

TO SPEAK WITH ONE VOICE: THE QUEST BY AUSTRALIAN
FARMERS FOR FEDERAL UNITY.

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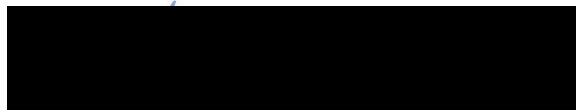
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CERTIFICATE

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being currently submitted for any other degrees.

I certify that to the best of my knowledge any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

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Signature

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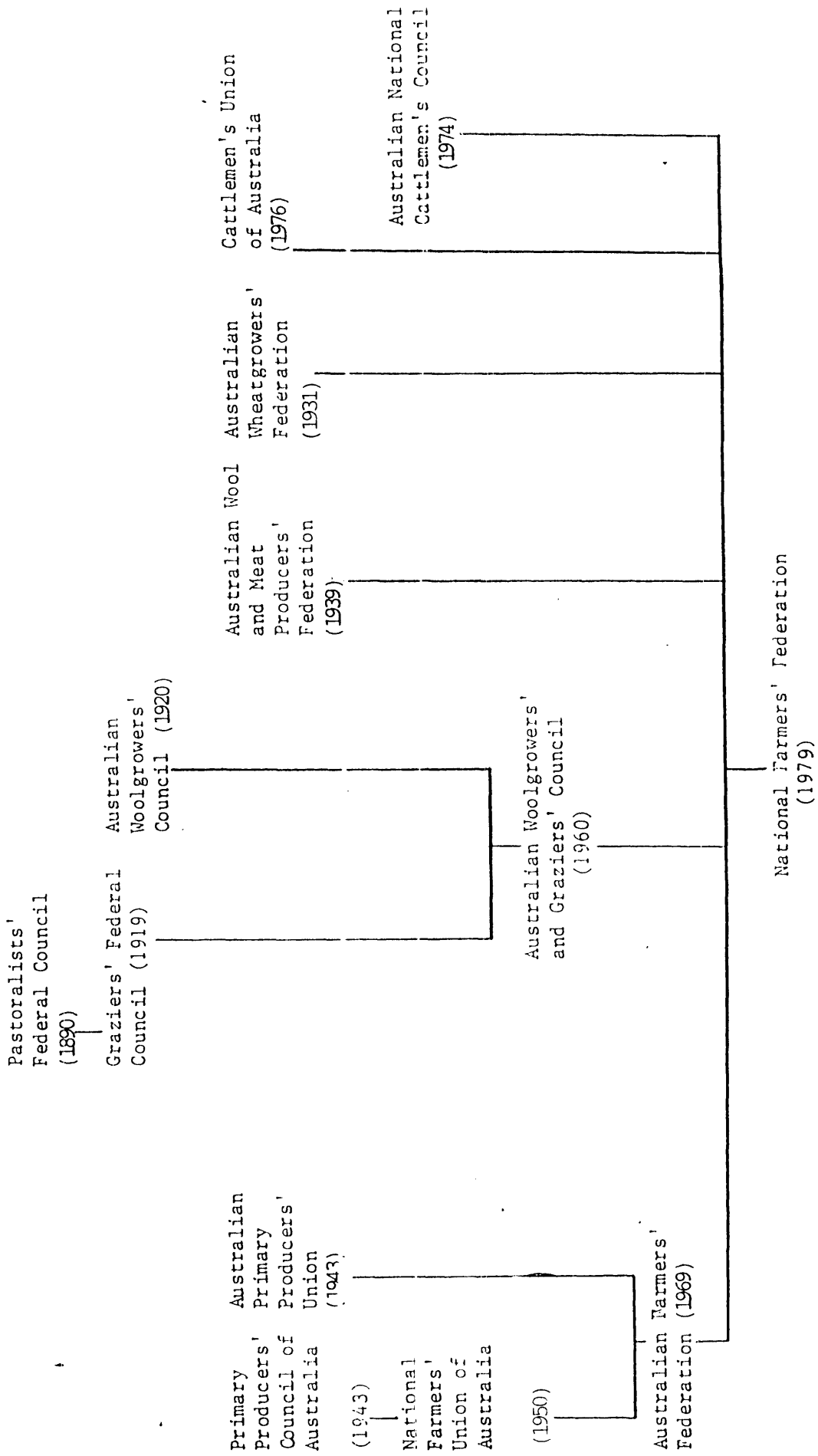
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ABBREVIATIONS

AAC	Australian Agricultural Council
AFF	Australian Farmers' Federation
AFFO	Australian Farmers' Federal Organisation
ANCC	Australian National Cattle Council
ANU	Australian National University
ANU archives	Noel Butlin Archives Centre
AMIEU	Australian Meat Industry Employees' Union
AWMPF	Australian Wool and Meat Producers' Federation
ASU	Amalgamated Shearers' Union
APPU	Australian Primary Producers' Union
AWC	Australian Woolgrowers' Council
AWGC	Australian Woolgrowers and Graziers' Council
AWIC	Australian Wool Industry Conference
AWF	Australian Wheatgrowers' Federation
AWMPF	Australian Wool and Meat Producers' Federation
AWU	Australian Workers' Union
BAE	Bureau of Agricultural Economics
BIG	Basic Industries Group
CCA	Cattle Council of Australia
CCGA	Central Coast Graziers' Association
FAC	Federal Amalgamation Committee
FSA	Farmers and Settlers' Association
GFC	Graziers' Federal Council
IAC	Industries Assistance Commission
NFF	National Farmers' Federation
NFU	National Farmers' Union
NRAC	National Rural Advisory Council
PGA	Pastoralists and Graziers' Association of W.A.
RAM	Rural Action Movement
UGA	United Graziers' Association of Queensland
UFWA	United Farmers and Woolgrowers' Association



REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

To my knowledge, this study is the first thesis on the search for, and the attainment of, "one voice" for Australia's farmers. David Trebeck provides a resume of the farm unity movement culminating in the establishment of the NFF in *Farmer Organisations*, Chapter Nine of *Agriculture in the Australian Economy*, third edition, D.B. Williams (ed.), (Sydney, 1990) but, with space limited to just a chapter, a detailed analysis was not possible. There were several journal articles and seminar papers on the topic of farm unity written before the NFF concept took hold. In the first edition of Williams (ed.) (Sydney, 1967), G.D'a Chislett in Chapter Five, *Primary Producer Organisations*, discusses the development of farm organisations and efforts to attain unity up to the mid-1960s, while K.O. Campbell, *Australian Farm Organisations and Agricultural Policy*, *Australian Journal of Agricultural Economics*, (December, 1966), argues strongly against farm unity. He claims that the interests of the broader community were best protected under a pluralistic set-up where politicians and administrators received advice from several farm organisations. He feared a "monolithic farm bloc" that would have too much power to the detriment of other groups. Campbell questions why anyone should expect an industry so divided by politics, marketing philosophies and geography to be united? Grant Harman also cast doubt on the achievement of farm unity. In his seminar paper, *To Speak With One Voice: Australian Farm Organisations and the Quest for Unity* (Australian National University, May 1967), Harman said that unity had become an obsession with most farmers but exactly what was meant by unity was seldom explained.

Two unpublished Ph.D. theses, Grant Harman's *Graziers in Politics* (ANU, 1968) and Keith Richmond's *Rural Politics and Emotion* (University of New England, 1979) are, respectively, detailed studies of the Graziers' Association of NSW and the United Farmers and Woolgrowers' Association of NSW, the two organisations that merged in 1978 and united graziers and farmers for the first time anywhere in Australia. Both studies raise the question of farm unity while providing insights into the reasons why farmers and graziers remained apart for almost 100 years. R.F.I. Smith's

unpublished Ph.D. thesis, *Organise or be Damned* (ANU, 1969) is primarily concerned with the formation of the rebel state wheatgrower organisations that emerged in the 1920s and, within a few years, formed the Australian Wheatgrowers' Federation. Smith's study ends in 1948 and is as much about dissension as unity in explaining why many wheatgrowers left the Farmers and Settlers' Associations to branch out on their own.

Harman's thesis is an excellent examination of how one farm organisation perceived its role as a pressure group and set about achieving its objectives, but Australia lacks a detailed historical analysis of the entire farm sector as a pressure group. Such a task would, however, be daunting because of the deep divisions that existed within that sector of Australian society. Trevor Matthews describes a pressure group as a "non-party group that makes a claim, either directly or indirectly, on the government so as to influence the making or administering of public policy".¹ Australia's primary producers did not fit Matthews' definition of a single pressure group because they often made conflicting claims. For example, later chapters of this thesis will highlight the deep divisions between farmer and grazier organisations on how the annual wool clip should be marketed. Farmers demanded government backing for the implementation of a reserve price scheme while graziers adhered to the free auction system. As a pressure group, primary producers often frustrated policy makers with their conflicting claims leading senior politicians to demand that they "speak with one voice."

Matthews wrote that overlapping producer organisations and disunity was the result of historical tradition, organisations jealously guarding their prescriptive rights, Australia's commodity-oriented policy-making, personal animosity between certain leaders and a relatively small number of matters of common interest over sustained periods. He said that agriculture "is not a unified homogeneous entity; it contains diverse and often conflicting

¹Trevor Matthews, *Pressure Groups in Australia*, Chapter 25 of *Australian Politics: A Second Reader*, edited by Henry Mayer, Melbourne, 1969. p.235.

interests".² Peter Loveday comments that pressure groups representing producer interests are in a very different situation from groups, such as the Returned Servicemen's League with its ability to appeal to patriotism to improve benefits for members or the Australian Medical Association that is concerned with the professional status of doctors and opposes the "socialisation" of medicine. Each producer group, Loveday argues, can expect its claims to be opposed by other groups with claims as legitimate as its own. In addition, pursuing their demands is more complicated than the relatively simple task of the RSL because several government departments or agencies can have an input into decisions that affect them.³

There are several undergraduate papers worthy of examination by students of rural pressure groups. They are J.B. Hodsdon's *Two Case Studies of Primary Industry Organisations: The National Farmers' Union of Australia and the Australian Wool Industry Conference* (UNE, 1965), Stuart Pigginn's *An Inquiry into the Reasons for the Formation of the Pastoralists' Union of NSW and its Policies and Actions in its First Year* (University of Sydney, 1965), and Maree Barclay's *A Time of Crisis: The Genesis of the United Graziers' Association of Queensland and the Cattlemen's Union of Australia* (Capricornia CAE, 1983).

Official histories of farm organisations suffer from the usual problems of bias as to their achievements and the quality of their leaders but, nevertheless, they can be valuable sources, especially in relation to records of meetings and conferences, decisions taken and a chronology of events. Official histories consulted for this study were J.O. Randell, *Teamwork, a History of the Graziers' Association of Victoria and Riverina* (Melbourne, 1982), W.A. Bayley, *History of the Farmers and Settlers' Association of NSW* (Sydney, 1957), R.F. Mercer, *On Farmers' Service: A Short History of Farmers' Organisation in Western Australia* (Perth, 1955), Neva Maisey, *No Man Alone*, (Perth, 1979), a history of the Pastoralist

²*Ibid.* p.242.

³Peter Loveday, Chapter 19, *Pressure Groups in Australia: A Survey*, edited by V.G. Venturini, Hamburg, 1970. pp.383-7.

and Graziers' Association of Western Australia, Ruth Kerr, *Freedom of Contract: A History of the United Graziers' Association of Queensland* (Brisbane, 1990), Angela Moffatt, *A History of the Graziers' Association of Central and Northern Queensland* (Brisbane, 1989), Penny Schmalkuche, *Cottlemen's Union: The First Decade* (Moorooka, Queensland, 1991) and George Mitchell, *Official History of the Victorian Wheat and Woolgrowers' Association, 1927-1968*. (Melbourne, 1969). Mitchell has done little more than precis the minutes of executive meetings and conferences but his book remains a useful source.

Because the roots of the Country Party (now National Party) lie within the early Australian farm organisations, there is a wealth of information on such organisations in studies of the party. The most significant work in this area is D.B. Graham's *The Formation of the Australian Country Parties*, (Canberra, 1966), a detailed and very readable work on the rise of farm organisations in every state and their search for a political voice. Ulrich Ellis should not be dismissed by researchers because of his long association with the Country Party. His two books, *A History of the Australian Country Party* (Melbourne, 1963) and *The Country Party-A Political and Social History of the Party In New South Wales* (Melbourne, 1958) are vital sources for anyone studying the history of farm organisations. D.A. Aitkin's *The Country Party in New South Wales: A Study in Organisation and Survival* (Canberra, 1972) is another good source that could be read along with his study of the early leader of the NSW Country Party, *The Colonel: A Political Biography of Sir Michael Bruxner* (Canberra, 1969).

For more recent material on the National (formerly Country) Party see *Country to National: Australian Rural Politics and Beyond*, edited by Brian Costar and Dennis Woodward (Sydney, 1985) and *For Better or Worse: The Federal Coalition*, edited by Brian Costar (Melbourne, 1994). In the introductory chapter to *Country to National*, Costar and Woodward point out that only in Australia and Scandinavia do the rural-based parties, formed early this century, still survive. But because of significant transformations of the Scandinavian parties-for example, the Swedish Agrarian Party changed its name to the Centre Party in 1957 and now champions

environmental protection-the National Party in Australia was the only true survivor. Costar and Woodward write that the success of rural-based parties in establishing price support systems for farmers had removed or lessened the sense of farmer grievance.⁴ My thesis argues that the relevance of the National Party in Australia to farmers has decreased because farm leaders have moved well ahead of the party in promoting an efficient, competitive economy that lowers tariff barriers and eliminates support measures, including those for agriculture. The party makes little contribution to the economic debate and basically holds the electoral support of farmers by promoting traditional rural values such as loyalty to the flag and the monarchy and opposing the recognition of homosexual families. There will be more on this in Chapter Two.

In *For Better or Worse* Costar discusses the erosion of support for the National Party, especially in coastal NSW and Queensland, the party's long-running image problem leading to the adoption of a variety of titles over recent decades and whether its survival (or extinction) rests with an amalgamation with the Liberal Party. Costar notes that the National Party is seen as an "anachronistic throwback" by many political commentators and some academics and, despite its 80 years of existence, "the dogs continue to bark that the party's days are numbered". However, he argues that it is a long way from extinction.⁵ The National Party's survival is outside the scope of my thesis but the point will be made that the emergence of a united voice for farmers in the national capital has decreased the the relevance and prestige of the party. The National Farmers' Federation is a front runner in the economic debate, the National Party is a long way behind.

A number of books have been written on specific primary industries which contain significant information on farm organisations. They include F. Eric Hitchins' *Tangled Skeins* (Melbourne, 1956) and *Skeins Still Tangled* (Melbourne, 1972) which, despite Hitchins' leadership of the Australian Wool and Meat

⁴See pp.2-3.

⁵Chapter 9, *The National Party: Revival or Extinction*. pp.130-1.

Producers' Federation in its fight for a wool reserve price against the opposition of the Australian Woolgrowers and Graziers' Council, give valuable insights into the divisions between farmers and graziers. Tom Connors' *The Australian Wheat Industry: Its Economics and Politics* (Armidale, 1972) devotes attention to the determination of the Australian Wheatgrowers' Federation to be the sole voice of Australian wheatfarmers and maintain price stabilisation schemes in place. Significant references to the AWF will also be found in Greg Whitwell and Diane Sydenham's *A Shared Harvest* (Melbourne 1991) and Edgars Dunsdorfs' *The Australian Wheat-Growing Industry, 1978-1948*, (Melbourne, 1956).

Among the many official reports on Australia's primary industry (and a number are referred to in this thesis) the most significant comments on farm organisations are contained in the Tenth Report of the Rural Reconstruction Commission, *Commercial Policy In Relation to Agriculture* (Canberra, 1946). The dissenting comments by S.M. Wadham dispute his fellow commissioners' belief that farmers could unite in a national body for the good of both agriculture and the country. Wadham declared that farm leaders lacked breadth of vision and that their only concern was demanding higher prices for their produce. This, until the 1970s at least, appeared true of most farm leaders.

For the later years of this study-from the 1970s on-I have relied heavily upon interviews with past and present farm organisation leaders and their executive officers, former federal ministers, other politicians and senior public servants.⁶ I am grateful for the practice adopted by the NSW Graziers' Association in depositing its records, going back to 1890, at the Noel Butlin Archives Centre at the Australian National University. The association's officers, encouraged by chief executive, John White, continued this practice after amalgamation with the United Farmers and Woolgrowers' Association in 1978. They also deposited material that came to them from other organisations but this, unfortunately, cannot fully compensate for the fact that some farm organisations discarded

⁶Names and dates are included in the Selected Bibliography.

records as filing cabinets filled up. This lack of a sense of history is regretted by researchers.

Certain officers took it upon themselves to deposit material with the ANU archives, despite the fact that it was not a priority with their employers. They were Alex Norquay, former secretary of the Australian Farmers' Federation and the National Farmers' Union and Ian Waring, former executive director of the Australian Wheatgrowers' Federation. I am grateful to them. The AWF actually removed material from the National Library of Australia in the early 1970s after I revealed to its economist, T.S. Jilik, that its former secretary, T.C. Stott, had, apparently without authorisation, deposited copies of minutes of executive meetings. I had foolishly underestimated the AWF's preference for keeping academics (which it distrusted) and other researchers in the dark about its business. In my opinion, Stott's actions, which seemed out of character, resulted from a desire by him to ensure that, as the author of the minutes, his version of AWF history was the one recorded.