploitative agricultural context that caused the original damage. We put a strong case for a more open-hearted approach, that can do more than just help crops survive salinity, that can honour the ecological and cultural richness of the south west.

Great stories deserve to be told and celebrated. It is an incredible saga we are living through in the west. This documentary does far more than show the standard pictures of bush being cleared. It gets inside the hearts of the people who did the clearing, and travels with some of them to a much better place. It recognises and respects the "larger than life" efforts involved in the settlement of large slices of Australia, and the even greater efforts involved in coming to terms with and reversing the resulting damage.

We need paradox to enrich our simple view of life. Our society seems to prefer simply packaged stories, but anything to do with communities and the environment is complex and full of mixed messages. The diversity of the environment we are responding to deserves a diversity of responses. But that is different from being overwhelmed by the detail. What this documentary does is take some very complex stories, that are full of paradox, and draw out the overwhelming themes within which real events occur.

 (continued)

***A Million Acres A Year –* CO-WRITER'S STATEMENT** (continued)

What does all this mean to me personally? Well, there is a great feeling of release and usefulness, and that comes with being able to tell my bottled-up story *like it is -* of being able to describe the magnitude of the problem while maintaining a positive outlook!

But most of all I am excited by the amount of good this documentary may do. I have always maintained that the ravaged landscape I love so much can be respected and restored quite easily, that there are no insurmountable reasons why we cannot have truly healthy communities living in truly healthy landscapes.

But the tragic stories I have seen played out in this part of Australia have been largely ignored by the mainstream of our society. That is now changing, our society is starting to re-discover the heartlands of Australia - and wants to learn. Biodiversity loss, salinity control and the rebuilding of country life have emerged from the dust onto the national agenda.

This documentary gives real people with proven records a voice that cuts through the official camouflage surrounding these issues. Much good can come from that.

- Keith Bradby

***A Million Acres A Year***

**A NOTE ABOUT THE LOCATIONS**

The early geologists called South Western Australia "an ageless and undatable land". In the northern hinterland the Earth's oldest crystals have been discovered and in the quartzite ranges along its southern edge are found the oldest recorded traces of living organisms. It is one of the oldest exposed landscapes on the planet.

It's a subdued undulating landscape in which the early mountain ranges of it geomorphological birth are long gone, washed to the sea by eons of erosion. In their place are gentle plains, interspersed with rounded granite tors and sparkling salt lakes.

Across this land in island reserves and national parks that escaped the mass clearing era, lays a thin mantle of heathland, mallee, woodland and thicket clinging to a mosaic of varying soil types. The rainfall is marginal for agriculture and unpredictable with much of the wheatbelt falling in the ‘transitional rainfall zone’ between the wetter south-west corner of the state and the arid interior. .

Look closely at these precious remnants. For reasons we do not understand, and may never understand, this land has hosted an evolutionary explosion. The south west of Western Australia is now recognised as one of the world's 25 biodiversity hotspots with its unparallleled levels of plant diversity. Many species are still being discovered, and it is estimated that around 20% are yet to be scientifically named. They have evolved with a host of Australia's special animals - the minute possum that feeds like a bird on pollen and nectar, the small turtle-shaped frog living out its life in the dry sands, the small wallaby that feeds on native truffles.

"A Million Acres A Year" takes us along the south-west's southern fringe, an area some have called the "Galapagos Islands of plant diversity" - where soils that farmers rank as some the most infertile in Australia support a botanical wonderland.

***A Million Acres A Year***

**A NOTE ABOUT THE MUSIC**

The sound track of the film provides a showcase for the work of twelve of Australia’s most talented contemporary composers.

Of the 52 minute duration of the film, 35 minutes are drawn from these composers, making a rich soundtrack which complements the landscapes of WA’s south coast hinterland in their ruin, desolation and melancholy, and their beauty, majesty and vulnerability.

The music underscores the confidence and aggression of post-war agricultural development - music from period archival films celebrates it - then as the environmental consequences become apparent, it turns to ambient accompaniment of the story-tellers as they describe what they saw happening to the land, and their change of mind.

The composers are:

Michael Hannan

Gordon Kerry

Stephen Bull

Elena Kats-Chernin

Stephen Benfall

Adrian Keenan

Ross Edwards

Cathie Travers

Robert Douglas

Andrew Ford

Colin Offord

David Chesworth

***A Million Acres A Year –* BIOGRAPHIES (written in 2002)**

**FRANK RIJAVEC** is the Director, co-writer and co-producer of the film. After winning several awards for student films in WA Frank worked as a film editor in Sydney and Perth and in 1984 was nominated for an Australian Film Institute award for *Best Editing* for “How The West Was Lost”. In the mid 80s he returned to WA to write and direct the documentaries “The Last Stand”, 1986/SBS; “Black Magic”, 1987/ABC /GWN; “Skin of The Earth”, 1988/SBS. In 1987 he embarked on a 5-year journey with the Yindjibarndi and Ngarluma tribes of Roebourne to make “Exile And The Kingdom” which was awarded the major *Media Peace Award* by the United Nations Association of Australia with the Council For Aboriginal Reconciliation in 1994. This was followed by the award for *Best Documentary* and *Best Achievement in Sound*  in the Australian Film Institute Awards; *Best Documentary* Louis St John Johnson Media Awards (1994); the Australian Human Rights Award for *Best Documentary* (1994). EXILE was featured on ABC-TV as its 2-hour special commemorating the 1993 International Year for the World's Indigenous Peoples. Other writing/directing credits for television documentary include: “Requiem for A Generation of Lost Souls”, ABC /1996; “The Habits Of New Norcia”, 1999/SBS; "A Million Acres A Year", 2003/SBS; "Breathing Life Into Boodja: Social and Ecological Restoration in an Ancient Land" 2019. Frank was awarded one of four national Documentary Fellowships in 1998 by the Australian Film Commission and has served on the boards of the Film & Television Institute (1991-92) and Screenwest (1997-98). Since 2004, he has extended his practice into media and communications research. This was recognised by the award of a PhD, Communications Studies, Murdoch University, in 2010, for his dissertation *Sovereign Voices, the Yindjibarndi fight for a dignified life amid the Pilbara resources boom*.

**KEITH BRADBY** is the co-writer and narrator of the film. During the early 1980s, he was one of the principal protagonists that brought to an end mass land release programs in WA. In the mid-eighties he helped establish the Fitzgerald Biosphere Project which brought nature conservation, sustainable development and landcare together. In the early 90s he worked to establish a major mammal re-introduction project at Shark Bay and spent 4 years as coordinator of one WAs largest catchment programs in the Peel-Harveyregion. From 1996-2002 Keith was a Policy Officer with the Western Australian Department of Agriculture where he ultimately chaired an inter-agency committee which paved the way for the introduction into the WA Parliament of some of the toughest clearing controls in Australia. He now works as the CEO for Gondwana Link, a partnership of local, state and national groups working to protect and replant crucial areas of remnant bush on south coast farmland.

**Other participants in alphabetical order:**

**DON COCHRANE** was the President of the Lake Towerrinning Catchment Landcare Group when it won a national Landcare award in 1994. He led an enormous community effort to save the local lake, a community focal point and childhood icon, from dying. He has diversified his sheep farm to include grape vines, a native plant nursery and wood lots for timber, and has experimented with non-traditional crops and pastures.

**SUSANNE DENNINGS** returned to the family farm near Ongerup in the late 1980s from where she has coordinated the Malleefowl Preservation Group on a voluntary basis for the last decade. The MPG has grown into one of WA’s most effective conservation groups with numerous Landcare awards at both state and national levels.

**REX EDMONDSON** is theowner operator of a large cereal and wool growing property in Jerramungup. He has had ten years of experience in Local Government, two of those as Shire President of Jerramungup. Since 1982 Rex has served as a member of over a dozen state and national natural resource management boards and committees, most often as chairman, and in 1989 was awarded the McKell Medal for Service to Land Conservation in Australia.

**GARRY ENGLISH** currently farms north of Esperance and his properties are considered a model of sustainability, with extensive tree and shelter belts, large areas of bushland and major water management programs in place. He was deputy chair of the WA Soil and Land Conservation Council for over a decade and was recently appointed to the WA Government’s Natural Resource Management Council. Garry was winner of the Mckell Medal for Service to Land Conservation in Australia in 2001.

Dr **STEVE HOPPER** is Chief Executive Officer of the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority and an Adjunct Professor at The University of Western Australia. He served at the W.A. Wildlife Research Centre for fourteen years as a flora conservation research scientist and has conducted research on the evolution, systematics, ecology and plant conservation, primarily in south western Australia.

**JIM JOHNSON** and his wife **MAREE** came from Sydney to take up a CP block at Jacup (near Jerramungup) in 1961. Jim served with the Australian Occupation Forces in Hiroshima, and after demobilisation with the NSW CIB. He and Maree are glad to be out of the rat-race of cropping and feel sorry for the current generation of farmers who are deluged with the added pressures of globalisation and bad seasons.

**VERONICA KINGDON** took up a new-land block at Pingrup under the Conditional Purchase Scheme in 1968. She was one of very few new-land farmers who challenged the government’s CP conditions when she refused to clear land that was salt-prone. Today, in her late 70s, she still identifies strongly with her farm and is reluctant to leave.

**PETER LUSCOMBE** turned his family’s new-land farm away from traditional farming to propagation of native species for seed collection. Over 2 decades he has developed a native seed distribution business which is unequalled in Australia. His working knowledge of the Australian flora is phenomenal and today his firm works with farmers to replace bush cleared since WWII.

**IAN MANGAN** arrived in Jerramungup in 1954 to work on the War Service Land Settlement Scheme as a foreman before taking up his own block. He recognises that they overcleared but holds the government accountable because clearing followed the advice of the Department of Agriculture. He is now looking at breaking up his fence-to-fence cropping and sheep farm with tree crops.

**NATHAN MCQUOID** worked in the wheatbelt as a youth clearing new-land farms but did not pursue farming. Instead, he trained as a national park ranger, eventually becoming head ranger at the Fitzgerald River National Park. He later worked with the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority and is currently Manager of Vegetation and Landscape Services with Greening Australia where he works with community groups and farmers to design bush rehabilitation and conservation projects.

**BILL MOIR** thought growing wheat was a very exciting business, that he was doing something worthwhile by feeding a hungry world - until he realised that his wheat was not reaching the hungry and his farm was degrading under his feet. While still farming Bill taught himself biology and geology and steeped himself in the natural history of his region. He now gives geology lectures at university summer schools and the local museum.

**STEVE NEWBEY** is a third-generation farmer and now a landcare worker who pulled back from fulltime farming to devote more time to his work on catchment rehabilitation schemes in his region. He feels enormous responsibility for the land his family and his community cleared and farmed and believes he must do his best to try and fix up the mess before moving on.

**Dr DENIS SAUNDERS** (PhD BSc) was a Chief Research Scientist with CSIRO for 34 years. He is a conservation biologist and landscape ecologist with research interests in the conservation of biological diversity in agricultural landscapes.

**BOB TWIGG** moved to a Conditional Purchase property near Jerramungup in the early sixties from a dairy farm in Cowra, NSW. In mid-life the realisation that he had grossly overcleared his farm led him on a crusade to bring the Jerramungup district into the forefront of landcare. He was a founding member of the Fitzgerald Biosphere Committee which successfully worked to have the Fitzgerald River national Park and surrounding farms listed as an international Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO. In 50 years’ time he has no doubt that the prosperity of the region will lie, not in agriculture, but in biodiversity and the values of the bush.

**KAYE VAUX** witnessed the endless mallee to the east of her outlying farm go under the chain and up in smoke in the post-war years. She voiced her concern long before the value of the ‘ballee mallee’ had occurred to anyone else and put her foot down on further clearing of the family farm in the 1960s.During the 70s and 80s she worked tirelessly for wider bush road reserves, limitation on aerial insecticide spraying and the cessation of mass land clearing.

**KINGSLEY VAUX** fears that the accruing debt of soil and water degradation and the loss of biodiversity will ultimately blight the opportunities available to future generations. He and his wife Sandy are determined to diversify their farm into eco-friendly enterprises such as cultivation of native species for timber, seed and aromatic oils and he has reserved or replanted one fifth of the family farm to bush. Kingsley was recognised for his efforts with a Primary Producer Landcare Award.

**KEY QUOTES FROM THOSE WHO APPEAR IN *A Million Acres A Year***

***including other material from the interviews.***

**KEITH BRADBY**

I came down here and lived in the middle of a great hunk of bush, and that was pretty bloody fantastic, but people kept knocking it over, and that is pretty painful, and it drives you to try and do something about it, so you do, and that is pretty painful too, but twenty years on you are bloody glad you did because it would be very hard, I mean it is very hard to think of the bits that were lost, it would be harder if we hadn't made a stand.

I think one of the reasons the agricultural areas are emptying of people is because we haven't built a society that belongs in a place and respects a place. I mean if you can carelessly chain a couple of thousand acres, plow it all in, knock out the regrowth, not get too worried about the wind erosion, accept that 10 or 15% of it might go salty but you'll probably still survive, if you can do all that then you are starting to build a society that, I guess, is ethically bankrupt and very unappealing.

But I guess the 80's were a very intense, personal time for a lot of people, those who had been here for a long time had witnessed destruction on a scale you rarely see on the planet. They had been in amongst it, while their mates, the people they grew up with, sometimes them, had unleashed some pretty destructive forces, and in that wave of confidence of doing that, there were doubts, there was hidden doubts, so people whose dream had been farming, in the 80's they went through a transformation I marvel at and I admire their courage, they questioned the whole basis of their previous life, and a lot of them had the guts to say - bugger! Bugger! Oh well, I have to do things differently, and have lived their lives differently as a result.

There's a few images that are still very strong within me from those years, one is the number of people who'd agree with you privately and who had either scientific or personal knowledge of this country and knew it was a travesty to clear it but who wouldn't say a word publicly, who would pull back from doing anything, whether it be because it would put their jobs a risk or because of the, I guess the social thuggery you sometimes get in small farming communities where people don't want to put their head up with a contrary view because they will get it abused in the pub or at basketball on Saturday, so there were a lot of concerned people who kept their voices silent.

All through there were voices saying, voices of warning, people saying whoa, what are we doing, will it really work, how come you are going into country that was rejected 40 years earlier because of its salinity, how can you farm salt ? After the crash of '69 when wheat prices collapsed and the drought came you had Industry Assistance Commissions looking at rural hardship in this area and the human, social cost of it all, you had all those messages, you had the wildflower societies campaigning to save bush in the 50's and 60's, you had the eminent scientists warning of salinity in particular areas, and all of that was brushed aside by a government, a society and a rural culture that was blinded, somehow, by its dream of, I don't know, I don't know what they were trying to do !

It wasn't ignorance on the part of the government, it was a pretty bloody-minded attempt to get economic growth at whatever cost. On the part of the landholders I think there was a certain level of ignorance, they were individuals believing a fair bit of what they were told and hoping to make, to fulfill the rural Australian dream of having your own farm, but I don't think any of that is much of an excuse, we all have a fair bit of responsibility to the world around us and an awful lot of people over a long period of time failed to live up to that responsibility and they have left us now with a pretty horrible cost.

**KAYE VAUX**

I guess a lot of people thought we just had to farm the land and get rid of the bush. We didn't have that love of the land itself, not like the Aboriginals, it's part of them, its their religion more or less, the land and the bush, and I think a lot of religions have missed out on that point, really, they haven't put that part as the most important. To me it is very important.

All the farmers around would all get down there ready to burn. They would light up all the way around the edge on the other side, leave the windward side ready for the last one, and then they would light that up and off it would go, and of course there were huge mushroom clouds in the sky, I mean you could see them for miles. And the wind dropped, and it was still, so the fire just slowly moved in and it was very, very hot and because there was no wind it was just sort of exploding, and there were little mallee trees going up in the air. From our house, which was about 4 miles away, you could hear like thunder when these willy-willys would explode with stuff, and a bit later on there was sand and stuff falling down on the roof of the house that had gone right up in the sky. That didn't happen very often, but it did happen when the winds died. All through February the men were hardly ever home, they were nearly always away putting through burns.

It was pretty devastating really, watching all that bush being flattened, but everyone had to, it was sort of get big or get out, that was the saying, get big or get out, and you thought you were doing the right thing, but I think a lot of us realised afterwards that we didn't do the right thing, that we should have saved more bush. People thought that the bush was just a useless thing, I think. A lot of people's general thought was, what is the use of the bush?

I always remember when Charlie Court announced that he was going to open up a bit more land, and I just couldn't believe it, I couldn't, I just sat down and I wrote that poem about the bush, realising no, we can't keep doing it all the time, we have ruined enough as it is. It really got to me to think that anybody could be so stupid as to open up more land and let people go through all the agony that they have been through in the last 30 years.

**BILL MOIR**

Farmers are at the cutting edge, if you like, of all the things that are going wrong, land degradation, over clearing, salinity and all that sort of thing, but they are only the front men, if you like, the front men and women, but it is society that is driving it, its driving the engine that is pushing them, so therefore it does go a lot deeper than a bit of land care as a band-aid fix, a bit of salinity control.

You always felt that farming was something that was really important. That you were feeding the starving people of the world, the people that really needed your products and you were doing something great, that it was just so important that really nothing else mattered. Any other occupation really was secondary and that was a feeling that you had, and I think most farmers had that feeling. But then it started to change and you started to see as farming products were being over-produced and world markets started to dry up then you realised that the people who really needed your products couldn't buy them anyway and they were going to people who really didn't need them.

When I realised there was more to life than farming, it really wasn't the most important thing in the world, as I had always thought, that there were far more interesting things, and farming fell into its right perspective. It was an occupation, it was a very enjoyable occupation but there was a lot more besides, and the natural world opened up before my eyes, just like the scales had fallen from my eyes. It was just magic.

I don't think that the value we would get from agriculture would be anywhere near the value we have from just having it here, something that is unique. An interesting concept I have of things is, you see that bush over there, we can land a man on the moon and bring him back but we can't create that bush, no matter how hard we try we can't create that bush. We can plant trees but we can't create that, and that is a pretty sobering thought isn't it.

We spent several months, two or three months each year helping the new settlers east of us putting through their burns, and the most poignant thing I can remember is we did this perimeter type burn just like they do now when a wild-fire gets away, and I remember the kangaroos trying to leap out through the flames, and they would leap up really high and into the flames, and couldn't make it, and it just made me feel sick. I couldn't handle that. I just had nightmares about it. I often think about it, it is just something that is so unnatural, there is no escape.

It became competitive. If you could cut 100 bales of wool for example and your neighbour was cutting 100 bales of wool, well you wanted to cut 120 bales. If he was putting in x acres of crop you'd put in more. If he was achieving a certain yield, you'd try and achieve more, and so you would look for more equipment and we got into a sort of rat race. That really got scary after a while because as you started to see the results of what you were doing, and the more you did it, the more your land blew away, the more it washed away, and then you started to see declines in fertility and this is when eventually the penny dropped and for me, eventually I said “hey, there's got to be something wrong here. We've got to change.”

**SUSANNE DENNINGS**

We talk about, we hear all this garb about salinity and all the problems we have got with salinity, and yet we are not actually recognising what is causing it. It is natures response, isn't it, really, to what we are doing? And yet we just have no respect for nature. We just think we can beat nature, we keep thinking we can beat nature, and nature is going to win in the end. It is winning now, and it's going to win in the end. We are just so arrogant that we feel we can come up with a solution to everything, but in reality we have got to learn to live within our means within nature.

I think humans in general, we are losing respect for each other and I think that nature can teach us respect, because if we don't respect it we are going out the back door, and it would be wonderful if we could teach people respect just through something like the mallee fowl, to respect each other, because we are just as likely to get out there and cut each other's throats most of the time.

**DR. STEVE HOPPER**

We are just in a tremendous age of discovery, first phase of discovery really, of our flora. In the last 30 years about 2000 new species have been described for WA, which is equivalent to what people are pulling out of rainforests elsewhere on earth, let alone understand their biology. And that brought home to me that maybe you need to look at this landscape and just learn from it, let it tell you the stories instead of imposing the world view that comes from a traditional university education.

The flora is really diverse and with something like 75-80% of the species found nowhere else on earth. The more I have looked the more I realise that this is one of two or three places in the world that really is superbly ancient, it is just one of the oldest extant landscapes on earth, and the flatness is due to great maturity, its something to celebrate as venerable. There has just been an incomparable period of time for our plants and animals to sit on a terrestrial landscape without having the ocean wash over them or a glacier scrape them clear.

The selection pressures on our flora and fauna have been very much for most things learning how to stay put in a very harsh, nutrient deficient environment, so there is all sorts of wonderful partnerships between fungi and plants and bacteria and micro fauna that help the plants eke out the nutrients in water, and its in that top 5 cm of soil. We have had a Ph.D. student at Kings Park who has looked at the next 5 cm below that, and 90% of the action in terms of seeds and the ability to recover is in the 5cm above, you drop down to less than 10% if you go down to the next 5 cm, so just with one sweep of a bulldozer blade you can almost irrevocably change the community.

The other point I would make with the wheatbelt is that every remnant that is there is incredibly valuable. We are starting to move into restoration ecology in Kings Park, and the expense of trying to put back what was there is orders of magnitude above what it costs just to look after a patch of bush if it is already there, so while the wheatbelt has been fairly well turned over, every little fragment that is out there is going to have something interesting and special about it and deserves to be protected and restored around it so that you can move out from those foci of uncleared vegetation.

The salt system obviously looks like we are heading for worse rather than better for some time, and the predictions are up to a third of the lowlands sites will go saline. I think that there is a lot of marginal country that has been cleared that ultimately will turn into desert, basically, unless we actively restore it.

You can see the abandoned paddocks in many parts of the wheatbelt, the best you could hope for is the odd wattle and the odd york gum to come up over 5-6 decades. If you are going to rely on natural processes you are looking at thousands of years, so I reckon that in some of the more marginal country if we want to hold the land together, we will have to be in there actively reintroducing the plants we want to grow.

**IAN MANGAN**

We used contractors, with a ball and chain, it was done on a big scale, they would do about 10,000 acres in one swipe, make a big square of it, and they bowled everything over. If they came to a big heavy swamp or something, they would sort of skip around that and leave that, but that was one of the reasons why the cost was so cheap... They didn't leave any shelter belts at all. The rest of the block that was uncleared, well if you wanted to leave shelter belts in there you could leave them. There was regrowth, and then come the farmers, or say the War Service Settlers, and there was, among some of those that took over from Colin Cameron, an attitude of bowl it all out because it was poison, so they bowled, instead of letting the regrowth come up and use them for shelter belts, it was cleared and they could get more production.

I don't care whether the city people like it or they don't, but they have got to face the reality that the average owner of land, he doesn't want that to happen to his land, but the return that he is getting for his products means that he just cannot do anything about trying to repair that. And the criticism of saying that we brought it on ourselves is not valid, because they have been quite willing to have us produce, and create work for them.

**VERONICA KINGDON**

WA was experiencing a land boom, there is no doubt about that, and that was during the 1960's, and large areas of cheaply priced land were being thrown open, and they were thrown open for selection with very little regard for the consequences. It was advertised by the Government which boasted about opening up a million acres a year. The political catch cry was very important to the government.

It is very special to me, very special. Every time I go out in the paddock I just think how special it is, and that is why it is hard for me to leave. There is like a spirit there, if you know what I mean, part of you, the energy and work that you have put into it, it’s now, it’s all part of you, it is supporting you, it will never give you more heartaches like you have had again.

**BOB TWIGG**

Flying back in the early 80's from Perth it suddenly struck me that what I had in my hands was the spoils, and I was one of the spoilers that was making it look like that out of the window. It was just so graphic that it was mind boggling, but very, very challenging as to what are you going to do about it, is there anything you can do about it?

I started to think about what are my ethics, and I was asked to talk one day at a farmer's gathering and the further the talk went on the blacker looks were coming on the people sitting closest to me, and that was when I first realised the power of that word, ethics, just that one word. For a lot of people, it conjures up a whole lot of negative things, and especially if you relate that to agriculture or the environment, and I got a lot of flack over suggesting that there should be any sort of ethics involved in farming.

The majority of the people in the allocation that we were involved in in '61, the majority of the people were from the eastern states, with the majority from NSW and a few from Victoria, and the second greatest number was from SA. There were ex-painters, there was ex-orchardists, I was one of only about 2, from memory, actual farmers that had any experience of farming. And the guy who got the block next door to us actually owned a ladies’ dress shop in Woollongong, and he arrived here with obviously no experience whatsoever.

About a third of the people left, like during the first decade, mainly as a result of the '69, '71 and '72 years, those three years were very dry. But there was also at that time the wheat quotas came in and there was restrictions on how much wheat you could grow, and the wool price collapsed, which put extra hardship on, but there was about a third of the people went within the first decade.

I actually thought that we would get to the stage where we wouldn't see dusty paddocks and that sort of thing, but once the right conditions came back the dust was still there, so I think that there is possibly some people that just don't learn, don't learn by experience, so you have got to put up with those and try with the stick if the carrot doesn't work, try with the stick to bring those people into line.

**JIM JOHNSON**

You had to develop 300 acres or 10% of the land every year for 10 years, and this had to be completely developed, fenced, watered, and sown pasture, and the whole block completely done by the end of the 10-year term, and then you bought the block. This was the big mistake they made, because everything was supposed to be cleared, like a table, there was no shelter belts or land with trees to be left, this is what was the start of the salt, the salination of the soil in that whole district out there.

Someone said oh well, a big argument about the fire breaks, what size fire breaks should we have, 12 feet, 15 feet? And someone said who cares what it is, we haven't lit a fire yet that hasn't got away, and that is the truth! We haven't lit a fire yet that hasn't got away. Oh, there was mayhem everywhere. Some fellow, we'd lit one fellow’s farm up there, his scrub up, I am not going to mention names, but he comes up later and he says I've got it all lit up, the whole thing is completely lit up, all four sides are alight, and he come down and said my pigs, my pigs, what about your bloody pigs, they are in the middle, he forgot to take his pigs out.

Birds are a wonderful thing, because if you have got birds you have got life, and if you have got life there you know damned well you are going to enjoy it, but when you get a big area there and everything is burned, you get up in the morning and there is just nothing, its quiet, that is a terrible time, that is a terrible way to live. I myself now would definitely have farmed it totally different to the way we did, cleared it, certainly cleared it, totally different to the way we did, I'd have had belts everywhere.

I remember going into the bank one day, and because you always walked in tugging your forelock sort of thing, cap in your hand, and this bank manager in there, I won't mention his name, but he said you've got troubles, Jim, yes, I said, I have always had troubles John, but yes, you have got real troubles this time. He said I have got to go to the loo, so with that he just turned this board with the paper clipped onto it, he turned it around to face me like that and he got up and walked out. He said don't read anything until I get back, and I said no, no. And I read it and one of the first things read "Johnson will not succeed. This is that and this is that and he has not got the facilities and he has not got the stock", so I just turned it round that way and waited until he came back and he said, you didn't read that did you? And I said no, John. He said what are you going to do? I said one thing I am going to do, I said you can tell that bloody fellow up there if he ever sets foot on my bloody farm, I'll shoot him. But it did, it put 20 miles an hour on me, it did, it made me change my whole way of thinking and everything and I got up and I worked and I worked. But, God, you were for ever going in with your cap in your hand, the greatest thing I ever did was get out from under them.

Do you want me to tell you about the time I got really cranky with the Good Lord? I was getting up, and I am not a great praying man but I do believe there is a God somewhere because otherwise he wouldn't have done these terrible things to me, but I'd get up in the morning and I'd say "please God let me have a good day today" and he'd go for half and hour and he'd put a spike through your tyre, and you'd be spending the rest of the day fixing it, and the same thing the next day, and I got up this day and "please God, let me have a good day today", and I went and bloody fell, so I went flat and I got up and said "you bastard", I said, "I hope every one of your angels fall pregnant" and I thought after that I have got to be mad, and it was a turning point in my life, that, because I thought I've got to be mad to be talking like that. But anyway, that is the sort of frustration that set in, you just got that way.

Fortunately, being a painter, house painter I was able to get work and we did it that way, got food that way. The first house I painted I got an old AL harvester for, for painting the house, and when I got it home, I read the instruction book that came with it and it said, 'this machine must not be driven faster than 3 mph’, because you would wreck it. If the horses have been on oats and are very fresh, it is best to run them around the paddock first, either that or tie a log on the back of the harvester to slow them down, and I thought, they are putting men on the bloody moon and here am I fooling around with horses. True.

**MAREE JOHNSON**

I feel sorry for the young ones, even the ones with the big acreages, the big debts and big everything, they have got an awful stressful life, really, 24 hours a day, and I am just not happy with farming the way it is going today, for their lifestyles. OK there is lots of things they can have, they can do things we never ever did, but all of that is just so much added on, you have got to earn more so that we can have all this, that to me is not living... You have got to get bigger, bigger, bigger, bigger, and to do that you've just got to borrow, borrow, borrow, and if the years are going to be bad, up and down, well what hope is there for a lot of them.

**Jim**: Don’t be so morbid.

**Maree**: I am not being morbid, but I think the small farmers, he is really and truly on the way out.

**Jim**: To sum it up, if you leave your son a farm these days. he is likely to sue you for child abuse.

**JIM JOHNSON**

One of the drawbacks of Jerramungup is the absentee owners, the vacant farms, whereas before every farm would have a family on it as times got tough, they moved out and sold out and the next farmer bought them up and very few new people moved in, so quite a number of places in the area there is one farmer owning 3 or 4 farms, there is 3 families gone. This affects the schools, it affects the school buses, it affects the towns, businesses and that sort of thing. It is sad but it is, I suppose it is called progress in a way but I am blessed if I know how, it's a retrograde step I think.

**REX EDMONDSON**

Because the development was done by the War Service Land Settlement Scheme you suddenly went from virtually no farmers to 130 in a period of 3 or 4 years, and that wouldn't have happened in the old methods of clearing where people just crept out across the edges of the boundaries of the last clearing and sought more land, and tended to pick their way through. Here is was just done in one huge slab.

One of the contractors, F J Canney's, unloaded 2 bulldozers here with that 14-ton chain on and they didn't load it up again until they were the other side of Ravensthorpe. They cleared blocks almost connecting one another all the way, and you could go past, it was in my shearing days you could go past the block in the morning on the way to work and come back in the afternoon and it was all just flat on the ground.

The instruction to the contractor was go a mile that way and a mile that way and we'll have a look what's in there, and down it all came and oops, bugger, we shouldn't have knocked that over, and its very difficult to get it back. It was virtually impossible with the scale that it was going at, if you had a 1500 - 2000 acre block down and there were 3 waterways in it that you wanted to re-vegetate it was almost impossible to keep fire out. You would put fire breaks in and all sorts but it was virtually impossible so 9 times out of 10 the whole lot got burnt and you would say well, righto we'll just let that bit grow back, but its never quite the same, and in fact if it was country that didn't have poison in it, it was never fenced out so stock cleaned up the new growth that was there.

The thing that had the biggest impact on me over that time I was fire captain here for about 7 years through that heyday of clearing, and that was just an amazing experience because every year during that 7 or 8 year period you knew from the 28th of February when the burning season opened through until the end of March that every second day you would be out and you would burn 2,000-5,000 acres in the day, and to go out and burn 300 was a pretty poor day.

There were people who were just set up to fail. They convinced the board of 3 or 4 people, the Lands Board, that they could make a go of it, but with their background they were just never going to make it, financially or with the skills that they had. So to some extent we should have said, no, sorry.

They do a lot of damage in those last 10 years that they are on those properties because they are desperate, they will go much, much lower down than an economist thinks you can. Economists draw lines and say a farming family can't stay here at that level, and in every case they go way, way, way below that level. But they do environmental damage on the way, because they can't get the inputs, they can't afford to take the risks, they take risks but they can't afford to get into sustainable systems so they tend to continue to degrade until they eventually just fizz and grind to a stop. And then somebody else has got to come along and pick up the damage, of course.

**PETER LUSCOMBE**

There seems to be a bit of a fallacy with Australia and what we call drought and extreme circumstances. Really in Australia that's all you get, bloody droughts and floods and this and that and it’s all over the place, it’s not a soft fuzzy climate, it’s what makes Australia is its extremes. And when you talk about drought hitting the farming sector, it’s just a normal season and the farming sector is just in the way, it’s got in the way of it - and really people in farming should be treating it as a business, and you plan for those dodgy seasons, the ones that sort of swing wildly, that's just part of surviving, it should be, but if government is always there ready to fork out for any little slight blip on the graph, are they ever going to worry about planning for it? In my business I don't think the government would ever dream of, if suddenly we didn't sell too much seed, they wouldn't rush and say here's some money just so you can keep going, so you can buy that new ute this year, no way, so we've got to plan for it.

**NATHAN MCQUOID**

Chain it all, burn it and then disc plow it, to get the stumps and root material out, back and forth, just wrecking it with the disc plow to get it into some sort of submission so you could sow a crop into it. Disc plow it and then rake with a root rake... I remember driving the tractor round and round, with the stick rake, and you'd go around and come up against the bush and the mallee fowl would be out wandering around picking the seeds that were a result of the raking process, and then the black glove wallabies would be out there late in the afternoon doing the same sort of thing, and we were out shooting one night, dare I say it, for vermin, which were wildlife, and in fact this place was called Taronga Park, and it was called that because vermin abounded out there, there was lots of wild life out there, and I remember chasing a woylie around a plow, around a 20 disc Chamberlain plow. All my mates wanted to shoot it, and I said no, don't, I think this is important, I think this is a bit odd, and I tried to catch it. I'm glad I didn't because it would have torn me to bits, but that's what it was.

All this stuff is here that's doing fine, all this incredible diversity, and we want to homogenise with a wheat crop that you could do anywhere, so why trash this for that? I remember looking, thinking about all the agricultural goings on, and thinking, God, we've got to drive tractors around in circles and trash the soil in order to get the magic thing of 7 bags to the acre. But it just seemed a complete waste to want to do that, rather than repugnant, it just didn't seem clever.

Well, it is noticeable that things like black cockatoos are diminishing, that's a sad story that, because you can still see lots of them around but they are very old and a lot of them would be beyond breeding, so the fragmentation of the landscape has meant that they haven't got secure places to breed, the woodlands, for instance, with the hollows to breed in. And all the heathlands to eat in, all the hakeas and the dryandras and all that stuff that they eat. And that's an indication of a great shame, I think, of what has gone on, we didn't even know.... and many of those would have been born, probably all would have been born in woodlands that don't exist anymore.

If I knew then what I knew now, I wouldn't have been able to do it, I don't think, but it was just scrub, and I was in amongst the just scrub thought processes, but its not just scrub. The smells were the overwhelming thing, the smell of the pines, Actinostrobus, Caliatrus, the inland pines, the eucalyptus smells, and all the little things, and all the cockroaches and all the creatures running around.

I reckon it's the homogenous views that most of the community has that is the biggest problem, not the salinity, not the biodiversity loss, although they are significant issues, the dilemma is that as we are too mono-dimensional in our thoughts about landscape and about how we even live with it. So its not about change its about adapting to what is going on suitably, that is really important, more so than trying to fix salt, because you can't, its like trying to say we want to try to fix the planet, or fix Jupiter, how and why and so what, or fix an ocean, I mean, you are not going to do it, it’s just not like that.I don't think it's a fix problem or a fix thing, I think it's a live with and make the most of and be careful with thing.

**DON COCHRANE**

It was well known then that's 105 years ago, that removal of tree species was causing salinity and degradation. It was well known, and yet over the years we have pretended that it is something new, that this business of having 6 million hectares of saline land is something that someone has just discovered.

A lot of people, particularly in rural areas where farmers haven't had great incomes for the last 10 years, they have got this, or they are developing a mental attitude that the problem is so great that they in their lifetime won't be able to make a contribution to fix it up. All they hear about is Western Australia has the potential to have 6 million hectares of saline affected land, and that is almost enough to scare people off forever, and almost think well we can't do anything about it, it develops a hopeless situation.

I can remember when I was going to school the government of the day had this policy of opening up a million hectares of new land, I mean, when it was well known that the cycle for salt to express itself after clearing is somewhere in the vicinity of 15-25 years, and there were thousands of hectares of saline land or secondary salinity in Western Australia then, and yet they still had this policy of opening up new land, so it is difficult to blame people but I don't think farmers should be given all the blame for what has happened in the past.

Throughout those years it has in most cases been someone else from outside the agricultural areas or the communities who has almost held the hand and forced the farmers to clear the land the way they have. We've had the situation where banks would not lend money to farmers unless they removed all the vegetation, that went on for years and years... And then we have had government departments, and particularly the Agriculture Department which I can remember in the 1960's developed farm plans, and if you cleared your farm with one of their farm plans which was the thing to do in those day, today you would probably have one of the worst cleared farms in the district.

I can see there is going to be enormous friction between those people lower in the landscape and those people higher in the landscape, and it would be a very bold person who decided to take his higher neighbour to court and do something about it, but eventually something like that will happen.

There are certain things that need changing legislatively to make it so that everyone knows what their position is as a farmer, and what the expectation is from the wider community, and perhaps the sooner that happens the better, because I think we are spending a lot of time and money pouring into land care projects and research and implementation and fencing off vegetation and all these scheme that have got grants of money, and yet one person is doing that but the next door neighbour is just degrading the land, so I mean, what is the point? It is almost pointless to waste public money if there is no requirement for everyone to understand what their obligation as a landowner is.

We seem to be all competing with each other, every farmer is an individual business, and if they had the opportunity, they would like to get rid of the one next to them, because he is a competitor. And I would imagine a lot of farmers would be looking over the fence hoping that the next door neighbour, whether they are their friend or a valued member of the community, does decide to sell. There is this almost cut throat mentality that has been promoted by get big or get out.

We have got this culture here whereby we produce so much from our land and our farms, and then it goes out the farm gate. We never ever enjoy what our land produces, and that is one of the reasons why I think we tend not to have the same affinity to our land and care for our land as much as other cultures do.

But talking about different cultures, within the community there is an Italian community that settled here many years ago, and I was talking to some of them just recently, and we were talking about stress and I just happened to remark how stressful it is going to be with the long dry season and feeding sheep all the time, and all the worries of farming, and one of these young farmers said oh you don't need to worry about stress, I am not that stressed, and I said how come, and he said you have to think about the good things in life, and surprisingly most of the good things in life come from the land, and are food based, and he gave me the example of milking the cow and making their own cheese, and then growing tomatoes and having sun dried tomatoes, and mentioned olive oil, and then home-made bread, and by the time we had finished I was just about dying of hunger, and he said there is nothing more enjoyable than coming in from the paddock and sit down to some home-made cheese, some lightly toasted home-made bread with olive oil poured on it as well as tomatoes, and then follow it up with a glass of red wine... it is just the fact that yes, we seem to have developed this culture that we have to work the land like mad and have more land and less time for the little things in life.

I am sure that we would appreciate our land far more if we enjoyed the benefits of what the land produced. We don't taste it, we don't smell it, we don't actually feel it. Take wool for instance, we spend the whole year nurturing the sheep and growing the fleece, same as our grain, we don't follow that through. One of the very few things that we do, though, follow through is wine, and I am sure that is what makes wine growers very understanding of their land and all the natural inputs into producing good quality grapes to produce good quality wine.

**KINGSLEY VAUX**

There is a lot of farmers who could look after their land properly but it is the hip pocket, it is the finance. You can't spend money on land care knowing that you are not going to get a return on that in the first 12 months, you just can't do it. And the people that require the money to be spent on their farms are the ones that are more broke too, you can see farms almost just about blowing away, salt coming up on them, and they are the ones that really do need to spend big dollars on that. They are not going to make it, it is obvious. They will never ever have the money to spend on it because of our constraints, as far as what we are getting paid for our wheat and barley and all our products. If it took a quantum leap and all of a sudden wheat went from $200 a tonne to $400 a tonne, guaranteed there would be 5-600% more land care work done, because you would have a commodity there that is worth something, and you would have a value, and have a thriving business, and it would work. But until we are able to be financial, there is not going to be a lot of work. And you can see it, land is going downhill, it will maybe turn into, not a desert, but it is heading that way.

**GARRY ENGLISH**

At the moment the conventional systems are running us into the ground. We are mining our resource or degrading our resource, and you only have to look at the salinity projections and that is very, very scary, and we are going to have to adjust to that because frankly I don't believe that that issue is going to be able to stop, even if we did everything right today, there is going to be an impact that is going to continue for the next 10 or 15 years whether we like it or not.

There is going to have to be major adjustments to the way the land is managed, certainly when salinity comes in a bigger way we are going to have to probably adjust some of that saline land out of the system and manage it in a different way. We certainly should be managing our water ways and taking some of those out of the system and readjusting properties to management boundaries rather than the grid lines that we are working on at the moment, which look nice on a map but frankly they don't recognise the landscape.

And it is written, we have very strong acts which could virtually shut down agriculture tomorrow, but nobody is prepared to bring that to bear. We have got Environmental Protection Acts, and we have got the Soil and Land Conservation Act, and frankly that is a 1945 act, but some of the clauses in that are very, very strict, very hard, but never brought to bear.

There should be assistance to adjust but not propping people up to stay the same, if you are propped up to stay the same that is a major weakness and while I have a lot of sympathy for people at the moment going through this exceptional circumstance period because they have had a couple of frosts and a drought three years in a row, but the adjustment is not happening there to manage the land and allow us to cater for those events.

Then there was a drought in 1982 or '83, '83 in particular. That really did test people out financially... and the government of course always jump to the party of propping up very quickly if there is a drought or a flood, and so we saw quite a bit of drought assistance come about at that stage, and quite often drought assistance or flood assistance or any of these assistance measures masks the underlying problem that our industry is not able to stand on its own feet, it can't manage down turns in whatever, whether it be weather, or whether it be markets or whatever, so I think we were seeing some of the market signals then that something was wrong with the industry. Some people were doing very, very well, but there was just that niggling feeling that I certainly felt that there was something wrong and we had to change.

Something which I am very keen on is just managing and trying to look after those last elements of the environment which are out there which are not necessarily productive things, but they also give us a feeling of wellbeing frankly... We didn't have a lot to start with, it was already cleared and over cleared, but we have revegetated and put in a lot of rehabilitation of our wetlands and water ways and a couple of very good native vegetation patches which have all been protected, as all vegetation is protected on this property, so we have got some very good habitat and some very good flora and fauna, and I feel well about that. This then goes back to the social thing and it is something that makes you feel proud of being on the land, is the fact that you can feel good about something, that it is not degrading, you will see, every now and then you will go out to a patch of bush and you will see a new bird there or something that you hadn't seen before, it might be a little insect or whatever, that gives you a bit of spark... That is part of agriculture, it is not a matter of saying we have got to manage every acre for production and dollars, you have to manage the whole system because you just can't segregate out the profitable land and abandon the rest.

If you crop it till it crashes, a term I have heard, and you go for broke, and you put everything into it, and all your eggs in the one basket and you are very, very exposed, but if you pull it all off, you really do make a killing economically, but for the long-term sustainability of the system, you are probably writing your own death bed. When you go to those high production, high yield, you tend to just about stretch the system until it just about snaps.

There is all sorts of issues out there, the reduction of what is seen as our biodiversity, now we have a duty to manage that but I know from our industries side that a lot of people say well that is not what we are here for, we came here to farm this country, now I don't believe we can necessarily farm in isolation of the environment, that is just not right, we are part of the world environment and frankly you just can't operate in isolation.

**DR. DENIS SAUNDERS**

Something like 190 species of bird that has been recorded from the wheatbelt of WA, and many of them would have been from the southern parts of the wheatbelt, I would predict that over the next 50 years possibly 50% of those will disappear from SW Australia, simply because of the changes that we have wrought on the landscape, and you could say OK but what does that matter, who cares? But we may be losing something that is functionally important, for example we know that most of Australian plants are pollinated by animals, now we have lost a lot of the invertebrates, the honey eaters are now a very, very important component of that process of reproduction for the plants. You lose the honey-eater community and you may well have frozen those plants to where they are, because basically what you are talking about is the living dead, and they will only survive as long as those plants are alive, because they are not going to reproduce.

We produce wheat, we are told we produce wheat very efficiently, yet we know that in every tonne of wheat we produce there are minus X Carnaby's Cockatoos, minus X hectares of native vegetation, plus Z millimeters per year of rising water table, plus X tonnes per hectare of salt coming to the surface. Now that's in every tonne of wheat averaged over the landscape. None of those are costed into the cost of production... Do you hear anybody say that is part of our accounting system? So, when we make decisions on how we dispose of the native systems, it is done on a flawed economic accounting basis, and so we need to raise that sort of economic awareness into ecological awareness so that we actually start making decisions on a basis that doesn't discount the future.

But the issue is why aren't we paying the true production costs for primary produce. I am effectively getting subsidized bread and I don't think that's fair. I say we are subsidising our agricultural production heavily using the environment to do it.

We've got to get away from treating and managing nature in straight lines, even agriculture doesn't make sense to manage in straight lines, we should be farming to soil type, we should be encouraging fencing to be changed.... There are areas where farmers should not even be wasting their time driving a tractor over, you know even if they seed them, they're not going to be productive. Why are we persisting in using those parts of the landscape ?

You drive around the paddocks around here and then have a look at those lovely old stately eucalypts and say well, hey we have got a great situation, this is iconic Australian landscape, isn't it, it is the sort of thing that was drawn by Hans Heysen in South Australia, you know that lovely, ‘our view of the developed bush’, and then you think hang on a minute, some of those trees have been there since Cook set off to Tahiti, but hang on, there don't appear to be too many young ones there, what happens when all those go, what is the landscape going to look like in 50 or 100 years’ time if we don't replace them?

We need to protect all we've got left, we just should be saying flatly, all native vegetation that we have left in these areas should be retained. Now there's a social issue there or a political issue - do you compensate people for not clearing, all those sorts of things. I'm taking that as a given, that they're going to be addressed because the first rule of environmental management in these landscapes is to protect all you have. That's the first rule of management.

**STEVE NEWBEY**

The investment of farming is rather like investing it on horses at the races on the weekend, it is very, very risky. When I gave up cropping, I still farm, I still run sheep, but when I gave up cropping, I likened cropping to drawing out $50,000 in one dollar notes and putting them out in the paddock and hoping that they were still there at the end of the year, and perhaps that they had multiplied a bit.

Unlike any other business, if you open up shop somewhere and it fails, well so what, you can move on and do something else, but if your farm fails and you stuff up the land, that land is stuffed up for everyone for the future, and I don't think we have got the right to do that, and I think real farmers accept that.

When members of your family have lived on the land for a long time you feel part of that land and you feel that you have got a responsibility to, in my case I feel that I have a responsibility to repair the damage that my family has done to this land before I finish with it.

They have developed their farm. They have cleared the land, they have fenced the place, they have put in dams, they have built houses and sheds, they have bought machinery and they have paid off debts, and that is developing a farm, but in the process of developing that we have created a lot of wrongs that we have got to right, and we really need to go into a new development phase where we put a great bulk of our income into repairing the damage that we have done, much like we did when we put a great bulk of our income into developing the land in the first place. The difference is, of course, in those days there was a large surplus that you could put into developing the land whereas today there is a very small surplus put into repairing that damage.

**END CREDITS for**

**A Million Acres A Year**

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The filmmakers acknowledge the Noongar People

of the South Coast of Western Australia

whose tribal country this film depicts

... and whose story has yet to be told

Thanks to all those who appear in the film

for their testimonies, advice & production support

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**MUSIC**

**(in order of occurrence)**

“Piano Collage I”

Composed & Performed by Michael Hannan

“Torquing Points”

Composed by Gordon Kerry

Performed by Melbourne String Quartet

“Hands On”

Composed by Stephan Bull

Published by Sony Records

Performed by The Sydney Mandolins

“Clocks”

Composed by Elena Kats Chernin

Published by Boosey & Hawkes

Performed by Sydney Alpha Ensemble

“Circle Journey”

Composed & Performed by Michael Hannan

“Rough Cut”

Composed by Stephan Benfall

Performed by Nova Ensemble

“Cold Air Rising”

Composed by Cathie Travers

Performed by Nova Ensemble

“Ex Terra”

Composed by Adrian Keenan

Performed by WATT

“Reflections”

Composed by Ross Edwards

Published by Universal Edition

Performed by Synergy

“Summer”

Composed & Performed by Cathie Travers

“Chambre of Horrors”

Composed by Elena Kats-Chernin

Published by Boosey & Hawkes

Performed by Marshall McGuire

“Raindance”

Composed by Cathie Travers

Performed by Cathie Travers & Gary Ridge

“Homage to Bessemer”

Composed by Robert Douglas

Performed by WATT

“Monolith”

Composed by Cathie Travers

Performed by Cathie Travers & David Pye

“Piano Collage II”

Composed & Performed by Michael Hannan

“Valley of the Winds”

Composed & Performed by Michael Hannan

“Hymn to the Sun”

Composed by Andrew Ford

Performed by Kowmung Music Festival Ensemble

“Reflection”

Composed & Performed by Cathie Travers

“Mists”

Composed & Performed by Cathie Travers

“Paleyaga”

Composed by Cathie Travers

Performed by Cathie Travers & Friends

“Venus and the Sickle Moon”

Composed & Performed by Colin Offord

“To the gods”

Composed by David Chesworth

Published by Festival

Performed by David Chesworth & Friends

**MUSIC RECORDINGS COURTESY OF**

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Move Records

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***The Australian’s* review of A MILLION ACRES A YEAR**

**Asa Wahlquist’s feature review in *The Australian*, 8 March 2003**

THIS is a powerful piece of work. It is the story of some of the worst environmental destruction of our lifetime, told in the plain-speaking voices of ordinary men and women, who were – quite unwittingly – part of that destruction and now seek to understand it, and be part of the solution.

The documentary recounts the postwar agricultural settlement of southern Western Australia, the opening of land for what they called new land farmers. The title comes from the Government's proud boast.

It is held together by Keith Bradby, who along with film-maker Frank Rijavec, conceived, researched and wrote it. As Bradby tells us at the beginning, new land farmers was a misnomer: the land in fact was some of the oldest in the world. Worse, he says, not even the mistakes they made in settling it were new.

Archival footage, of earth movers pulling chains, knocking down the vegetation, of lighting the bush, and the resulting great plumes of smoke, the disc ploughs churning through the newly exposed soils, are accompanied by heroic music. The voice-over continues the heroic theme, of frontier, opportunity and progress, promising "useless sand plains" would be turned into productive farmland.

Those first farmers, with considerable courage, tell us their stories.

They came as young men and women, with high hopes and good intentions. Many came from the east, and few had farming experience. They got cheap land, but it came with conditions. They had to clear and fence and farm: failure to fulfil those conditions meant forfeiting their land.

There were some good years. But they came to an end in with drought in 1969, followed by poor commodity prices. One-third of the farmers walked off their land. Others started to ask questions. Some seeing salt, refused to keep clearing, others insisted some of the bush be retained.

Then in the early '80s the dust storms hit.

In 1981, astonishingly, the state Government decided to open up yet more land to be cleared for agriculture. At this point Bradby entered the picture, campaigning to stop the releases, to save the bush.

Most powerful are the descriptions by the farmers themselves, first of the realisation that what they had done was destructive, and second, knowing that they had to change.

The stories of these modest men and women, who were prepared to hold up and examine what they most cherished in life, and then with enormous courage to change how they managed the land, packs a punch no lecture by an environmentalist could ever match.

Like the farmer describing how he had believed that farming, feeding the starving of the world, held enormous value, but on seeing his land blow away, realised he had to change. Or the farmer questioning why they should trash (his word) 2000 species of native bush, to replace them with just half a dozen agricultural crops.

That 50 years of agriculture was undoing 3 billion years of evolution.

Their part of Western Australia is not useless sand plains. It is, in fact, among the 25 richest areas in the world when it comes to biodiversity. It has about 2000 plant species, more than in all of Australia's rainforests.

This was for all of them a key realisation, learning to see beauty, to value and cherish what previously has been regarded as worthless.

Land management there is changing, and the documentary shows some heartening examples, but not fast enough and not thoroughly enough. As one farmer asks, what is the point of spending government money on Landcare, on farmers working to rehabilitate their land, when the next-door neighbour is free to keep degrading the land?

***A Million Acres a Year* is a haunting work. It is simple in telling a deeply complex problem. It captures perfectly a period in our history when our relationship to our land changed profoundly. It is a deeply felt, compassionate work, that does not resile from the scale of the destruction it documents. This deserves to become an Australian classic. I cannot recommend it highly enough.**

Asa Wahlquist

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