Chapter One

The NFF Family of Farm Interest Groups and Political Representation

1.1 Introduction

A flurry of amalgamations of farm interest groups in the late 1970s produced a peak interest-group structure the National Farmers’ Federation (NFF). The formation of the NFF in 1979 signalled a new phase in the political representation of primary producers. It evidenced a clear departure from a reliance on the party political system to effectively transmit the interests of farmers to the political sphere. Further, it signalled a determination by farmers to present a united position to government in order to maximise influence.

The NFF formed during a period of immense change in Australian agricultural policy. The policies of price support and government intervention were progressively replaced by policies of trade liberalism and self-regulation. As a result of this change, Australian agricultural producers are fully immersed in the global complex of international commodity trade and, as such, have become somewhat beholden to the vagaries of both European and North American trade policy. Domestically, farmers have been asked to become more self-reliant as the government withdraws services in line with the goal of creating a ‘managerial’ state (Fairbrother et al, 1998). Many agricultural producers have found the going hard as global citizens and price takers. The increasing acuteness with which adjustment pressures are being felt continues to be a source of considerable tension within the farming community.

It is no coincidence that radical policy change commenced just as the NFF came to political prominence. To achieve and legitimise changes of such magnitude in agricultural and broader economic policy, the state has required farmer organisations at national and state level to secure the compliance of its members (Coleman and Skogstad 1995; Trebeck 1990). As a consequence, the relationships between these organisations and the state has taken a distinctively new tenor. These peak organisations have entered
into more corporatist-type relationships with the state, hence facilitating many of the
deregulatory reforms that have led to a significant number of farmers enduring financial
hardship.

The state has praised the NFF's role in assisting significant policy change over a short
period of time. This, in addition to its use of professional economic research to inform
policy debates, has drawn the attention of academics who suggest it is a splendid example
of a professional, modern, peak interest-group structure. Predictably, the NFF, itself,
concurs with these evaluations. However, the role of farm interest groups in the reform
process and their relationship with the state has not been unproblematic. Early militancy
and falling membership levels of its state organisations indicate an increased level of
member disaffection with the NFF family. A series of consultancies reviewing
organisational direction indicated an urgency amongst NFF leadership to address these
implications (Michels Warren Pty. Ltd. 1993; NFF 1994 & 1996b; SAFF 1997b). In the
absence of any significant change to the policy position and tactics of the NFF family,
levels of member disaffection have increased, further catalysing a debate about the
capacity of existing interest groups to adequately represent farmers' interests. This debate
has been sharpened by the emergence of 'alternative' formations to articulate a range of
alternative positions to those of the NFF family, some complementary others
confrontational. Some of these formations mimic past political strategies whilst others
signify a fresh approach to securing political influence.

Given that it is the state member organisations of the NFF who have direct subscription-
paying farmer members, it is they who are the interface between the farm interest-group
family and their constituency. Consequently, this debate has had the gravest implications
for state farm organisations (SFOs). This thesis, therefore, considers the case of the New
South Wales Farmers' Association (NSWFA); its role as part of the NFF family; the
organisational ramifications of this debate, and how it has responded.

To set the context, this chapter will commence by outlining the NFF family of
organisations as they currently stand (Section 1.2). The changes in agricultural policy
(Section 1.3) and its ramifications for the agricultural sector (Section 1.4) will be discussed. The significant role of the NFF family in achieving the shift in agricultural policy (Section 1.5) and the self-evaluations of the group’s activities will be examined (Section 1.6). The challenges confronting the NFF family will be studied (Section 1.7). The NFF’s attempt to explain its role and the ramifications for the agricultural sector, in the context of the debate amongst farmers regarding their political representation, will be outlined (Section 1.8). Finally, the structure of the balance of the thesis will be outlined (Section 1.9).

1.2 **Australian Farm Interest Groups**

The National Farmers’ Federation (NFF) is the peak sectoral interest group for Australian farmers. Branching off the NFF are state farm organisations (SFOs) and commodity councils (CCs) (see Figure 1.1). There are affiliate and associate members of both the NFF and SFOs, who have limited roles in their umbrella bodies. The NFF is also a member of the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP)\(^1\).

At the time the NFF was established concern was expressed by commodity organisations that the full range of views encapsulated within membership would not be represented under the new structure. Recognition that commodities have historically had different views on matters such as protection and orderly marketing has resulted in a structure being designed which continued their autonomy, allowing each commodity freedom to pursue an agenda of their own choosing. This measure does not reduce internal division; rather, it normalises the division and assists in reducing the likelihood of it becoming an intermittent source of public embarrassment. The NFF Council does not have the constitutional mandate to intervene in disputes between commodities and, hence, is under no obligation to aggregate their sometimes disparate demands.

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\(^1\)Membership of this body was commenced under the auspices of the Primary Producers’ Council of Australia in 1946 (Bayley 1957, 106), was withdrawn in 1963 due to the NFU’s lack of attendance, and reinstated under the APPU in 1964 (Campbell 1966).
Figure 1.1. NFF Family of Organisations.

National Farmers' Federation
In a departure from the national commodity organisations that preceded it, the NFF has been based in Canberra since its formation. It is responsible for all issues that affect more than one state or more than one commodity. As the label 'federation' denotes, it does not have individual members, rather it has member organisations. The federal structure largely reflects the structure of the agricultural policy process and the federalist nature of Australian government (Campbell 1971, 149). In its early years the NFF was, itself, a member of an umbrella organisation, the Confederation of Australian Industry (CAI). However, it left the organisation on May 21, 1984, after a string of disputes with those CAI members who were resisting cuts to tariff levels and industry assistance measures².

As an organisational unit, the NFF is composed of an Executive Committee, a Council and Policy Committees. The Council meets twice a year to set policy whilst the

²This led to some consternation amongst the policy community. For instance, the NFF was the CAI's representative on the National Labor Consultative Council (NLCC). After their separation the NFF could no longer participate given the corporatist underpinnings of the Act which stated that the ACTU and CAI have six nominated representatives (Whitelaw 1984; Hughes 1984). The CAI amalgamated with the Australian Chamber of Commerce (ACC) in 1992 to form the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Bell 1994, 148).
Chapter One  The NFF Family and Political Representation

Executive Committee meets more frequently to implement and manage the NFF. Policy Committees are established by the Executive Committee to investigate matters of importance. The composition of committees is determined on the same basis as the executive. The NFF is fully funded by its constituent state bodies.

Commodity Councils (CCs)

Prior to the NFF, the only credible federal agricultural interest groups were those that were commodities-based. When the NFF formed, these organisations became autonomous CCs of the Federation. For example, the Australian Wool Industry Conference (AWIC), formed in 1962, had its roles taken over by the Wool Council of Australia (WCA) in 1979 under the new NFF structure. Similarly, the Australian Wheatgrowers’ Federation (AWF) joined the NFF in 1979 and soon after changed its name to the Grains Council of Australia (GCA). Other commodity representatives in rice, dairy and cattle industries repeated similar processes of amalgamation and name change.

Commodity Councils have autonomy over any issue that relates specifically to that commodity on a national basis. The relevant commodity section of the SFO pursues matters relating to a commodity in a particular state in question. Four of the most significant CCs — Grain, Wool, Sheep Meat and Cattle — maintain secretariats in Canberra. The others are based in various capital cities and some regional centres. CCs draw funding from a number of sources. As stated earlier, SFOs pay a fee for each allocated seat taken on a Council. For industries that operate under some level of statutory regulation, SFO subscriptions are subsidised by payments made to the Council.

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3The NFF Executive has 14 members whilst the Council has 37. The NFF members appoint delegates to the Council. The Council then elects Office Bearers of the NFF and appoints an Executive Committee. Voting Entitlement on the Council is as follows: SFO’s: NSW- 10, Vic.- 8, Qld- 7, WA- 5, SA- 4, NT- 1, Tas.- 1. CC’s: WCA- 6, GCA- 6, CCA- 5, ADEF- 3, SCA- 2, ACRC- 1, ACF-1, ADFA- 1, RGA- 1. Where there are two or more SFO’s in each state the voting entitlement shall be distributed based on mutual agreement. Each organisation is entitled to a councillor per two votes.

4Each committee comprises a chairman (elected by the Council), one delegate from each commodity council holding three or more votes on Council (WCA, CCA, GCA, ADFF), one delegate from each state (appointed by each state organisation) and one member representing the smaller commodity councils (Multi-Commodity Group). NFF Constitution 1995, Sub-Clause 30 (d).

5The location generally reflects the regional concentration of an industry. For example, Dairy Industry in Victoria, Rice in Leeton and Dried Fruits in Mildura.
by the relevant statutory organisation for ‘consultancy services’ provided. The Cattle Council of Australia (CCA) is a good example. Reportedly, each seat costs the relevant SFO $22,000. In addition, the CCA receives consultation funding of $340,000 per annum, representing 40 per cent of the CCA’s funding\(^6\).

The statutory bodies that provide these consultation payments are themselves funded from compulsory producer levies. Therefore, the major CCs are, in effect, subsidised by all levy-paying producers from that industry regardless of whether producers are NFF members. This has recently become a point of tension, with some farmers publicly objecting to compulsory levies supporting a NFF member organisation. In response, the NFF has suggested all payments to CCs, that are not made by SFOs, should be separately accounted for and attached to specific projects (Dick 1998c, 13).

**Associate and Affiliate Members**

Associate members are those organisations representing emerging agricultural industries. They are not given a policy role in the NFF but are allowed ‘observer status’ at Council meetings, in addition to access to staff and resources of the organisation and a copy of its publications. Affiliate members are those without a production or commodity focus. They are allowed all the privileges of Associate members with the exception of attendance at Council meetings. These two categories have grown significantly over the past few years; from one Associate and three Affiliate members in 1989 to five Associate and five Affiliate members in 1997. Importantly for the NFF, the most recent Affiliate is the Australian Women in Agriculture movement (AWiA). This raises the NFF’s profile in an area where rural Australia has seen to be lagging behind other sectors of Australian society.

**State Farm Organisations (SFOs)**

The State Farm Organisations (SFOs) are the foundation of the NFF family. They pay a contribution in order to be members of the Federation, as well as a subscription for a seat on relevant CCs. SFOs are the only organisations in the NFF family to have direct farmer

\(^6\) Executive Officer, NSW Meat Industry Conference, 1997, pers. comm., 5 Aug.
members and, hence, the only organisations that generate revenue from voluntary subscriptions. Given its extremely positive financial position, the NSWFA plays a disproportionately large role in funding the NFF, with some claiming it contributes one-third of the NFF’s funding. This financial strength also correlates with formal political strength as the NSWFA has the largest number of seats on the NFF Council.

SFOs pursue matters that are relevant to farmers in their state. The states still hold significant powers in relation to agriculture, consequently SFOs are important political actors and state departments and ministers of agriculture are important targets of influence. In all states, except for Queensland and Western Australia, there is only one SFO representing farmers. Queensland has three SFOs and WA two. Further formal organisational characteristics of one of its state organisations, the NSWFA, are described in detail (see Appendix One). This will provide the necessary background to later discussions on the NSWFA in particular.

Despite the conventional wisdom that federated interest-group structures are difficult to govern — leaders exercise low levels of internal autonomy which hamper their ability to make binding agreements on behalf of members (Abbott 1996) — the NFF is quite a different case. The federated structure provides space for NFF leaders to exercise considerable autonomy from individual farmer members by virtue of the SFOs’ willingness to deflect or absorb demands. The willingness of SFO leadership to defend NFF actions is central to the ongoing stable operation of the NFF and cements their power over the NFF (Connors 1996). Given that the SFOs are intermediaries between the NFF and its grassroots members, they are responsible for addressing membership concerns regardless of whether members are disillusioned with the SFO or the NFF, or

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7 John White, 1996, pers. comm. 14 October. NSWFA Executive Director (retired 1994).
8 The Wik Legislation proposed in 1997 is a case in point. As the states have power over the status of Crown land in the Western Division of NSW, it was the NSW government who had to decide if leases in that region were subject to Native Title claim or not. This led to hectic lobbying at a state level by the NSWFA, which was ultimately unsuccessful.
9 Attempts have been made in Queensland to rationalise the SFO structure. In 1993 there was a referendum of member of the UGA and CU about a merger. The result was a no vote. However a recent vote led to two Queensland farm groups merging to form ‘Agforce’ (NSWFA 1998, PR/161/98).
Chapter One  The NFF Family and Political Representation

whether the issue is national or state-based. Conversely, where the NFF’s relationship with the state requires farmers’ compliance, it is the SFOs that must ensure compliance and manage any resistance.

This thesis will argue that the high degree of interplay between organisational units establishes the NFF as a coherent ‘family’ of organisations and, as such, when the NFF is involved in adopting policy positions then so, too, are the SFOs. Therefore, whilst this thesis focuses on the NSWFA, the actions of the NFF are taken to signify the extension of the NSWFA policies at Federal level. That the NSWFA is the most wealthy of the SFOs and has a disproportionate role in funding the NFF, means that it, above all other member organisations, is likely to adopt a view consistent with that of the NFF leadership. It if for these reasons that the term NFF family is deployed.

1.3 Agricultural Policy Change: From a ‘state-assisted’ to ‘market-liberal’ paradigm

The NFF was forming at the same time as agricultural policy commenced a process of immense change. Australian agricultural policy post-1970s has undergone a dramatic shift from a ‘state-assisted’ to a ‘market-liberal’ paradigm (Coleman et al 1996, 275). Post-WWII agricultural policy in most developed countries has been based on a ‘state-assisted’ paradigm. This paradigm was founded on the two principles that ‘the agriculture sector contributes to national policy goals and therefore merits special attention [and] ... the price mechanism is a sub-optimal means of achieving an efficient and productive agricultural sector’ (Coleman et al 1996, 275). This paradigm employed the assumptions that, the income derived from production should be enough to sustain a farm family, technology transfer should contribute significantly to any increase in efficiency and marginal producers deserve government assistance to become commercially viable (Coleman et al 1996, 275).

In more recent times many have advocated the replacement of the ‘state-assisted’ paradigm; linking it with overproduction, high government costs and international trade tensions. The ‘market-liberal’ paradigm has been promoted as an alternative. This
paradigm has four central tenets. Firstly, agriculture is to be treated as any other economic sector. Secondly, a competitive market should be the source of a producer’s income. Thirdly, only producers who can earn an income from this competitive market should remain active. Finally, individual producers should be responsible for protecting themselves against adverse natural conditions through private insurance markets\textsuperscript{10}.

This broad change in policy direction is reflected by the shift in Australian agricultural policy from the ‘protection all round’ policy, synonymous with the McEwen era, to that of the post-1970s. After the Second World War, agriculture was still viewed as the primary source of foreign exchange for the nation, and so was given a central role in fixing the existing balance of payments problem. Import restrictions to dampen the import side of the balance of payments were in effect till 1960 (Gruen 1990, 20). On the export side, the government attempted to increase agricultural production through various measures including tax concessions, accelerated depreciation allowances and generous pricing policies for farmers on the domestic market (Gruen 1990, 20-1). A development bank was created to provide finance to primary production or to industrial enterprises where finance was not available on reasonable or suitable terms and conditions (Ellis 1963, 298). Governments pursued closer settlement policies (apparently marginally better implemented than those that followed WWI) and policies that promoted the intensification of agriculture (a move from sheep, beef and wheat to irrigated crops and dairying).

From the late 1960s, import restrictions on manufactured goods were withdrawn after it was accepted that a strong manufacturing sector was unlikely to flow from such measures. The minerals boom of the same era attracted investment away from other areas of primary industry, whilst the major market for agricultural produce shifted from Britain (now absorbed into the Common Market in Europe) to Japan (Gruen 1990, 22-3).

\textsuperscript{10}One assumes here that the Coleman et al would include purchasing futures and other associated risk management strategies against commodity price fluctuations as ‘insurance’. This assumption is made on the basis that within a neo-liberal paradigm ‘natural’ conditions could conceivably include the refined market system.
Consequently, the 1970s were a difficult time for primary producers. The capacity of primary producers to deal with cost-price discrepancies through normal measures, such as the application of new technologies, was diminishing (Grunen 1990, 23).

The policy thrust changed to reflect trade liberal assumptions post-1970s. Unlike in previous decades, agriculture was not treated as a 'special case'. Extra-parliamentary bodies such as the Industries Assistance Commission (IAC) provided a mechanism to review the levels of assistance for Australian industry, placing agriculture alongside all other industries. Each industry was investigated in terms of its capacity to grow the Australian economy and compete in a liberalised international trading environment. In accordance with the new policy paradigm, the NFF has been reinforcing the message 'What is good for rural Australia is good for the economy as a whole' (Donges 1998a), and that agriculture is 'just another industry' (Craik 1998a). Both statements are quite a departure from the special pleading characteristic of farm organisations in the pre 1980s.

It has been the aim of Australian agricultural policy for some time to ensure the farm sector operates in an undistorted market. Commencing with the Whitlam Government and gathering pace with successive governments, protection to industry has gradually been wound back. The Statutory Marketing Authorities (SMA), viewed by the DPIE 'as barriers to the integration of farming with agribusiness' (Lawrence et al 1992, 6), have slowly been corporatised and handed back to producers to operate.

Despite this trend, significant variation in the levels of protection exists between industries. For instance, the Textiles, Clothing and Footwear sector has a higher effective rate of protection than most agricultural industries (Wonder and Fisher 1990, 62) and the threatened reduction in tariff protection for the car-manufacturing industry was recently put on hold. However, in relation to agriculture, the 'free-traders' of the 1890s have largely prevailed. The decline in protection and subsidy is, for all practical purposes, an irreversible trend.
Given the decline in protection, Australian farmers are exposed to the full variation in world commodity prices. Australia has led the world in the reduction of industry protection, particularly in agriculture, and, hence, its industries must compete with subsidised goods from the European Union and the United States. Rural industries, such as those producing oranges, pork and tobacco, have often become the casualties (Trainor 1997, 15). The government’s countervailing strategy has been to pursue the freeing up of world trade through the Cairns group at GATT and WTO forums. A strategy apparently pursued with only a modicum of success.

The deregulation of both the currency and financial systems were significant events in the transition to a new policy paradigm. The deregulation of the dollar achieved, in part, the integration of Australia’s domestic economy with the rest of the world. The deregulation of the financial system coincided with high world interest rates and consequently the end of the 1980s in Australia saw interest rates exceed 20 per cent (Wonder and Fisher 1990, 61).

Deregulation has also been pursued in other areas of government policy. Rural industry research and development was placed on a more ‘commercial footing’ through government corporatisation in 1989 (Lovett 1994). Producer levies are now a substantial part of the new research and development corporations’ budgets (Gerritsen and Abbott 1990, 9). In essence, the economic reform agenda of successive federal governments has been the removal of regulation, where possible, and the installation of market mechanisms to ensure an efficient distribution of resources throughout the economy. Competition in the 1990s has become a persistent theme in the public policy arena. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) was set up to ensure that markets were functioning correctly so that maximum resource utilisation occurred. This Commission continues to put additional pressure on the marketing arrangements and trading practices of Australian industry through its enforcement of National Competition Policy.
Chapter One  The NFF Family and Political Representation

The government has gone to great lengths to ensure that market signals prevailed in the agricultural sector. In the context of declining terms of trade and increasing international competitiveness in commodity markets, many farmers have been unable to maintain an economically viable farm enterprise. However, the persistence strategies\textsuperscript{11} of farmers mean that many have ignored market signals. This caused what could be viewed as 'market failure'. Rather than allow marginal farmers to persist in generating substandard produce and occupying productive land that is under-utilised, the government (with the acquiescence of farm organisations) has attempted to facilitate their 'adjustment out' of the agricultural sector. Attempts to trigger adjustment have become a central concern of agricultural policy.

To overcome farmers' persistence strategies the Commonwealth set up the Rural Adjustment Scheme\textsuperscript{12} in 1976. Under the scheme, those considered able to maintain viability were supplied cheap credit, whilst those not able to continue were provided with one-off re-establishment loans in order to create a new beginning off the land. In contrast, the RAS has of recent years focussed more on adjustment out of agriculture as opposed to farm 'reconstruction' and carry-on assistance that sought to maintain farm numbers through difficult times.

According to Wonder (1995, 3) the assistance measures of the pre-1982 period were a combination of input subsidies and price support. The first often assisted the larger and wealthier farms, whilst the latter provided government-guaranteed pricing for wool and domestic market-price support for those producers exporting to distorted markets. The period between 1982 and 1990 was a period of 'managed change', according to Wonder. Structural adjustment assistance was used to soften the impact of a deregulated economy, exchange rate and financial system.

\textsuperscript{11}The true impact of cost price squeeze pressure is obscured by the persistence strategies of farmers. Farmers often persist in conditions tantamount to poverty for an indefinite period or at least until they need to invest in capital equipment.

\textsuperscript{12}At the time of writing the federal Minister for Primary Industries was reviewing this program.
Recently, the NFF and NSWFA have assisted the insurance industry to develop risk-management products for those agricultural producers who are also interest-group members (NSWFA 1998i, PR/164a/98). These products have been advocated by the NFF as a replacement for the exceptional circumstance payments that government regularly makes in times of both abnormal natural and market conditions. This new step to ‘soften’ the impact of market and natural perturbations further removes, if not eliminates, the role of government in managing the adjustment process. Instead, the individual farmer’s entrepreneurial and risk-management skills are being emphasised as the determining factor in survival.

A paper prepared by the DPIE and delivered by its First Assistant Secretary, Bernard Wonder, in the US on March 13, 1995, sets out the thrust for agricultural policy in the 1990s.

The focus of the Australian Government’s rural policies in the 1990s is to provide an integrated package of policies and programs that enhance farm profitability and international competitiveness, encourage sustainable agricultural practices and enhance social and economic opportunities for rural communities. The orientation of Australia’s agricultural policies is, therefore, towards facilitation of market responsiveness, risk management and self-reliance. There has been a deliberate move away from policies that distort market signals to producers (Wonder 1995, 2).

It is clear that the market-liberal paradigm is firmly entrenched as the prevailing orthodoxy in Australian agricultural policy.

Rural policy under the transition from the Hawke and Keating governments to the Howard Government is characterised more by continuity than change (Cockfield 1997, 168). In 1997, the Coalition government set out the framework for a replacement to RAS. The ‘Agriculture Advancing Australia’ (AAA) package represents a further iteration in the attempts by successive governments to subtly force farmers to adhere to market signals when decision-making on the farm. According to the Minister for Primary Industries and Energy, the package is ‘...designed to encourage as many people as possible not just to stay in the industry but to become profitable again’, whilst it will give those people who are under financial stress ‘... support while they make tough decisions’ (Paterson 1997, 12). The AAA package, launched in July 1998, constituted the first plank
of a ten-year ‘Action Plan for Australian Agriculture’. As with past determinations of strategic policy directions, the plan was developed along with major stakeholders such as the NFF. According to the Minister, ‘The planning process has seen an unprecedented level of cooperation between government and major stakeholders, including farmer organisations, the banking sector, rural women, service providers and individual farmers’ (DPIE 1998, DPIE 98/88A). Perhaps the only major difference under a federal Coalition government is in the expectations of the rural constituency that it will deliver reform more quickly than a Labor government, particularly in the area of industrial relations (Connors 1997, 72).

1.4 Outcome of Policy Change

The change in policy paradigm has been associated with some broad trends in the economic and structural basis of agriculture. Post-1970s the expansion of the area under cultivation has slowed appreciably as have the number of livestock (Gruen 1990, 23). Farm numbers have dropped, the average age of farmers has risen and the farm sector now employs significantly less people (See Table 1.1 and Table 1.2). Meanwhile, the productivity and level of production from the remaining farms has increased. However for many farmers the productivity increases merely compensate for the small increases in the price received for produce relative to the increase in input costs. Therefore, the cost-price squeeze has become more acute.

Table 1.1. Farm Numbers in Australia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time period (Years)</th>
<th>No of farms (thousands)*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950/51 to 1959/60</td>
<td>204.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960/61 to 1969/70</td>
<td>199.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970/71 to 1979/80</td>
<td>181.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980/81 to 1989/90</td>
<td>154.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990/91 to 1992/93</td>
<td>122.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABARE (1994, 2). The figures presented were calculated based on figures in this publication.
*Prior to 1986-87 it includes agricultural establishments with EVAO of $2500 or more. From 1986-87 this was raised to $20000 and from 1991-92 was raised to $25000.

During this time, agriculture’s contribution in percentage terms to the GDP of the nation has declined dramatically (see Table 1.3). This is largely due to the rise in value of production from the mining and service sectors of the economy. Whilst it is still an
important export earner, its historical claim to be the barometer of the wealth and well-being of the nation is contested.

Table 1.2. Farm Employment in Australia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time period (Years)</th>
<th>Farm Employment ('000)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950/51 to 1959/60</td>
<td>478.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960/61 to 1969/70</td>
<td>428.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970/71 to 1979/80</td>
<td>385.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980/81 to 1989/90</td>
<td>392.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990/91 to 1992/93</td>
<td>377.3</td>
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Source: ABARE (1994, 24). The figures presented were calculated based on figures in this publication.

Table 1.3. Farm Sectors Contribution to Australian gross product.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period (Years)</th>
<th>Average Contribution to gross product (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950/51 to 1959/60</td>
<td>15.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960/61 to 1969/70</td>
<td>9.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970/71 to 1979/80</td>
<td>5.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980/81 to 1989/90</td>
<td>3.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990/91 to 1992/94</td>
<td>2.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABARE (1994, 2). The figures presented were calculated based on figures in this publication.

The outcome of this policy change is an agricultural system where a minority of producers creates the majority of the output. In production terms, four-fifths of agricultural output is produced by one-fifth of the farms (Lawrence et al 1992, 10) and in financial terms, two-thirds of the total value of production from broadacre production is produced by one-third of producers (Martin 1996). Current policy directions appear to envisage the Australian agricultural sector as able to efficiently produce inputs into the Agrifood industry. As such, larger family farms will continue to increase in size, capturing the economies of scale and increasingly be contracted by agribusiness to supply designated inputs at pre-determined prices. The remainder of the medium to small-scale family farms will survive as a result of off-farm work and target niche domestic and export markets (Lawrence et al 1992, 6).

The shrinking numbers of farmers operating profitably indicates how the strategy of adopting output-increasing technology in order to meet the discrepancy between increasing costs for inputs and declining prices for outputs has become less efficacious over time. The expansion of farm size is only one of the long-term strategies for coping with the cost-price squeeze short of a landmark technological innovation (Campbell...
1980, 85). In the absence of the capacity to expand, many farms have, in an economic sense, become non-viable operations. Indeed, in late 1994 the NSW Rural Assistance Authority predicted that in the following 12-18 months 20 percent of farmers would be forced to leave the industry (Wahlquist and Coulton 1994, 5).

However, in many instances individual farmers have resisted market signals for adjustment, instead adopting persistence strategies such as increased off-farm work, working longer hours, forgoing capital investment or living in poverty. These persistence strategies have had serious implications at a social level for farm families. As a result, stress amongst farm families is a major social health issue (Gray and Lawrence 1996). Suicide has become a prominent social issue in rural Australia, with studies revealing that suicide levels are higher in regional areas and amongst farmers as an occupational grouping (Burnley 1994, 303). The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commissioner found that ‘The incidence of poverty in rural and remote areas is considerably higher than the state average’ (HREOC 1996, 5). Life opportunities for young rural people are significantly lower than that of their urban counterparts. They exhibit reduced employment opportunities and higher suicide rates (Sidoti 1998).

The new policy regime has had an impact on rural society in general. Rural communities are now less reliant on agriculture. Other industries such as tourism and mining have sustained many rural towns. The rural population, in general, has declined and, as a consequence, government services have moved with the population. In regional NSW, government services are now provided in larger service towns or ‘regional centres’, such as Wagga Wagga, Tamworth, Orange and Dubbo. Even attempts to decentralise government services have resulted in the building up of large towns to the detriment of small towns. The regional centres have become the only place to receive the full range of shopping and government services. This pattern of regional consolidation has developed to the point where towns compete against one another for government and industry investment. Local councils or regional development boards contest the location of a government office, wool processing plant or an abattoir. Regions are attempting to
brand’ themselves as an area that specialises in a particular product or service to attract further investment.

1.5 The NFF’s Role in Policy Change

Whilst a similar change in the substance of agricultural policy has taken place amongst most developed nations, the means by which change is attained has varied. The nature of change — it can be gradual and managed or crisis-driven and swift — is primarily contingent on the institutional policy-making framework (Coleman and Skogstad, 1995). The change in Australian farm policy, from ‘state-assisted’ to ‘market-liberal’, coincided with the NFF’s formation. In Australia, the NFF family’s existence, specifically its capacity to exercise a monopoly over the representation of farmers’ interests, enables policy to be dealt with in a de-politicised manner through corporatist-style bargaining rather than in a pluralist and politicised partisan environment. Consequently, change in Australia has been gradual and managed.

The NFF, along with the bureaucracy and elected government, forms part of an ‘epistemic community’ that supports the market-liberal paradigm (Coleman and Skogstad, 1995). Participants in this community have ensured that trade-liberal assumptions informed both the policy trajectory and the rhetoric used to support it\textsuperscript{13}. The incremental nature of the paradigm change signifies that the impetus largely originates from within the agricultural policy community. The state did not thrust change upon the NFF in reaction to factors in the ‘political environment’; the NFF understood the repercussions of trends in electoral support, economic significance and world trade reform and acted in advance of any externally imposed solution. Consequently, much of the lobbying by the newly formed NFF was on the big economic issues rather than any specific agricultural policy measure.

\textsuperscript{13}The current emphasis on the development of farm business acumen amongst primary producers is a prime example of this coordination. The NFF emphasise it as one of their priorities, the Minister makes it a major plank of the ‘AAA’ package to replace the RAS, the DPIE produce programs and with NFF member groups support set about their delivery.
The NFF '... accepted that restructuring was necessary in the rural sector and that farm protection levels had to be reduced globally' (Wanna 1992, 75). Consequently, rather than seek 'ad-hoc palliatives' they focussed on securing cost savings through market reform (Gerritsen and Abbott 1988; Martin 1989, 5). The first Minister for Primary Industries in the Hawke Labor Government noted that the NFF was willing to trade its assistance for a reduction in assistance to manufacturers (Kerin 1983, 60). At an economic level the bargain was founded on the Hawke Labor Government's acknowledgement of agriculture's contribution to export earnings and influence on the CPI, and the NFF's desire to secure a positive operating environment for Australian farm enterprises through reform in other areas of the economy (Kerin 1983, 56).

The NFF's policy-making role reflects the broader change in the way public policy and, hence, lobbying was conducted in Australia under the Hawke-Keating Labor governments. Rather than policy being conducted via personal and 'old-boys networks', the merit of a policy case was assessed on the intellectual rigour of the argument (Bell 1994, 150). For many, the development of encompassing organisations willing to look beyond sectional interests was a key contributing factor to the headway made in economic policy reform\(^{14}\) (Keating and Dixon 1989, 70).

The existence of the NFF family as a encompassing peak interest group and its willingness to bargain in a de-politicised manner was instrumental in the smooth transition from one agricultural policy paradigm to the next. It has been an ongoing supporter of the government's strategy of deregulation, rationalisation and competition on the condition that other reforms take place elsewhere in the economy.

Amidst advocating a change in the policy paradigm and playing a role in achieving such a change, the NFF family has always acknowledged that this would have deleterious effects on its constituency. Initially, it promoted the notion that new markets and

\(^{14}\)In fact Gerritsen (1992, 110) places much of the blame for a stagnation in reform in the early 1990s at the feet of the Labor Party, who failed to keep their end of the bargain and provide micro-economic reform in non-agricultural sectors.
adjustment measures would reduce the impact of the paradigm change on the sector. However, adjustment pressures have not subsided, prompting the NFF family to openly acknowledge the impact of trade liberalism on membership. As Dr Wendy Craik, the NFF’s current Executive Director, conceded, ‘The campaign by Australian agriculture to be as good as its word, and eliminate tariffs in rural industries, has not come without pain, and some of our people have been forced to restructure to deal with such fundamental change’ (Craik 1998b).

The NFF admits that its policies, aimed at lowering the cost structure and further liberalising world trade, provide benefits that will accrue only in the long term. It states: ‘Most medium scale family farms require an immediate boost to cash flow but the benefits of these reforms would take time to accrue as they are structural reforms’ (NFF 1995b, 9). Consequently, the NFF finds itself in the position of selling policies which will lead to a more productive agriculture, in the knowledge that many farmers will not survive to receive the benefits unless, of course, it finds ‘... some way to expedite the implementation of at least some of the bigger ticket items’ (ibid).

The degree to which these policies have had an uneven impact amongst Australian farmers is also well acknowledged by the NFF. In this respect Craik (1998d) employs the established statistics on farmers’ economic well-being.

Only about 30 per cent of the broadacre farms earned the sector’s entire profit last year. In each farm size category, the top 25 per cent of farmers dramatically outperform the average. I leave you to calculate where that leaves the remaining 75 per cent.

As was indicated previously (Section 1.4), where it leaves the remaining 75 per cent is in a state of financial and social crisis. As the NSWFA has acknowledged, this financial crisis has a concrete link with interpersonal violence. In a submission to the Standing Committee on Social Issues (Standing Committee on Social Issues 1994 op.cit, 67), Terry Ryan the Policy Director from the NSWFA commented:

Over the past few years the number of phone calls of either threatened murders or threatened suicides has increased. There is a direct correlation between suicide and prosperity in Agriculture.
Chapter One  The NFF Family and Political Representation

The recognition that the NFF family has participated in delivering a policy regime that is causing significant hardship amongst much of its membership raises the question of organisational repercussions for the interest-group family.

1.6  The Success of the NFF Family

In the context of their role in achieving rapid and radical change in the direction of agricultural policy Australian farm interest groups consider themselves to have been particularly successful. The NSWFA proclaims to be the 'largest and healthiest farm body in Australia' and the 'premier lobbying force in Australia' (The Land 1998d, 54). According to the NSWFA, 1998 was 'A year of success for the NSW Farmers' Association' (NSWFA 1998k, PR/201/98). Similarly, the NFF claim to constitute '... a tremendously successful and effective team' (NFF 1995) and 'At a national level acknowledged as influential in policy debate' (NFF 1994).

Importantly, the state looks to the NFF family for leadership in agricultural policy and, as such, it exercises a monopoly as the voice of the farming community. In his address to the 1995 Annual Conference of the NFF, the then Prime Minister Paul Keating congratulated the peak interest group for its approach to policy. He revealed that from a government point of view there was '... not much more they could ask for ...' from an interest group. Government seems to recognise the importance of maintaining a peak farm lobby, such as the NFF, and continues to encourage its development in the same direction. This has continued under the Howard Coalition Government. The government has recently called for a peak body or advisory council to be developed in the Horticulture Industry. The parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Primary Industries, Senator David Brownhill, said that ‘... horticulture was hampered by fragmentation, geographical dispersion and a lack of strong industry organisations’ (The Land 1997b, 4). This was repeated with the wine industry, when he urged the Australian Winegrape Growers’ Council to merge with the Winemakers’ Federation of Australia (The Land 1997d, 25). Further, the government continues to support and shield those established
organisations, which from time to time become the subject of challenge from rebel organisations\textsuperscript{15}.

Interestingly, academic appraisals of the NFF family have tended to concur with those of the institutions themselves. The academic treatment of the NFF has tended to chart its activities in advocating and securing a paradigm change in agricultural policy. In undertaking these activities the NFF has tended to be characterised as a successful interest group (Trebeck 1990; Connors 1996). The NFF is applauded for attaining organisational amalgamation, which to a large degree has enabled the establishment of a close relationship with the state. The end of protests as a tool of political persuasion and the public displays of disunity are both evaluated as signs of political maturity. Its ability to work in partnership with other interest groups further illustrates its value as a policy partner.

1.7 Challenges for the NFF family

Whilst the NFF family believes it is successful, it confronts significant challenges. Firstly, its members have resisted the path down which their representative organisation wishes to take them. Secondly, the political environment in which the NFF family is operating continues to place demands on its resources and stretches its capabilities.

Resistance from NFF family members

In the context of the impact of trade liberal policy on the grassroots membership of the NFF family, its role has had implications. Its family of organisations has generally supported the NFF; however, there have been exceptions. A small number of commodity councils have attempted to retain some protection from subsidised imports. In December 1981, the Horticultural Growers’ Council announced its withdrawal from the NFF

\textsuperscript{15}The Minister has actively resisted the Australian Wool Growers’ Association (AWGA) and stated his preference for the reorganisation of the existing Wool Council (Morse 1997; Anderson 1997). In an answer to a Question on Notice the Minister commented, ‘It is obvious the Government can most effectively respond to growers if the industry speaks with a clear single voice. I urge AWGA to work with Wool Council in determining whether further reform of Wool Council is needed ...’ (Australian House of Representatives Hansard for 26\textsuperscript{th} August 1997, Question No.1917)
Chapter One The NFF Family and Political Representation

(Campbell 1985, 13). The cotton and egg producers’ commodity councils have also left the Federation. In the early 1990s the Tobacco Growers’ Council disaffiliated with the NFF, whilst the dried fruit, dairy, pork and cane farmers all threatened to do the same. Given this break in the NFF’s seamless approach, the NFF President, in late 1991, called for a stop to rationalisation in the farm sector until the pace was picked up in other sectors (Gerritsen 1992, 107). This was perhaps more symbolic; meant for the members rather than government. The end of the reserve price scheme for wool in the same year reinforced the fact that assistance as once delivered was no longer financially or politically tenable. Even if the NFF wanted a slow-down in the pace of market liberalisation, it could not go backwards.

Whilst the NFF has not been able to forestall all actions by commodity councils to wind back market liberalisation, it has succeeded in imbuing them with a level of sophistication. Rather than defend protection on the basis of traditional arguments regarding the importance of agriculture, protection is now argued for on the basis of quarantine and food safety concerns. For example, the recent opposition to imported chicken meat and to grain importation were both fought on the basis of food safety and quarantine concerns rather than the direct economic effects on Australian producers from loss of domestic market share.

The NFF’s role in advocating a policy change that has delivered negative outcomes for many of its members has also engendered a degree of resistance amongst grassroots membership. Despite the NFF having directly pursued policy change it was the SFOs, such as the NSWFA, who directly felt the implications. In NSW the militancy and grassroots activism of the mid-1980s was an early indicator of farmers’ difficulty in accepting the paradigm change. Groups such as the Rural Action Movement, the Canowindra Reform Group and the Union of Australian Farmers (UAF) articulated grassroots resistance to the policy manifesto of the NFF and the NSW Livestock and

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16 This organisation is now an Associate Member of the NFF.
17 Importantly for the NFF, the Cotton industry organisation (Cotton Australia) has rejoined the NFF.
18 The Australian Pork Producers’ Federation is now an Affiliate member known as the Pork Council of Australia.
Chapter One    The NFF Family and Political Representation

Grain Producers' Association (NSWLGPA). The absorption of these organisation back into the NFF fold, facilitated by the NSWLGPA re-launching itself as the NSW Farmers' Association (NSWFA), silenced early criticism.

The 1992 election of the NSWFA President from the floor of the Annual Conference flagged a further rise of dissent. The incoming president articulated the tide of opposition to trade-liberal policy, confirming it was his view that '... our object should be to get as many farmers over the line as possible for when things turn around, no matter who they are' (The Land 1992, 7). Whilst Crawford's election suggested the rank-and-file membership concurred with his position it did not change the trajectory of trade-liberal policy, the Association's position, or the predicament of farmers. According to the outgoing President, this unprecedented event reflected the fact 'that farmers are no longer united in their needs and aims.' (Wahlquist 1992, 8).

Amidst the rise and fall of militant opposition to the trade-liberal paradigm SFOs have endured a steady loss of members. The NSWFA's membership has been in steady decline ever since its formation as the LGPA in 1978\(^\text{19}\) (See Table 1.4). The trend is similar in South Australia where the SAFF's membership declined from 11500 in 1987 to 5180 in 1997 (SAFF 1997b, 10).

As the membership decline reached critical levels many SFOs responded with inquiries or consultancies. The NSWFA, for instance, contracted Michels Warren Pty Ltd in 1993 to report on strategies to turn around the membership decline. It found a diverse range of reasons for the NSWFA's declining support including competition from local farm-based groups, lack of services and a communication gap.

\(^{19}\) These figures give a sense of the overall level of membership of the Association. However they cannot be expressed as a percentage of total farm numbers so as to determine the membership density because they are riddled with anomalies. For example, in 1995 there were more members paying subscriptions to the wool section than ABS statistics indicated there were NSW wool producers (Andrew, M. 1995 Membership Marketing Manager NSWFA, pers. comm., 23 March). Given that each year will manifest the same inaccuracies, comparisons between years provide an accurate overall trend yet preclude meaningful density figures.
Table 1.4. NSWFA membership since formation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Member Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>21,500*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>21,000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>20,500*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>20,291</td>
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<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>18,547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>17,077</td>
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<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>17,120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>17,133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>16,842</td>
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<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>15,719</td>
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<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>15,692</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>15,330</td>
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<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>14,456</td>
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<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>14,266</td>
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<td>13,370</td>
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<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>14,271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>14,842*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Estimate provided by NSWFA Financial Controller and Treasurer
*Estimate based on NSWFA claim of a 4% increase on previous year (NSWFA 1997c, PR/359/97)

Challenging Political Environment

After the 1985 rally of 50,000 farmers in Canberra, Dick Eldershaw, a columnist for The Land newspaper, and LGPA General Councillor, summed up the rationale for the future conduct of farm organisations:

> These are not short battles to be won by twenty bus loads of farmers waving placards outside Parliament House. It is a long unrelenting war in which we’ll go backwards if we let up for a moment ... our problem is that no matter how angry we may become, we have no leverage, no way to twist arms. Go out on strike? We’re self employed. Withhold our product? Our competitors would love it ... there remains nothing more effective than appointing able and forceful leaders, giving them the resources they need, and getting behind them (Eldershaw 1985, 9).

Eldershaw’s vision was one of a professional organisation working in a de-politicised policy process. It is a vision that has largely informed the representation of farmers’ interests to the political sphere for the best part of two decades. Apart from early militancy, the farmers of NSW have fallen in behind the leadership of the NSWFA and NFF. As a professional interest group the NFF family has pursued a policy of researching
and presenting policy positions in a reasoned manner, formed coalitions with other interests and assisted the state to secure an unprecedented level of economic policy change. Recently, the NSWFA President, Ian Donges, reiterated the strategy articulated by Eldershaw:

I believe we must adopt a more sophisticated approach to lobbying to ensure the views of agriculture are properly understood by all decision makers. Agriculture will always suffer from our lack of ability to influence elections, therefore our future influence must be with the best lobbying resources we can muster (Donges 1997a, 13).

However, the political environment within which the NSWFA and NFF operate is, itself, rapidly changing. The political terrain on which farm interest groups must pursue farmers’ interests has broadened. The issue of environmental policy has been particularly difficult for the NFF family over recent years. Donges suggested the farming community faced ‘... a new wave of environmental fundamentalism which is bereft of economic responsibility’, and that in response the Association needed to assist farmers in demonstrating their environmental credentials to the broader community. The Association has recognised it needs to broaden into non-traditional areas, such as the environment and rural health. Donges assessed the attempts to date in this manner: ‘While the initial results are encouraging, they also indicate this will be an area which will test the Association’s ability to enter new frontiers’ (Dick and Trainor 1996, 7).

It is not only the type of issues that are stretching the NFF family’s capabilities. The number of issues and the level of resources required to gain access and influence is also increasing. The 1995 NSWFA Presidential Address to the Annual Conference argues that the Association is under pressure ‘... forever increasing demands placed upon agriculture by more and more groups, tribunals and government departments requiring more and more responses to protect our interests’ (NSWFA 1995). The NSWFA Executive Director observes that its policy role ‘... will require even more succinct and detailed research in order to carry weight in the political arena, particularly given the myriad of interest groups vying for government recognition’ (NSW Farmers 1995i, 5). Given that the number of possible members and, hence, the pool from which resources can be generated is contracting, the capacity of the NFF to keep up with the demands of its environment is increasingly stretched. In the words of one NSWFA Executive member:
Chapter One  The NFF Family and Political Representation

'The chief problem with the NFF is too few people trying to cover too many issues with insufficient funds' (Hodgkinson 1997, 14). Consequently, the logic expressed by Eldershaw and recently reaffirmed by Donges can not be realised without considerable effort by farm interest-group leadership.

1.8 Political Representation

The admissions by the NFF family that its policy product has caused short-term pain and is unable to guarantee the long-term survival of substantial numbers of Australian farmers has made selling the merits of the policy to those disadvantaged members of its constituency its most significant challenge. Given it has been charged with representing the interests of farmers, the NFF family's acknowledgement that significant proportions of its members have become the 'collateral damage' in the agricultural policy paradigm shift does not sit easily with its continued championing of trade liberalism. The NFF family's continued unwavering support and endorsement of the paradigm has attracted high levels of criticism from members. The Federal Minister has emphasised to farm organisations that they have led the economic debate in Australia and that even in the face of criticism ‘... now is not the time to retreat from that role’ (Dick 1998a, 8).

Whilst criticism centres on the NFF family's role in advocating trade-liberal policy, the debate has been pushed beyond questioning the thrust of policy and onto how farmers should represent themselves. Its complicity in changing the paradigm has led members to demand it explain why so many of their peers are suffering and leaving the industry. The significant levels of criticism it has been attracting has required it to explain why this does not weaken its authority and, hence, its status as the 'premier lobbying force in Australia'.

Questions about levels of representation first arose out of the 1993 Michels Warren Report into the NSWFA. The report suggested ‘... that the association is not truly representative and does not reflect the views of grass root members’ (Michels Warren Pty. Ltd. 1993). Whilst the conclusion appears straightforward, exactly what amounts to 'representation' has become a point of contention.
Chapter One  The NFF Family and Political Representation

To many members the link between the NFF family’s ongoing support for trade liberalism and its negative outcomes for membership is evidence that the NFF family is unresponsive to their needs and, hence, unrepresentative. As one NSWFA member comments:

... the National Farmers’ Federation has shown itself to be a second-rate lobbying organisation, totally out of touch with not only its own constituents, but the Australian community as a whole ... The NFF has been a lobbying disaster. Its biggest claim to fame has been that it has provided a breeding ground for the economic rationalists who have gone on to create havoc in agriculture (Munro 1997, 16).

A delegate to the NSWFA 1997 Annual Conference has criticised the organisation for being out of touch and distant, suggesting that this has resulted in membership loss.

NSW Farmers, you do not have anywhere near the membership you should have, and while you have this policy of hiding what is really happening to farmers in NSW, you will never get the majority of farmers as members. We are losing members at a local level ... wake up NSW Farmers, and start working in the real world; one where rural Australia is on its knees because we have been squeezed and screwed for two decades and we’ve had enough (Hain 1997, 19).

Members tend to consider that the lack of widespread member participation has made the NSWFA’s policy positions unrepresentative:

A lot of decisions are being made on a representative sample of a very small minority of the district. I just thought sometimes the decisions weren’t maybe representative of the whole district. (Farmer Interview-Gunnedah 1997)\(^{20}\).

Some members of the NSWFA have directly questioned and challenged the ongoing utility of the NFF family. ‘I just feel that the farm organisations as they are at present have run their course. I don’t think they are giving the service they should’ (Farmer Interview-Gunnedah 1997). Others claim ‘... there is a kind of a void there between the representatives and the people they represent’ (Farmer Interview-Gunnedah 1997).

However, there remains a belief amongst a significant part of the farming community that despite its deficiencies it is ‘... the only lobby group we have got and we have to have it, and we would be a lot worse off if we didn’t have it’ (Farmer Interview-Gunnedah 1997).

\(^{20}\) See Appendix Four regarding details of the interviews conducted. See also Appendix Two and Three for details of the mail questionnaire that accompanied the interview process.
Chapter One The NFF Family and Political Representation

It is perhaps for this reason that most critics call for reforms of the present NFF structure rather than seeking its total replacement.

The emergence of a ‘rebelt commodity organisation reflects this view and has, in some instances, channelled this dissent and made it respectable. The Australian Woolgrowers’ Association (AWGA) formed in 1997 to try and reform the Wool Council of Australia. It attempted to remove the control SFOs exercise over who is elected to positions on the Council and the level to which it is funded. Claiming that ‘Many [farmers] are disillusioned with the existing methods of farmer representation.’ (Laird 1998, 18), they are calling for the ‘democratisation’ of the wool policy process. Their policy document argues:

State organisations have a local role to play for their members but they do not have a charter to look after those wool growers who do not belong to their Association ... it is inconceivable to compel woolgrowers to pay tax and then deprive them of the democratic right of influencing their own industry. Currently, they have little or no right to determine the management of their industry (AWGA 1997, 4-5).

It claims that the lack of input and decision-making by grassroots producers has led to the increasing levels of criticism and dissatisfaction. Apart from ‘rebelt’ commodity organisations, this collective unease at the role of the NFF family in policy change has manifested itself in a range of new formations including parties, cooperatives and movements.

At an intuitive level, criticism of this kind suggests that the quality of representation is poor and logically diminishes the authority of the representative. However, the NFF family has attempted to undermine the power of this convention by suggesting that its actions in advocating such policies, however much it exacts pain on its constituency, amounts to responsible leadership. According to Craik (1998c),

... good leaders are not afraid to be unpopular — to go against general public opinion of the day for what they see is the greater long term good. NFF as an organisation is familiar with this principle.

Craik suggests criticism is virtuous: a repercussion of the NFF’s willingness to take hard decisions in the best long-term interests of farmers. However, the suggestion that it, not unlike a benevolent dictator, has taken a deliberate decision to be unresponsive in the best
interests of its members appears to be highly undemocratic. To redeem the democratic
character of its actions the NFF maintains it fosters the aim of ultimately converting
dissent into acceptance. As Craik (1998c) continues, as leaders ‘we must aim for
acceptance and support from the people we represent, even though the message you’re
communicating is that pain will have to be endured before gain’. According to the NFF,
acceptance is not forthcoming as ‘... in some regional areas, there’s a lack of
understanding about some of the issues we, as farm lobbyists, pursue’ (Donges 1998a).

Given the NFF’s suggestion that resistance is merely a consequence of misinformation,
farm organisations have committed themselves to communicating the individual benefits
of trade liberalisation more effectively with their constituency.

The immense benefits of labour market reform, taxation reform and international trade
liberalisation — all issues so crucial to the well-being and prosperity of the rural sector
— will have to be spelled out in a way which regional Australia can understand (Donges
1998a).

... a concerted effort from both industry and government is required to sell the benefits of
trade liberalisation, so that families and individuals can see what benefits they have
received ... (Craik 1998a).

Quite apart from discussion of leadership and who really is best able to define farmers’
interests, the NFF family’s consistent response to those challenging its provision of
representation has been to reiterate the way its internal decision-making processes
institutionalise democratic principles. For instance, the NSWFA President asserts:

... NSW Farmers is a democratic organisation whose policies are developed by branches
and district councils by bringing forward propositions that are then debated and voted
upon by farmers representing the whole state at the annual conference. The result is
strong policy that truly reflects the views of all farmers (Donges 1997b, 12).

The response of the NFF family has been to protect the existing electoral and funding
structure; the NSWFA’s CEO maintains: ‘We need to preserve the primacy of individual
farmers by payment of fees, being able to determine policy through the annual conference
process’ (Austin 1997a, 18).

This exchange indicates a conflict between the representation provided by the NSWFA
and the representation many farmers believe they require. The concerns of members are
that this formal ‘representation’ has let them down. Many farmers claim that these formations do not ‘really’ represent them, that their leaders do not understand them and that no one is listening to them. But what is it that farmers feel is not being heard? Is it merely a difference of opinion with respect to agricultural policy or is it a more fundamental difference of interests? Have the structural changes associated with the trade-liberal paradigm, such as the rise in part-time farmers and the diversification of enterprise types, been translated into diversity at the interest level?

1.9 Conclusion

The NFF family and the state have facilitated a change in the direction of agricultural policy. The repercussions of the new policy paradigm for many farmers have been severe at both an economic and social level. Discontent has risen in the face of the NFF’s persistent advocacy of trade-liberal policy and its acknowledgement of the pain endured by its members. SFOs such as the NSWFA have had to bear the brunt of members discontent with the policy thrust.

The comments of farmers suggest what exists is a crisis of representation brought about by a lack of authenticity. Yet, the NFF and its SFOs contend that members simply lack sufficient understanding of the policy process. As such, they maintain that responding directly to their concerns would have a deleterious effect on their members’ long-term interests. Whilst the period since the release of the Michels Warren report has been marked by a slow, but steady increase in the NSWFA’s membership, as Table 1.4 indicates, no fall in criticism from members can be detected. This further complicates the picture. What is the significance of a parallel rise in both the membership of the NSWFA and the level of criticism? Explaining this ‘representative paradox’ and, hence, the confrontation between the provision of formal representation by the NFF family and the disillusionment of the represented, is the major theme of this thesis.

In stark contrast to its claims of success, the NSWFA and NFF are facing an ongoing challenge to their representative credentials. This contrast is the first focal point of the thesis. The central question is how has the NFF leadership managed the apparent conflict
between its role in policy change and the wishes of its membership? To answer this question this thesis asks a number of associated questions. What has been the NSWFA’s response to its loss of members? What has been the impact of these responses on its relationship with membership? How has it responded to the challenges of this environment? What reforms have the NFF family made to address the changes in its external environment? How can one explain the recent increase in the membership of the NSWFA?

In the minds of both leaders and the state, the NFF family has been successful. According to academics, it is a splendid textbook example of a modern, professional, peak interest group. However, these ‘successes’ do not appear to accord with their complicity in bringing about a paradigm change, the result of which is prolonged and significant hardship for the farming constituency. The label of success appears even less justified given that the NFF family undertook its role in the full knowledge of the implications for its membership. Furthermore, the NFF family continues to advocate a paradigm in the full knowledge that it proposes a model of Australian agriculture in which a significant proportion of their constituency will not have an economically viable role to play. This raises the second focal point of the thesis, that is, a critical analysis of the framework used to evaluate the success of interest groups. On what basis are they claiming an interest group to be successful? In what respect does their definition of success take stock of the interest groups’ provision of representation? Why is it that academic accounts of the NFF have not revealed their internal dissent SFOs have had to deal with? What does this tell us about the role and status attributed to interest groups in political science?

In order to address the major theme and two focal points the thesis is structured into eight main chapters, including this one. Each of these chapters is further grouped into four main sections, each of two chapters in length. Each section signifies a particular part of the thesis argument. In between the sections is an ‘intermediate reflection’ section. This draws together the previous section of the argument, highlighting important conclusions, and introducing the next section.
Chapter One  The NFF Family and Political Representation

The first section, incorporating Chapters One and Two, outlines the argument of the thesis and establishes an important base of information regarding farm interest groups for the rest of the thesis. As has been noted, there is a collective unease at the role of the NFF in policy change. In considering where to turn for representation debate amongst farmers inevitably commences with what has gone before. In this respect what came before the NFF family is central to what will come after it. Consequently, a historical view of the political representation of farmers in Australia is important to understanding the present sense of disillusionment and the ruminations regarding where to go from here. Chapter Two addresses the history of farmers’ political representation in Australia. It details the range of formations farmers have used as vehicles to represent their interests in the past and the reasons for their replacement by the NFF. It also outlines how the NFF developed and what reforms it has already been through to date.

The second section of the thesis, incorporating Chapters Three and Four, involves developing a theoretical framework or a lens through which to examine the evidence collected so far about the NFF and NSWFA’s predicament. Chapter Three examines the academic studies of farm interest groups in Australia. The purpose of the examination is to reveal whether a common framework has been used and what conclusions these researchers came to regarding the success of the NFF and its predecessors. This is followed by a review of interest-group literature. This review illustrates that the assumptions implicit in the framework used to examine farm interest groups in Australia has its origins in a particular strand of interest-group literature. The chapter concludes by documenting the ‘unthinking habits’ of interest-group research that need to be addressed in a new framework for explaining interest-group behaviour.

In Chapter Four attention is directed to advancing a new model to explain the behaviour of interest-group organisations and their leaders. This attention is prompted by the seeming incongruence between the current problems confronting Australian farm interest groups and the conclusions of the contemporary academic literature. That the NFF family’s policy does not reflect the interests of all members is not, itself, evidence of unequal representation; these interests may have been heard but just not able to win the
argument. Rather than attempting to locate suitable elites who, in pursuing a ‘dominant interest’, have in some way conspired to exclude the interests of these farmers from the debate and, hence, from their advocacy activities, the model makes quite a different suggestion. Following Offe (1972, 89), it will be argued that such a definite act of will on behalf of elites is not essential. A more systemic form of exclusion and suppression can also effect the exclusion of interests; one that has its roots in the actual design of the interest-group system.

The third section of the thesis, incorporating Chapters Five and Six, involves applying the lens and framework, developed in the previous section, to the NSWFA and NFF reform process implemented to address the challenges outlined in the first section. In Chapter Five, the thesis considers the way the NFF family has defined the problems it faces and the responses it has formulated. The NFF’s Review process, launched in 1995, indicates their perspective on the policy process, the challenges it presents and the range of possible responses. The NFF’s response illustrates how it has utilised changes in the external environment to guide its internal organisational reform. The NFF identifies a lack of resources as its central problem and advocates its state organisations adopt a service provision role to increase available financial resources. There is a high degree of consistency in both problem definition and response across the NFF family.

Chapter Six evaluates the repercussions of the implementation of the NFF family’s response to its resource deficit. In particular, it looks at the impact that its adoption of a ‘service provision’ role has had in terms of increasing membership and delivering increased levels of resources. It is argued that, in terms of the relationship with members, the service-provision role has tended to privatise as opposed to collectivise the act of joining or taking up membership of the NSWFA. That is, what is typically interpreted as confirmation of the need for a group or collective approach to various common issues is replaced by a contractual arrangement between an organisation and an individual for the provision of particular services. It is contended that whilst initially increasing membership numbers, the ‘provision of services’ as an organisational response further exacerbates rather than ameliorates the level of criticism and tension between
membership and leaders. This response develops a willingness to pay rather than a willingness to act on behalf of the NSWFA amongst members. Hence, the ability of the NSWFA leadership to control the political activity of members is significantly diminished.

The fourth section, incorporating Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine, examines the implications of the NSWFA and NFF reform process implemented to address the challenges outlined in the first section. Chapter Seven examines the NSWFA’s efforts to influence the debate over native vegetation management in NSW. It is contended that the NSWFA’s attempts to oppose and alter the Native Vegetation Conservation Act (NVC Act) were hampered by its inability to coordinate the activities of those members who were charged with representing the Association on local decision-making committees under the Act. This chapter suggests that the NSWFA’s lack of control over its members is a direct result of the ‘provision of services’ response and the lack of emphasis on integrating farmers’ interests in a collective manner.

Chapter Eight examines the extent to which the loss of control by NSWFA leaders is linked to particular issue sets or contexts. It argues that the NVC Act is indicative of an increasing range of issues that require the Association to coordinate the behaviour of its members to exercise influence. As such, the NSWFA’s present emphasis on generating a willingness to pay as opposed to a willingness to act amongst its members leaves the Association with limited scope for exercising influence. In turn, it argues that this forces the NFF family to reconsider its present approach to representing farmers’ interests.

As indicated in 1.9, the ultimate question is to what extent the NFF family is equipped to represent farmers’ interests. Consequently, Chapter Nine revisits the representative paradox. The implicit assumption of this thesis is that a farming constituency and an attached set of interests actually exists; it just needs to be uncovered. However, structural changes in agriculture, brought on largely by trade-liberal policy, suggest that a constituency may no longer exist and that a coherent farmer interest is going to become more elusive over time. If this is the case it has significant implications for the relevance
of interest groups. If there are no clear constituencies and no clear interests then what role
do interest groups fulfil? What do they signify? Where does their authority come from?
Chapter Nine addresses these questions and re-evaluates the significance of the
representative paradox and the challenges facing the NSWFA and NFF as described in
the outset of the thesis.
Chapter Two

A History of Political Representation of Farmers in Australia

2.1 Introduction

The political representation of primary producers in NSW is achieved through the NSW Farmers’ Association and the National Farmers’ Federation. This family of interest groups is the recognised voice of Australian primary producers. Chapter One provided a snapshot of the NFF family as it stands, highlighting the paradoxical nature of its representative achievements. Given that the task of this thesis is to unpack the 'representative paradox', it is important to identify how the trends comprising this paradox came about. To do so requires identifying the forces that led to the NFF’s formation and guided its subsequent development into a modern, professional, peak interest-group structure.

Given the focus of this thesis, it is understandable that historical examination needs to concentrate on the period immediately prior to the NFF's formation through to the present day. However, it is also important to trace the pattern of political representation since the colonial times. Whilst a relatively recent addition to the political landscape, the NFF family structure has its roots in more than a century of political organisation. In the quest for political representation, primary producers have moved from local voluntary associations, parliamentary parties, state and commodity-based sectoral interest groups to, finally, a federated national interest group. Whilst there appears to have been a seamless transition from an unorganised group of farmers to a series of well-disciplined and professionally operated interest groups, the nature and rationale for the change remains unclear. Moving beyond the NFF era is crucial to identifying the factors that have catalysed transitions between different political formations. Particular attention is paid to the role of changes in the social-economic conditions of primary producers and the political conditions enforced by the prevailing political-administrative system in bringing about transitions in representative political formations. Identifying the factors that catalysed transitions between previous political formations assists in understanding
Chapter Two

A History of Political Representation of Farmers in Australia

the significance of the dynamics at play in the paradox facing the NFF family. In effect, the situation facing the NFF family is viewed as yet another iteration in the development of formations to politically represent farmers’ interests. What is yet to be determined is whether the transition has been driven by factors that have an historic precedent.

These factors prove useful in examining the evaluations of ‘success’ applied to the NFF family by a range of commentators (see Chapter Three, Section 3.2). It assists in teasing out the basis on which commentators have been applying these tags and the extent to which they are founded on in-depth analysis or distant observation. The import of establishing the mode of change also extends far beyond historical record. As was amply illustrated in Chapter One, these past formations appear to be guiding contemporary discussions (or more accurately ‘reactions’) amongst primary producers about the future of their political representation. Discussions of ‘new’ parties, groups and local associations draw heavily on the apparent success of these past formations. Consequently, it is important to understand in more detail how and why past formations arose, were supported and declined.

Complex and detailed histories have been written on the development of primary producers’ political formations. The task of documenting these histories is the sole focus of many books and doctoral theses. To attempt even a credible summary of these works would require a thesis dedicated solely to this task. Therefore, this chapter will resemble a ‘potted’ history of the political activity of primary producers with particular emphasis on NSW. This chapter will focus on the catalysation of political activity and the role played by material conditions, experiences of primary producers, the economic climate of agriculture and the agricultural policy process. It will plot the changes or transitions in formations used by primary producers to represent their interests. Finally, it will establish the rationale for the development of the NFF family of farm interest groups.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{1}}\text{Graham (1966, 54) is clear that whilst the pattern of development of primary producers political strategies — from local group to pressure groups, to parliamentary party — were consistent through out Australia, there were qualitative differences between states. Given this thesis ultimate concern with the NSW Farmers’ Association, the focus of this chapter will be on the qualitative nature of political developments in NSW.}\]
2.2 Politics in the Colony: 'The Squatters Council'

Between 1823 and 1842 the colony was ruled by the Governor in combination with a Legislative Council. The Legislative Council meetings were held behind closed doors and were not reported by the press (Hallam 1983, 108). The Legislative Council constituted both official members (appointed by London) and unofficial members (appointed from amongst the colonists by the Governor). The Legislative Council was dominated by '... the small number of free and wealthy colonists ...' and had as its aim the '... wresting of control of the Colony's land from the colonial office ...' (Hartwell 1955, 55). McNaughton (1955, 107) refers to the NSW Legislative Council as the 'squatters council', reflecting the influence that squatters, as the major wealth producers and landholders, had on the political process.

Post-1842, the parliament was established, comprising two houses which were majority-elected and relatively autonomous. Whilst the Legislative Council took direct power from the Governor, elections only involved a minority of the colonial population (Hallam 1983, 109). The number of rural seats in early parliaments far exceeded the electoral numbers of pastoralists (Hartwell 1955, 68). This, coupled with the parochialism of elected members for local issues, ensured that pastoralists' interests continued to largely prevail. The Pastoralist Association, which formed in the mid-1840s, was instrumental in squatters exercising influence on Legislative Council members. Whilst this association was instrumental in coordinating action, citizens in the colonial era voted for '... local men, or a colonial notable, whose talisman was his ability to get things done for his constituency' (Aitken 1977, 14).

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2The New South Wales Judicature Act of 1823 established the Legislative Council, but according to Hartwell (1955,65) it left the Governor's power largely intact. The 1842 Act gave the Colony a Council of 12 nominated and 24 elected officials.

2According to Hallam (1983, 109), in 1951 the states 31 electorates were split into three categories, pastoral, country and urban. The pastoralists had a number of their own occupying the country seats in addition to all the pastoral ones. Further, the number of voters per urban electorate was double that of the country and pastoral ones. It was an effective way for pastoralists' to maintain their parliamentary ascendancy.
Chapter Two  

A History of Political Representation of Farmers in Australia

The post-1850s in NSW marked a shift in political power from country to town. The extension of suffrage and other democratic reforms weakened the political hegemony exercised by squatters (Connors 1996, 17). However, during the same period their general economic prosperity increased as a result of increases in prices for wool, the weight of fleeces and a reduction in the use of farm labour. The absence of significant wealth, independent of agriculture, ensured pastoralists’ interests prevailed despite reform of electoral and legislative processes.

As the number of free settlers increased they, too, became politically active. The first Free Selectors’ Association was formed at Yass, in the Southern Tablelands of NSW, in 1873. Similar associations proliferated throughout NSW. In what became an annual event, a conference was held in Sydney in 1875 for delegates of all the associations (Loveday and Martin 1966, 101). The Free Selectors’ Association proceeded to organise meetings to select candidates for the 1877 general election. According to Loveday and Martin (1966), the legislative Assembly took on a more pro-selector tone from the mid-1870s and the Free Selectors’ Association had a recognisable faction within that chamber.

By the beginning of the 1880s the factions that had previously characterised the NSW Legislative Assembly were crumbling. A worsening economic crisis unleashed social tensions that favourable economic conditions had largely obscured. As the environment within which primary producers operated increased in complexity — due to technological innovation, changes in marketing arrangements, government legislation and economic conditions — producers started to experiment with diverse forms of organisation. Graham (1966, 46) comments:

His energies were directed to several objectives: at the local level he tried to build up clubs or associations, and gradually to increase their functions; outside the district he gave his support to sectional, regional or cooperative institutions. In the last decades of the nineteenth century the process of association-building in country communities was continuous; some organisations would last a few years and then fade away; others would carry on at a low level of activity; others would adapt themselves to changing conditions and survive.

39
The period between 1875 and 1900 was a turning point in the political organisation of primary producers. It was through local groups that farmers came to be aware of transport, trading, banking and tariff issues. Importantly, they became aware that most primary producers were enduring similar experiences and perceived similar threats. This was instrumental in the creation of an identity which began to replace 'the absence of tradition and the weakness of shared values' that were 'characteristic of earlier colonial times' (Graham 1966, 13).

2.3 Formation of Primary Producer Organisations

It is generally conceded that primary producers formally organised into associations in response to the organisation of labour in Australia (Trebeck 1990; Brown and Longworth 1995). However, Connors (1996) draws attention to the fact that there were three threads to the formation of farm organisations. The first was union threats, the second the conflict between graziers and farmers (squatters and selectors) and the final strand being the militant wheat producers frustrated with unstable prices and the escalating domestic costs of production.

A Farmers' 'Union'?

The most commonly cited catalyst for the political organisation of farmers was the shearsers' strikes of the 1890s. The Amalgamated Shearers' Union was formed in 1886. Subsequent to this formation, the Queensland Shearers' Union and the Amalgamated Shearers' Union demanded that Queensland pastoralists employ only unionised shearsers. In 1890, the Australian Labour Federation resolved to halt all the exports of wool shorn by non-union labour (Trebeck 1990).

Prior to 1890, groups of primary producers were organised principally to deal with local issues and influence the selection of candidates for election, however the new challenge from labour required an organised and direct response at both state and national level. In July 1890, the Pastoralists' Union of NSW was established, followed by the formation of the United Pastoralists' Association of Queensland in December of the same year. An inter-colonial conference, held in the same month, resolved to form the Pastoralists' Federal Council (PFC). The first meeting of the PFC was held in March 1891 in
Chapter Two  

A History of Political Representation of Farmers in Australia

Queensland (Trebeck 1990, 127). The Pastoralists' Union of NSW was formed to represent predominantly grazing interests on industrial relations matters. It was renamed the Graziers' Association in 1916 (Richmond 1980, 72).

The shearing dispute was finally resolved in 1891, when a meeting was held between the Amalgamated Shearers' Union and the PFC. These parties agreed that shearers should be free to accept work and pastoralists should be free to refuse work without reference to union membership (Trebeck 1990, 128). Despite this apparent truce, in 1909 the then president of the Australian Workers' Union asserted that there were 'some 10,000 strikes in shearing' between 1886 and 1904 (Gill 1981, 143). The cessation of disputes around 1904 coincided with the federal Conciliation and Arbitration Act of 1904 (Gill 1981, 144). Despite the existence of formal procedures to deal with industrial disputes, the PFC continued to characterise unions as an ongoing threat to pastoral operations in order to maintain some organisational momentum and guard against membership loss (Connors 1996, 21).

Land tenure: Farmers versus the Graziers

Whilst the graziers were pursuing the unions, small farmers and 'selectors' were organising against the graziers. Few farmers operated sheep enterprises, hence their focus was not on the union movement's immediate demands. According to Connors (1996, 17), farmers were upset that the colonial land laws had not freed up the large pastoral lands occupied by graziers.

Prior to 1831, the only method of obtaining land was by grant from the governor. However, after 1831, land was to be acquired through payment of a flat fee. Despite legislation promising the contrary, isolation and lawlessness thwarted attempts to collect fees which allowed squatting to become the dominant form of land tenure. Wealthy squatters who precluded 'selectors' (those wanting to purchase land) from taking up prime agricultural land occupied the majority of NSW. The Pastoralists' Association is credited with influencing the NSW Legislative Council to pass a law allowing for 14-year leases over crown land runs (McNaughton 1955, 106 &108). By virtue of this political
Chapter Two

*A History of Political Representation of Farmers in Australia*

influence, between 1820 and 1850 roughly 73 million acres was tenanted by less than 2000 squatters (Hartwell 1955, 81). The 1861 ‘Free Selection before Survey’ Bill should, in principle, have led to reform. However, graziers on the whole managed to work around the laws (Hartwell 1955, 48).

A meeting of a collection of local ‘selectors’ associations took place in Sydney in 1883 to consider a response. They lobbied for and gained legislative reform through the Crown Lands Act of 1889. However, this Act included provisions allowing graziers loopholes through which to claim exemption from subdividing land upon expiration of their lease. According to Graham (1966, 56), once the implications of this Act became clear to farmers, they held conventions to contemplate a further response. One was held at Wagga Wagga in 1890, which resulted in the formation of the Amalgamated Farmers’ Union — a confederation of local farmers unions in rural NSW (Ellis 1963, 13). A further meeting was held in 1892. A third meeting was held in June 1893, at which the Farmers’ and Settlers’ Association (FSA) was formed. According to Richmond (1980, 72), ‘... its main objective was to secure sufficient land to enable the would-be selector to make an adequate living’. The FSA’s target was the pastoralists as much as the unions.

**Militant Wheatgrowers**

Militant wheat producers frustrated with unstable prices and the escalating domestic costs of production constitute the third thread (Connors 1996). Wheat farmers of the Mallee and Wimmera, and others from areas where government had instituted closer settlement schemes, protested their inability to make a productive living on existing subdivisions. The disparity in profits between merchants and wheatgrowers escalated demands for market reform and a reduction in tariff protection for domestic industries.

Demands for price stabilisation and producer control of marketing processes by the Farmers’ organisation ultimately fragmented the position of the Pastoralists’ organisation. Drought, poor wool prices and lack of demand for breeding stock had led to a 50 per cent reduction in sheep numbers between 1895 and 1902, whilst the acre under crop increased from 3.5 to 9 million acres between 1890 and 1913 (Shaw 1990, 10). These trends
Chapter Two  A History of Political Representation of Farmers in Australia

reflected the move of pastoralists into wheat production. As a consequence of this diversification, some woolgrowers, who were members of the Pastoralists’ Union, were also wheatgrowers. They began to demand that stabilisation measures, similar to those granted wheatgrowers through the series of five-year wheat stabilisation schemes, be extended to wool (Connors 1996, 27).

The wheat industry’s increasing exposure to the export market soon reinforced the lack of control producers exercised over prices they received. This, coupled with a severe drought in 1914 that cut wheat production by 75 per cent, prompted farmers to demand a reduction in protection to other sectors of the economy (Graham 1966, 13). The call for a reduction in tariff barriers was coupled with a call for reform of the marketing system. Ultimately, these producers retreated from the free-market philosophy of pastoralists and demanded government intervention and market protection (Graham 1966, 65; Connors 1996, 31).

In 1931, the Australian Wheatgrowers’ Federation was formed. It was a body that many state and regional farmer organisations slowly affiliated with. This left two major national ‘families’ of primary-producer organisations: the Graziers, who maintained a free-market platform, and the Farmers, who advocated protection.

2.4  The decline of the ‘local member’ and the rise of Party politics

The early organisation of primary producers resulted in the development of a complex of local, regional, state, commodity and federal organisations. The issue of land tenure, in particular, introduced a class dimension to political organisation. Two groups of primary producers were discernible: the small to medium and the big. In New South Wales the small to medium tended to belong to the Farmers’ and Settlers’ Association (FSA) and the larger to the Graziers’ Association (Hallam 1983, 29). According to Hallam, the FSA was ‘... unsympathetic to city-manufacturing and trading interests. The Graziers’ Association covered the pastoralists and was dominated by the bigger graziers together with the bankers’ nominees and pastoral companies’ (Hallam 1983, 29). Generally speaking, the farmers, normally on marginal land, had to undergo significant hardships
compared to their grazier colleagues (Hartwell 1955, 48). The graziers' economic prosperity was coupled with political and social importance (Shaw 1990, 8).

It must not be forgotten that this simple 'class' dichotomy amongst 'owners' of land existed within a broader social stratification within farming rural communities. As Graham observes:

... at the bottom of the scale was the agricultural labourer; then came the sharefarmer, working another man's land for part of the profits; above him was the small farmer, often using his family for labour; and at the top was the wealthy farmer who owned a large property and employed labour (Graham 1966, 60).

Despite their class differences these two organisations pursued politics in a similar manner. Politics in NSW during the 1800s was 'personal-following politics'. Rural members of the Assembly 'gained their votes on the basis of how effective they were as pork-barrellers: bringing in a new railway line, post office or courthouse building' (Hallam 1983, 14). The importance of the local members as the major conduit of influence was well-understood. Branches of organisations like the FSA in NSW required candidates to endorse their manifesto prior to gaining their support at the ballot box (Graham 1966, 52). The FSA encouraged branches to set up 'electorate organisations' to choose candidates for elections (Ellis 1963, 25). This local leverage allowed both farmers and graziers the luxury of maintaining some influence over parliamentarians whilst continuing to openly display the fragmented nature of primary producers as a group.

As a consequence, local, dynamic primary-producer organisations became the extra parliamentary organisation that the informal 'country factions' in parliaments had lacked. Whilst these members of parliament formed voting groups they had no formal organisational link. However, the platform of the farm organisation, which they often endorsed prior to the election, served to bind them together as a group and provide some degree of consistency in their policy position. This signalled a move from a politics of 'influence' to that of 'organisation' (Loveday and Martin 1966, 154).

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4These groupings were often identified under broad banners. For example in NSW the groups supporting farmers' interests were called the 'Protectionists'.

44
Chapter Two  

A History of Political Representation of Farmers in Australia

Federation changed the nature of parliamentary party politics and dissolved the informal ‘country’ voting blocks which primary producers had used to great advantage. The ‘party system’ forced, at the very least, cooperation between the farmers and graziers. Graham acknowledges: ‘As the old two-party system, based on Free Trade/Protectionist division, gave way to the new dualism of Liberal versus Labor, most social groups, and the farmers especially, came under pressure to choose sides’ (Graham 1966, 59).

The organisation of labour through the ‘Labor Party’ post-federation, put a different complexion on parliamentary politics. In the NSW parliament, anti-Labor factions formed (generally under the banner of Liberals) to oppose the Labor Party. However, within these factions the manufacturers, produce traders and merchants had more influence than did primary producers. Hallam argues that these factions were so ineffective that ‘The 1920s began with Labor country members providing the only effective voice for non-graziers…” (Hallam 1983, 31).

It was clear that post-Federation, the power of local politicians acting autonomously was in steep and irrevocable decline. The new party system required farmers to establish a suitable organisation able to extend influence to the new system. The apparent lack of influence in the existing anti-Labor parties left the only real option as a ‘Primary Producers Party’.

As country factions were being formed less frequently and were proving less effective, the rank and file in the farmers’ organisations felt that the only answer was to form separate parliamentary country parties and to back them with adequate electoral machinery (Graham 1966, 53).

Farmers needed a parliamentary voice that had some organisational and ideological permanency. It had to appeal to the broad spectrum of primary producers; from Labor-sympathising sharefarmers and managers through to the absentee landowners who controlled vast tracts of pastoral lands.
2.5 Primary Producers in Parliament: The Country Party

The resolve of primary producers to form a Country Party was galvanised by a number of major trends. Firstly, there was a general feeling, amongst both graziers and farmers, that ‘... the united Liberal Parties, which they had at first welcomed as a means of defeating the Labor Party, had closed them out from important areas of influence’ (Graham 1966, 79). Labor emerged as an extension of the union movement whilst the Liberals had increasingly become an agent for urban business interests. Secondly, under the colonial government the local member was relatively accountable and the primary-producer organisations could influence who was elected through local parliamentary pre-selection and endorsement procedures (Clark 1963, 200-1). However, the new party system dissolved the neat confluence between local members and branches of the relevant producer organisations (Clark 1963, 200-1). Thirdly, the discontent of wheatgrowers who, having expanded in the first decade of the century and borrowed heavily, were not receiving the prices necessary to pay back their debt. Finally, the increasing use of marketing pools for selling commodities played an important role in hastening the Country Party’s formation (Graham 1966, 96). Primary-producer organisations were generally opposed to marketing pools because they were perceived as being poorly administered and lacked accountability to producers. The opposition was reversed once producers gained places on pool boards, and cooperatives were granted special status as grain handlers for the marketing boards (Greenwood 1955, 320).

As Table 2.1 illustrates, the development of a parliamentary Country Party was a national phenomenon.
Table 2.1. The Early Development of Farm Organisations and the Country Party.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>Amalgamated Farmers’ Union forms.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1890-93</td>
<td>Three meetings held in rural NSW amongst local farmers' groups.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Farmers’ and Settlers’ Association of NSW (FSA) emerge from</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Amalgamated Farmers’ Union in 1893.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>Factions within other parties coalesce to form ‘The Country Party’.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>They operate as a ‘party within a party’ for 10 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>- NSWFSA conference considers a ‘direct party’ but votes against it.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Discussions between interstate farmer organisations regarding a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>national coordinating body.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>- NSWFSA conference is attended by Victoria, South Australia and</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Queensland state organisations who jointly set up a committee to</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>investigate a national organisation.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Shortly after the first report of the committee, NSW, VIC, QLD, SA</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and WA meet in Sydney and form ‘Council of Commonwealth Farmers’</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organisations’.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1907 and 1908</td>
<td>Meetings of ‘Council of Commonwealth Farmers’ Organisations’</td>
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<td>1908</td>
<td>At NSWFSA Annual Conference a motion is passed that the Association</td>
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<td></td>
<td>become a ‘straight out political party’. However, the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>limitation on parliamentary representation remains.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>- NSWFSA Launches an official weekly journal ‘The Land’.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- NSWFSA endorses a candidate for NSW Parliament.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Farmers’ Unions arise in QLD to oppose Rural Workers’ Union that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>is more keenly pursuing wages and conditions for rural workers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Inauguration of QLD Farmers’ Union.</td>
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<td>1913</td>
<td>- QLD Farmers’ Union forms QLD Country Party.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- NSWFSA endorses a number of candidates for state parliament.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>West Australian FSA forms an independent (ie. not a party within a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>party) Country Party.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>South Australian FSA forms.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>First council meeting of the Australian Farmers’ Federal</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organisation. It consists of members from NSW, SA and WA FSA’s and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the VIC Farmers Union.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>First Country Party member elected to Federal parliament. It is a</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Victorian Seat.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>The ‘Progressives’ in NSW rename themselves the ‘Country Party’</td>
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<td></td>
<td>on August 14, 1925.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Table compiled from information contained in Ellis (1963).

Despite the resolve for an encompassing primary-producer party, the tensions between graziers and farmers, inherited from their separate organisations, remained in the parliamentary organisation.

One wing of the party was composed of pastoralists and successful farmers who were deeply conservative ... and even branded democracy as a poison because one man, one vote meant the domination of the hard-working pastoralist or farmer by the city 'gas-pipe loafer'. The other wing, composed of the small farmers, farm labourers, petit bourgeoisie, and working classes of the country towns, was a radical group within the party that
Chapter Two  

A History of Political Representation of Farmers in Australia

clamoured for the cutting up of the large estates and toyed with the single tax and similar radical ideas. (Clark 1963, 201).

The internal divisions amongst primary producers laid out by Clark were further complicated by the link between the Labor Party and smaller farmers. Whilst most farmers were involved solely in primary production, many were shearsers or farm labourers who had small selections they were working in their spare time (Hallam 1983, 18). So whilst most primary producers pinned their hopes on the Country Party; others, primarily small selectors and part-time farm labourers, sort recourse through the Labor Party.

Despite similar outcomes across the nation, the sequence of events and the pace of change differed between states. Given the thesis focus on NSW, the next section details the pattern of development of the Country Party in NSW.

The Country Party in NSW

The Country Party had a number of incarnations prior to becoming a more permanent feature of the political landscape in NSW\(^5\). The first ‘Country Party’, formed in 1893, was a ‘party within a party’. It comprised a coalition of two NSW country factions within existing parties and operated for 10 years (Ellis 1963, 14). Given that both the FSA and ‘Country Party’ opposed the Crown Lands Act of 1889, they cooperated during the 1894 election (Graham 1966, 56). Failing to achieve the extent of land reform hoped for, the coalition of country members from the various parties ended their collaboration, and the first ‘Country Party’ dissolved.

Aitken, on the other hand, maintains that the NSW Country Party commenced in 1919 with the formation of a ‘Central Electoral Council’ comprising delegates from the Graziers’ Association and the FSA. According to Aitken (1972, 22), the purpose of the

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\(^5\)Aitken (1972, xiv) observes that the Country Party in NSW has undergone one major and two minor name changes. ‘From 1919 to 1925 it was the “Progressive Party”, from 1925 to 1931 the “Country Party of New South Wales”, from 1931 to 1943 the “United Country Party of New South Wales”, and since 1943 the “Australian Country Party (NSW)”. Of course as Costar and Woodward (1985) point out it changed in 1975 to the National Country Party and finally in 1982 to the National Party.
committee was to prepare for the 1920 state election. This committee supported the platform of the ‘progressive party’. This form of endorsement prompted further members of parliament to approach the Central Electoral Council and subsequently declare themselves ‘progressive’. The ‘progressive’s’ loss to the ‘free traders’ at the 1925 election resulted in the Progressive’s leader, Colonel Bruxner, and eight colleagues forming the NSW Country Party (Hallam 1983, 33).

Early in its existence the NSW Country Party was nothing more than the ‘... mouthpiece for industrial organisations’ (Ellis 1963, 141): the Graziers’ Association and the Farmers’ and Settlers’ Association were the industrial organisations providing the organisational base of the party. Membership of the party was limited to those who were industrial members, that is, primary producers. This was problematic in that it inhibited the party from gaining broad non-sectional support. In 1926, calls for a ‘political’ as opposed to an ‘industrial’ organisation at federal level resulted in the replacement of the Australian Farmers’ Federal Organisation (AFFO). The AFFO, which represented all state-based primary producer associations, was replaced with the Australian Country Party Association, which was a confederation of state-based associations (Ellis 1963, 143).

Despite winning the 1927 NSW election and having the support of both state farmer organisations, a degree of tension existed over the party’s accountability to the member organisations and the policy of forming anti-Labor coalitions. The NSW Country Party viewed the present party organisation, provided through the Graziers’ Association and FSA branch structure, as unsatisfactory and attempted to obtain finance independent of the two producer associations (Graham 1966, 279).

The 1930s were tough times for the nation. Amidst the depression, the Country Party found it difficult to deliver on much of its agenda, including the provision of new states in northern and southern NSW. The ‘new state’ movements were drowning the Country Party in demands, and the party needed to absorb their demands to maintain unity. In response, the internal organisation of the party was altered to reflect a more ‘grassroots’
approach (Aitken 1972, 33). In 1931, the Country Party of NSW was renamed the United Country Party of NSW.

The NSW Country Party relied on the strong support of its organisation to deliver support, however, the reorganisation undertaken in the 1930s had weakened its ability to mobilise (Aitken 1972, 33). The assumption that members were willing to take up an active political role was ill-founded given that members had not fought hard election campaigns in the past and were generally apathetic.

2.6 Country Party and Producer Organisations Split

The decline in the relationship between the Country Party and the two producer organisations was gradual in nature. Even from the very beginning the Country Party had been transferring power from these organisations to the party machine. In 1923 the Country Party’s constitution was changed to allow the Central Electoral Council to alter policy without the two producer organisations’ approval. The producer organisations’ allocation of seats on the Central Electoral Council had remained frozen at five apiece since formation whilst the Country Party increased its allocation. The Country Party’s allocation was five in 1927, eight in 1933 and more than 15 in 1939 (Aitken 1972, 46).

The United Country Party’s lack of electoral success (losing both the 1941 and 1943 elections in NSW) and the expectation that Labor governments would maintain a hold on the political reins, led to high levels of discontent amongst the farm organisations. The members of the FSA were the most strident critics of Country Party performance. Wheat farmers were angry at the lack of price support for their crop and the withdrawal in 1939 of the assistance they were getting. FSA officials conceded that the organisation had lost effective control of the Country Party (Aitken 1972, 38). A concern was expressed that the Associations link with a ‘discredited opposition’ interfered with its industrial aims. The trend towards support for Labor by wheatgrowers and smaller farmers meant that the FSA was caught in a position where its political affiliation often contradicted the allegiances of its membership base (Marshall 1985, 27). Whilst the FSA maintained that political, indeed parliamentary, action was still necessary, it recognised that being linked
to a party could prejudice its case when the other party is in government. This set of circumstances prompted a majority vote in 1944 for the FSA to end its affiliation.

The graziers, too, had misgivings about the strength of their association with the Country Party. Some were angry at a lack of progress regarding the formation of new states (particularly in the north of the state), whilst others were concerned at what they perceived as the intrusion of city interests in the Country Party. Ultimately, the removal of the FSA’s alliance with the Country Party left the Graziers’ Association with no choice but to follow suit. As Aitken points out, ‘... it would be politically unwise for the Country Party to have the open support of the Graziers’ Association only’ (1972, 39). In 1945, a vote of 54 to 49 at the Graziers’ Association Annual Conference ended the affiliation between the association and the Country Party in NSW.

The significance of the withdrawal of the FSA and the Graziers’ Association in terms of the loss of wealth and organisation is contested (Connors 1996, 47). However, the FSA maintained significant levels of cross-participation with the Country Party at its grassroots and the Graziers’ Association still supplied significant levels of funding. The Country Party continued to pursue the sectional interests of farmers despite no formal link. The sectional appeal was merely accommodated within efforts to become broader through the inclusion of town and business interests. Both organisations considered the Country Party the logical parliamentary voice for rural interests and, hence, encouraged members to join.

2.7  Country Party loses relevance

For the two decades preceding the 1965 NSW elections, the Labor Party remained in office uninterrupted. Whilst the Country Party was on the opposition benches, it still maintained its seats at a relatively stable level. Aitken reports that between 1950 and 1968 the NSW Country Party’s representatives in the lower house ranged from 14 to 17. (1972, 53). However, this maintenance of electoral support belied an undercurrent of distrust from the farming community.
Chapter Two

A History of Political Representation of Farmers in Australia

During the 1960s farm organisations maintained a similar relationship to that struck with the Country Party at their formal separation. The Country Party was considered the voice of primary producers in the forum still considered to be the locus of political power — parliament. McEwen’s now celebrated comment establishes this understanding:

My attitude is that neither the Australian Country Party nor its parliamentary members should decide what is the correct policy for a primary industry. It has always been the policy of my party that those who produce, own and sell a product are the best judges of the way in which their property should be treated. It is the function of my party to see that the will of those who produce and own the product is carried into legislative and administrative effect. (Hansard — House of Representatives — November 23, 1965, p. 3055)

According to Aitken (1972, 268), the tactic of deferring to farm organisations on contentious issues was common. In most instances the Country Party resisted getting involved in disputes over commodity marketing. The plethora of commodity boards and marketing organisations, largely administered by farm organisation-appointed boards, regularly placed the commodity issues out of reach of party politics, as ‘… the industry organisations have a more intimate relationship with these boards than any political party could hope to have’ (Aitken 1972, 268).

Connors (1996, 81) argues that the farm organisations were effectively led by McEwen rather than vice versa. The Country Party, in a period where there were unprecedented levels of bureaucratic involvement in respect of organised marketing schemes, adopted a strategy of securing the control of relevant departments (Aitken 1972, 56). Given their low levels of resources and poorly trained staff, they relied on departmental officers and the Country Party to research and develop policy that they could subsequently claim as their own (Connors 1996, 65).

6In particular he characterises the Country Party as trying to ‘entangle’ the Australian Woolgrowers Council (AWGC), in its ‘protectionist web’. He concludes ‘Pressure groups are supposed to demand benefits from government but, in post-war Australia, we saw a government putting pressure on a pressure group, the AWGC, to accept a benefit many of its members did not want’ (Connors 1996, 132).

7The NSW Graziers Association and the Australian Woolgrower’s and Graziers Council according to Connors (1996, 67) are the exceptions having relatively well argued and professional research. They had taken up the burden of representing primary-producers at the Arbitration Commission and had industrial and economic research officers on the payroll. Additionally, they had little in the way of protection compared to wheat and dairy farmers, so the Country Party had less leverage on them.
In retrospect, McEwen’s comment appears to constitute a reassurance to primary-producer organisations that their influence was to be preserved in the face of mounting evidence to the contrary (Trebeck 1990). For soon after McEwen’s statement, the Country Party reformulated its political strategy. The emergent document from the party’s 1966 revision of its policy contained just one page devoted to primary production. Its content reflected McEwen’s new belief that the economic well-being of the nation depended on assisting exporters, including the manufacturing sector. Accordingly, the party was reoriented to seek the support of all ‘producers’, not just primary producers. According to Aitken, the ‘Country’ in Country Party now referred to the Australian nation as a whole, rather than regional or rural Australia as originally implied. This change manifested itself in policy terms through the introduction of assistance for manufacturers who could present a cogent case to the Tariff Board and the policy of ‘protection all round’ to ‘off-set’ farmers for the costs of manufacturing protection (Aitken 1972, 70-1).

The Country Party increasingly lost relevance to the mainstream farming community as it cast its electoral net broader than the sectional interests of primary producers. The Country Party leader in 1971, Doug Anthony, outlined the ‘new chapter in its life’ with particular reference to farmers’ representation:

> When the Country Party says, as it does, that it wants to speak and does speak for country people, it doesn’t mean that it speaks just for the farmer. The Country Party believes that there is an invisible common interest linking all country people — farmer, businessman, storekeeper, employer, employee, professional. We see a fundamental interdependence between the rural producer and the people he serves in the towns and who serve him. (Anthony 1971).

It is perhaps also true that the primary-producer organisations needed the Country Party less and less. The Country Party’s role in representing primary producers’ interests was becoming as much ‘symbolic’ as it was ‘functional’ (Aitken 1968, 118). The provision of assistance to agriculture was by now the policy of all major parties. Further, the transfer

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8The reorientation of the Federal Country Party was also transposed onto the NSW context. The state party was contemplating contesting urban and regional city seats (such as Newcastle) to further stabilise the electoral foundation of the party.
of many government functions to the bureaucracy, such as determining assistance levels, meant that the importance of parliament in fine-tuning policy was declining.

Regardless of grassroots and farm interest-group disillusionment, the Country Party and primary-producer groups worked as a team to serve largely overlapping constituencies. In fact, Connors cites the former Executive Director of the NSW Graziers’ Association, John White, to illustrate the depth of this partnership:

   John White explained that during the 23 years of Coalition Government [federally] the representation of farm interests could be accomplished by telephone calls from the presidents of farm organisations to ministers in Canberra. Even if you did not like Jack McEwen, he said, that was how representation was done. (Connors 1996, 174)

The end of the Country Party as a distinctive ‘rural’ parliamentary presence, evidenced by its attempts to appeal to a broader constituency, left farmers, in a quantitative sense, back where they were in the late 1800s. They had no formal party structure and a weak, fragmented voluntary association structure. It was, of course, qualitatively different. In the 1800s Labor was under-organised, parliament was a collection of parochial members who, at best, formed weak groupings normally based on geographical boundaries, agriculture was economically important, rural seats made a majority of those contested in all state and federal parliaments, and markets were primarily domestic or, in the case of wheat and wool, were shipped, under government agreement, directly to Britain. This environment no longer prevailed.

In contrasting the Country Party of the 1970s with that of the 1920s Aitken concludes: ‘... its distinctiveness has faded, its parliamentary numbers are relatively fewer, its influence has declined and its future is less assured’ (1972, 60). That the Country Party’s core constituency, primary producers, was declining in numbers forced it to rethink its strategy. As had occurred in the 1940s, farmers again had their views diluted as the party reoriented itself to a broader constituency to ensure its survival. However, an alternative was hard to find. Local members were swept up in ‘party politics’ whilst farm

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9In addition to a decline in primary producers, rural electorates in the NSW Legislative Assembly were abolished as follows; one in 1949, four in 1949, one in 1961 and one in 1966 (Aitken 1972, 69).
organisations were poorly funded, employed untrained staff and were largely devoted to industrial matters.

2.8 Implications for Interest Groups

In the context of a vanishing sectional 'primary-producers party', primary-producer organisations were increasingly under pressure to take up a broader role as the aggregators and articulators of primary producers' political preferences (Barbalet 1975, 5). A number of factors drew the attention of agriculturalists to the need for a coordinated, professional and credible political representative. The creation of the Industries Assistance Commission (IAC), the growing influence of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), the weakening of the Country Party and the election federally of Gough Whitlam, and subsequently Malcolm Fraser, hastened efforts amongst primary-producer organisations to rethink and reorganise themselves in an attempt to articulate a unified political position regarding agricultural policy

Industries Assistance Commission

The replacement of the Tariff board with the Industries Assistance Commission (IAC) in 1974 commenced the erosion of price protection for rural industries. The IAC scrutinised the assistance primary producers received, demanding professional presentation and reasoned economic, rather than emotive ideological, argument. To supply professional economic argument, primary-producer organisations needed to become 'professional'. Many started to employ tertiary-educated staff.

The initial resistance of primary producers to the IAC subsided as early reports indicated the level of assistance to agriculture was below that generally perceived by the public. Often the reports agreed with many of the points made in primary-producer organisation submissions to the Commission (Trebeck 1990, 135). Ultimately, it was only the

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10 Harman (1968, 125) notes that it was not just primary producers who were exhibiting a lack of unity. He observes that the union and business sectors both have a multitude of voices claiming representation. However he illustrates that both these sectors have unifying strategies when an issue is of sufficient magnitude. For business they can adjust at the business unit level whilst labour can go on strike.

11 Whilst Trebeck's comments are sound, his subsequent assertion that the IAC promoted a more informed debate amongst the grass roots of farm organisations has little corroborating evidence. Current calls for
Chapter Two

A History of Political Representation of Farmers in Australia

Country Party that opposed the mechanism. It was concerned the IAC would threaten the partnership between Country Party ministers, the departments under their control and primary-producer organisations, which had been instrumental in setting the rural policy agenda. The IAC thwarted the Country Party's use of agricultural policy as a way to shore up electoral support; regardless of its impact on the public interest or even the long-term interest of agriculture (Warhurst 1982, 20-22).

Whitlam, whilst creating the IAC, was also responsible for the Green Paper into rural policy and the establishment of the National Rural Advisory Committee (NRAC). Both these measures threatened to destabilise the policy-making structure, as each had the potential to challenge the authority and influence of existing primary-producer organisations. However, this threat took a great while to come to fruition. Whilst the members of NRAC were appointed by the minister, most were prominent members of existing primary-producer organisations. The Committee became a forum for these groups to garner popular support with members which limited its capacity to articulate 'fresh' ideas from the grassroots (Longworth 1975, 15).

Australian Council of Trade Unions

The rising profile of the ACTU, and the success it had in articulating a coherent position under the leadership of Bob Hawke, further prompted the realignment of primary-producer organisations during the late 1970s. Appeals were made in rural media for farmers to learn from the union movement. One commentator said farmers should become more 'unionified', another said the set-up for primary-producer organisations should be like that of the ACTU (McWilliam 1977, 14). The prospect of a federal Labor government in cohorts with a powerful ACTU was one good reason for primary producers to resolve internal conflicts.

Primary-producer organisations, until the 1970s, were able to exercise considerable influence on commodity issues through their commodity federations, yet on general regulation, price stabilisation and subsidy would suggest that this educative benefit, if there really was one, only accrued to the organisational 'elite' and only took effect over a few short years.
economic issues they were outmanoeuvred by the better-researched manufacturing representatives and unions (Harman and Smith 1967, 81).

**Whitlam and Fraser Governments**

The election of the Whitlam and then Fraser governments provided further evidence that parliament would no longer protect the interests of agriculture. The Whitlam Government attacked assistance to rural industry, exposing this assistance to public scrutiny through the IAC, and replaced farmer representatives on the commodity marketing boards with ‘experts’. According to Marshall (1985, 29) it took some time for farmers to realise that working through the Country Party as the principal means of altering agricultural policy was no longer effective. Some primary-producer organisations continued to take policy requests to the leadership of the National Country Party rather than deal with the new Labor minister\(^\text{12}\).

Fraser, whilst less severe than Whitlam, continued on with the IAC and reduced producer representation on marketing boards. He did however, reintroduce the petrol price equalisation scheme and an income tax averaging scheme, both of which garnered some rural support (Martin 1989, 6). Despite this assistance, the Fraser government adopted an economic rationalist stance, and signalled once and for all that the ‘protection all round’ policies of the McEwen era were over. His government illustrated that the election of a Liberal/National Party government did not guarantee primary producer influence over policy directions or the preservation of assistance.

The end of McEwenism also signalled the end of the symbiotic relationship between the Country Party and primary-producer organisations. As Campbell (1980, 202) observes: ‘Today, only a limited number of rural measures can be settled in a cosy agricultural context without regard to their ramifications on the rest of the economy’. The IAC ‘...

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\(^{12}\)Marshall, citing Warhurst’s (1982) study on the IAC, suggests that extra-parliamentary bodies do not necessarily mean an end to traditional means of influence. Here, Warhurst refers to the Commonwealth Department of Primary Industry (DPI) as a target for influence by farm organisations. This interpretation is open to question given the emergence of environment, economics and foreign affairs as the terrain on which many ‘agricultural issues’ are fought. However it is clear that a level of symbiosis prevails between departments and interest groups.
changed the rules of the policy formulation game’ (Martin 1989, 4) and, along with the cessation of National Party patronage, reduced the importance of parliament and the minister as primary targets for political influence by farmers\textsuperscript{13}. Primary-producer organisations needed to take up a more direct political role. This was to prove difficult, as it was a role that primary-producer organisations were neither prepared, skilled or financed to undertake.

2.9 **Amalgamation of Farmer Organisations: ‘Merger Madness’?**

The economic hardship experienced by agricultural producers was reflected in the financial position of primary producer organisations. Given that organisations would often duplicate work, despite many of them maintaining offices in close geographical proximity to one another, amalgamation was advocated as one way to cut costs and ensure organisational effectiveness\textsuperscript{14}. Financial pressure was reinforced by political pressure. McEwen had insisted that farmers speak with one voice in policy representations. Disunity and inconsistency amongst farm groups, it was argued, would leave government with no other choice but to act on their departmental advice or the advice of other more professional and cohesive sectors\textsuperscript{15}.

With the financial and political cost of parallel organisations increasingly apparent, primary-producer organisations commenced the task of amalgamation in the late 1960s — a project largely completed by the end of the subsequent decade. Given that federal organisations were beholden to their state organisations, it is with state-based

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\textsuperscript{13}Longworth (1975, 11) illustrates how the IAC, whilst initially promising to change the nature of how farmers influenced policy, was hampered in its early years by the persistence of ‘pork-barrelling’ as a political strategy. He points to the reserve price scheme, which was put in effect despite IAC insistence that it should not go ahead. Longworth concludes, there was ‘a growing recognition by primary producer organisations (after the wool reserve price scheme fiasco) that pork-barrel politics is still more important when it comes to the crunch than presenting a good case at the IAC...’.

\textsuperscript{14}The word most often used to characterise the joining together of various farm organisations is ‘unity’. However I have used ‘amalgamation’ for the reason that it is purely an organisational measure, motivated by financial considerations, rather than a measure aimed at communicatively deriving a more homogenous set of interests from which to determine the proper direction for agricultural policy. It is true that an unintended consequence of branch amalgamations may be a meeting of ‘two perspective’s’. Yet this is a long term task and most certainly was not achieved at a single point in time.

\textsuperscript{15}To an extent the rise of economic rationalism (see Pusey 1991) supported the case against disunity. This doctrine asserted that a single ‘optimal’ position for the sector could be derived via economic analysis. Disunity therefore implied that the position was based more on emotion than on economic argument.
organisations that analysis of amalgamation need start. It is relatively clear that the precedent for organisational amalgamation came from NSW, so it is on developments in this state that most emphasis is given.

**Amalgamation in NSW**

In 1962, the Wheat and Woolgrowers’ Association\(^{16}\) and the FSA merged to form the United Farmers and Woolgrowers’ Association (UFWA) (Harman 1968, 142). This merger left the UFWA and the Graziers’ Association as the two major primary-producer organisations in NSW. Despite considerable external political pressure to forge a united position, fundamental structural changes in the agricultural sector made unity increasingly harder to achieve between farmers and graziers.

By the 1960s many of the Graziers’ Association members were producing wheat and wool: over 50 per cent of properties with sheep were producing wool, whilst nearly all wheat farmers had some sheep or cattle (Harman 1968, 48). Harman claims that the emergence, and subsequent dominance, of mixed farming resulted in the two bodies having policies on the same industries, bringing the Graziers’ Association and the UFWA into conflict. Wool marketing was a particularly contentious issue. The Graziers’ Association resisted the implementation of a wool-stabilisation scheme, similar to that operating in wheat, whilst the UFWA was generally supportive. Whilst able to thwart a ‘yes’ vote in two referendums on wool assistance, the Graziers’ Association ultimately acceded and the Reserve Price Scheme was instituted.

It is worth noting that the Graziers’ Association’s determination to disprove their image amongst the public and politicians as representing the rich rural elite may have eroded its capacity to resist government assistance for woolgrowers. The Graziers’ Association actively promoted the cause of smaller woolgrowers in its literature and recruited them in such numbers that they constituted the bulk of its membership (Harman 1968, 82). It seems ironic that the tactics employed to recruit members and enhance its political

\(^{16}\)This was a breakaway group of NSW wheat farmers who split from the FSA in 1934.
palatability may ultimately have reduced its ability to influence policy in the direction its core membership originally intended.

Concern was often expressed that politicians would play off one section of an industry against the other without amalgamation. However, some questioned the conventional wisdom regarding amalgamation, prompting one commentator to ask: 'Do farmers, when united, really “speak with one voice” or merely “listen with one ear”?' (Anderson 1972, 122). In his presidential address to the 1966 NSW Graziers’ Association Annual Conference, Bruce Wright warned that unity would benefit politicians more than primary producers. He said:

In my view we should not be concerned about the convenience of government or political parties ... to force into a common organisation interests which are not ideologically homogenous must — and does — lead to the suppression of ideas, to intolerable delays in evolving policy and the emergence of watered down compromise lacking in the vigour of conviction. I fear the regimented suppression of opinion far more than I do the consequences of government being confronted with conflicting policies. (op.cit. Connors 1996, 121)

These sentiments were more than politically convenient rhetoric. Differences between farmers and graziers in terms of production systems also translated into significant differences between the internal operation of both the Graziers’ Association and the UFWA and their conceptions of democracy (Connors 1996, 132-158). The Graziers’ Association leaders were selected by a small group of senior members whilst UFWA left the Annual Conference delegates to elect office bearers. The UFWA had a reputation of being antagonistic towards bureaucrats and academics whilst the Graziers’ Association’s members were largely well-educated and employed university-trained staff to act on their behalf. In terms of influencing government, the Graziers’ Association preferred reasoned argument and written submission whilst the UFWA preferred rallies and marches. The preface to Harman’s (1968) Ph.D. on the Graziers’ Association praises the association for its openness and encouragement, whilst the preface to Richmond’s (1979) Ph.D. on the UFWA registers his frustration at the lack of openness, lack of documentation and the negative attitude towards his presence. In 1967, the Graziers’

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17Connors (1996) notes that the Graziers Association felt comfortable with its staff publishing reports and press releases under their name, whilst the UFWA released information drafted by staff from the President.
Association set up a Unity Study Committee to canvass the idea of uniting with the UFWA\(^{18}\). This committee found sufficient differences to recommend against unification.

Whilst structural, philosophical, political and social differences between farmers and graziers were not resolved, the effects of drought, low commodity prices and rising farm costs were felt by all primary producers. This adversity fostered a climate conducive to amalgamation. The task of returning prosperity to agricultural Australia became a rallying call for the movement towards amalgamation. A further rallying point was the live sheep export issue (Connors 1996, 206). In response to the union movement’s refusal to load sheep at ports unless a proportion of them were slaughtered by union labour in Australia, primary producers moved sheep to a rural port and loaded ships themselves\(^{19}\). Given that the last time primary producers opposed unions was when the pastoralists formed the Pastoralists’ Federal Council in 1890 to oppose the Amalgamated Shearers Union, the symbolism in terms of amalgamation was immense.

The adverse economic conditions also created a climate of militancy and initially producers acted independent of their organisations. In NSW the Rural Action Movement (RAM), which demanded higher prices and marketing reforms, was established. Despite UFWA’s early opposition to the RAM, only two years later it was party to a joint petition to NSW Parliament for the setting up of a sheepmeats marketing board (Connors 1996, 168). Whilst the RAM reportedly faded from view,\(^{20}\) it was indicative of the turbulent times. According to Campbell (1971), three different types of organisations emerged in opposition to established primary-producer organisations. Groups proposed formation of cooperatives to reduce the cost of agricultural inputs, other organisations had the aim of lobbying for a particular marketing reform, whilst others were opposed to the established

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\(^{18}\)See Connors (1996) for a thorough treatment of this committee’s finding and its implications.

\(^{19}\)In effect the unions were attempting to ensure that sheep were exported as carcasses rather than live sheep. Ironically the argument for processing primary produce prior to export (value adding) became the mantra of primary producers throughout the 1980’s and 90’s.

\(^{20}\)The re-emergence of the RAM in the 1990’s (Meeting notice in The Land 1997) in NSW along with other militant groups is significant and will be addressed in later chapters.
positions of farm organisations. All these groups placed established farm organisations under increased pressure to act.

Rural downturn in the 1970s placed significant financial pressure on the organisations themselves, prompting the Graziers' Association and UFWA to make joint submissions and representations to government on several occasions (Richmond 1980, 74)\(^\text{21}\). The widespread economic hardship amongst primary producers, coupled with the lack of funds for both representative organisations, was enough to catalyse a serious move towards amalgamation.

In September 1975, an amalgamation committee was formed between the Riverina Graziers' Association, NSW Graziers' Association and the UFWA to consider plans for a merger (Graham 1978, 3). The report released by the committee listed the positives as reduced costs, ability to resolve conflict within the organisation and the reduction of farmer and grazer divisions. The negatives were that the reduction in competition between two bodies could leave some important views off the agenda, and, hence, facilitate the emergence of splinter groups. The tone of the report gave the clear indication that the advantages outweighed the disadvantages. The plans were put to a referendum of members of the organisations in July 1977 which returned an overwhelming 'yes' vote for amalgamation\(^\text{22}\). In 1978, the Livestock and Grain Producers' Association (LGPA) was established\(^\text{23}\). The title of the new organisation

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\(^{21}\)Connors (1996, 95) suggests that the resolution of the wool marketing issue in the early 1970's paved the way for amalgamation. The establishment of a reserve price scheme ended years of division between the pro-protectionist small woolgrowers represented by the UFWA, and the free-trading Graziers represented by the Graziers Association.

\(^{22}\)According to Trebeck (1990, 136) the response to the referendum was 93% in favour. For the referendum to be valid, over 50% of the financial membership must vote.

\(^{23}\)The mood at the time of amalgamation can be captured by a panel discussion regarding the future of farm organisations and militancy printed in The Land newspaper during 1977. One said that the bickering between farm organisations '...probably played right into the politicians hands. I don't think this should happen. They should go with one voice to debate these issues' (Hardy 1977, 14.) A fellow panelist said regarding professionalism, 'The leaders we have at present are more or less on an honorary basis, aren't they. This is the point we've got to look at really. We've got to have a man who's getting a pretty good salary, probably in the $40,000-$50,000 bracket. You know one who is going to be there all the time.' (Hardy 1977, 14.) The appointment of professional salaried staff was perceived by some as the loss off control by hands-on farmers of their organisations. 'I think you still have got to have a fellow that's got to go back to the farm and get his hands dirty and sow his crop' (Hood, 1977, 14).
Chapter Two  

*A History of Political Representation of Farmers in Australia*

... illustrates the level of compromise necessary to bring together the two organisations; neither farmer nor grazier mentioned. It is clear that amalgamation had not, in itself, resolved diverging interests, ideologies or identities. Rather, financial necessity from an organisational perspective and political pressure from an external perspective had set-aside rather than resolved the heterogeneous interests of the farming constituency.

**Amalgamation in the Rest of Australia**

The pattern of amalgamation was replicated in most states, with the exception of Western Australia and Queensland where regional differences in agricultural production systems made it more difficult (Trebeck 1990). At federal level the amalgamation process proceeded parallel to that which occurred in NSW. A working group was established in 1977 between the Australian Woolgrowers’ and Graziers’ Council (AWGC), the Australian Wool and Meat Producers’ Federation (AWMPF) and the Australian National Cattleman’s Council (ANCC). Following preliminary reports in 1978, the group was widened to include the Australian Farmers’ Federation (AFF)\(^{24}\), the Australian Wheatgrowers’ Federation (AWF) and the Cattleman’s Union of Australia (CUA).

The formation of the NFF, a federation of commodity councils and state organisations, was originally set down for January 1, 1979. However, its commencement was delayed by infighting regarding the level of voting entitlements on commodity councils. State organisations such as the NSWLGPA threatened to withdraw financial support for the new organisation if it was not sorted out promptly (*The Land* 1979, 3). This delayed commencement till July 20, 1979.

The NFF structure reflects the pattern of agricultural policy development in Australia. For the first half of the century, the states held most power in relation to agriculture. State primary-producer organisations, often representing single commodities, emerged as subscription-based organisations to influence state governments. However, post-World War II, the Commonwealth played an increasingly important role in controlling prices,

\(^{24}\) In 1969 the Australian Primary Producers Union (APPU) amalgamated with the National Farmers’ Union (NFU) to form the Australian Farmers’ Federation (AFF) (Campbell 1980, 198; Connors 1996, 113).
regulating the supply of commodities and funding research and development in order to increase post-war production and, hence, increase export earnings. State organisations, still commodity-based, then formed commodity federations as conduits for channelling their demands regarding commodity marketing to the Commonwealth Government. Whilst state organisations had amalgamated into general farm organisations, federal bodies remained commodity-based. Federal primary-producer organisations, apart from the APPU, were always federations of existing state and commodity groups rather than a discrete subscription-based organisation. The NFF was bound to a structure that reflected this history.

The formation of the NFF family in 1979, as the peak 'encompassing group' for farmers\textsuperscript{25} in Australia, is the exception rather than the rule for 'employer associations' in this country. That the NFF family defies broader organisational trends in business representation suggests that farmers are not a typical case.

2.10 Professional Interest Groups: Committees, Corporatism and Extra-Parliamentary Politics

By the end of the 1970s there was an emerging acceptance amongst farmers of the need to adopt more conciliatory tones with governments of both persuasions rather than merely aligning themselves with the Country/National Party. A letter to The Land entitled 'Forget the Parties' expresses the sentiment of this period in rural politics.

\begin{quote}
It is patently clear that the only course open to electors in rural Australia is to forget the parties, as all they have achieved in the past two decades is the further destruction of rural Australia (Vallance 1977, 6).
\end{quote}

Farm organisations, such as the NSWLGPA, put this resolution into effect by banning donations to any political party, ending the practice of distributing National Party electoral material through its branches, and passing motions declaring the organisation non-political. In the context of farmers' disillusionment with parliamentary means of influencing policy, it was significant that the NFF had its initial conflict with a coalition

\textsuperscript{25}From this point on the term 'farmers' will be used in preference to 'primary producers'. The establishment of the National Farmers' Federation illustrated that the farmer versus grazier distinction has less contemporary significance.
government, led by Fraser, and of further significance that its most heated exchanges were with the National Party's leader Doug Anthony.

The farm militancy that preceded the amalgamation continued under the new NFF family. Whilst the amalgamation resolved many financial issues from an organisational perspective, it had not addressed the frustration expressed by many farmers who were unable to find space for the expression of their points of view. Larger farmers were frustrated by their inability to change traditional farm policy. For instance, in 1985 a group of grain producers in western NSW formed Grain Growers of Australia Ltd to oppose the policies of the NSW LGPA (Campbell 1985, 212). Many small farmers, disillusioned with the direction of the NFF family — specifically its support of tax measures which favoured the use of farms as tax shelters (Gerritsen 1987b, 52) — formed their own organisations, both state and federal. That groups were attacking the NFF family for being both, a supporter of traditional price-support policies associated with the wishes of small farmers and a supporter of big farmers who were surviving the farm crisis, illustrates the extent of the equivocation over the direction of farm policy. Most of these groups failed within two years largely due to the lack of financial resources.

Recognising the heightened level of farmer militancy and the increasing disillusionment amongst farm organisation members, the NFF family responded. Rather than address the militancy internally, it focused farmers’ energies on the policies of the newly elected Hawke Labor Government. This culminated in the 1985 Canberra farm rally. The strong

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26 An exception was Grain Growers of Australia Ltd (Goal) who were agitating for deregulation of the wheat industry. They originated in North Star, in North West NSW, and opposed the LGPA and other state based organisations on the issue of wheat market deregulation. They were a single issue organisation and did not seek to take over the existing organisation (Graham 1985, 11).

27 These include the Canowindra Reform Group and the Women's Rural Action Group. In combination with other groups these two formed the Union of Australian Farmers which challenged the NFF. Its agenda was largely to criticise the NFF for pursuing macro-economic reform, the results of which were taking too long to materialise. They pointed out that whilst the lobbying occurred, farmers were being forced of the land.

28 The Canowindra Reform Group asserted the NSW LGPA supported larger farmers’ interests, whilst the Grain Growers of Australia asserted the opposite.

29 According to one ex-employee of the LGPA, the leader of one group went bankrupt in the process of building the organisation. The lack of money in the fledgling organisation meant he could not employ a manager to look after the farm whilst he was away (Farmer Interview—Tarcutta 1997).
Chapter Two  

A History of Political Representation of Farmers in Australia

crowd of farmers marching on Federal Parliament, estimated at 50,000, established the credibility of the NFF family with its constituency. A 'fighting fund' was established on the day of the rally, which raised somewhere between $10 million (Trebeck 1990, 140) and $14 million (Connors 1996, 53). Whatever the exact figure, the farming community, supported by the broader business community, had established a significant fund from which its campaigns could be financed. The NFF's use of direct action as a political tactic had its origins in conflict with the union movement over the live sheep export issue, the Mudgenberi Abattoir dispute and the Wide Comb dispute.

The rally was also significant in that it further eroded the relationship between the NFF and the National Party. The leader of the federal National Party, Ian Sinclair, was denied permission to speak to the rally. This action effectively, as well as literally, removed the Nationals from the role of agenda setting for rural Australia (Connors 1996; 53). In turn the NFF established a reputation with the new Labor Government as being 'ready for business'. Credibility with the farming constituency flowed from the rally; the NFF touted as a body willing and able to act to change what the Nationals couldn't. The NFF held the hopes of an angry and militant rural constituency.

The militant activity not only raised the NFF's stature with its members but also raised its profile with the state. Due to its capacity for militancy the NFF had become an organisation that government could not ignore. Its well-researched and reasoned economic arguments gave its policy position a certain level of respectability. Most significant of all was the NFF's willingness to exchange some agricultural assistance measures in return for reductions in other areas of the economy (Martin 1989, 118). This

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30Gerriesen (1987a, 29) asserts that the farm militancy of the mid 1980's was a tactic by the NFF to divert rank and file attention away from internal organisational tensions. He argues they developed an anti-labor ideology to achieve this diversion, however it was so successful that it threatened to get out of the control of the NFF leadership. This view has to be balanced by recognising the various militant acts that were undertaken independent of the farm organisations. These actions may have drawn on the same ideology but were not connected and in fact opposed the NFF leadership.

31Recent events in relation to the NFF fronting a stevedoring company illustrate the NFF's willingness to 'front' attacks by business on the union movement.
willingness became the basis for the NFF’s participation in subsequent economic policy formulation.

The Hawke Government recognised the NFF’s willingness to make concessions, and in its 1986 ‘Economic and Rural Policy’ statement challenged the farm lobby to get on board and assist the process of reform.

If the rural sector really wants its off-farm costs to be reduced, the farmers must be prepared to support the Government’s efforts in this area. While the Government can provide leadership in the process, major changes have an essentially self-help character. (Commonwealth of Australia 1986, 50)

The statement concludes with:

In its review of economic and rural policies, the Government has identified many areas where little progress can be achieved by government alone. We are looking for a full commitment from rural groups generally, and farm organisations in particular to join us in developing specific courses of action in these areas. We have suggested machinery to facilitate this process. (Commonwealth of Australia 1986, 1)

The formation of the Rural and Allied Industries Council (RAIC)\(^2\) was part of the new corporatist\(^3\) ‘machinery’ which the Federal Labor Government established in order that its reformist agenda be successfully implemented. The NFF and its affiliate organisations took up the corporate role, as articulated by Hawke. Gerritsen and Abbot partly attribute the change in tactics to Kerin’s action prior to the 1987 election, when he bypassed the NFF and went straight to state farm organisations. According to Gerritsen and Abbott (1988, 24):

This reinforced the image of a government interested in constructive dialogue with the farm sector, and reminded the NFF that its authority amongst farm groups was dependent upon its representative function with government. Consequently, after the election a more cooperative relationship with government was sought by the NFF.

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\(^2\)This was renamed the Primary and Allied Industries Council in 1988. The name change was not merely a superficial one. It was accompanied by the inclusion of a representative of the Australian Mining Industry Council to join the already existing membership of farmer, trade union and services sector representatives (Gerritsen and Abbott 1990, 9).

\(^3\)Panitch (1980) and Schmitter (1983) are just two authors who provide a reasonably clear explanation of corporatism.
Chapter Two  

A History of Political Representation of Farmers in Australia

The approach adopted by the Hawke Government with respect to the rural sector was part of a broader policy of bargained consensus (Keating and Dixon 1989)\textsuperscript{34}. That is, the education of narrow interest groups as to the broader agenda, such that they are willing to trade specific measures for the pursuit of policy change which would assist the whole group. They concluded:

... that the Government’s ability to achieve significant changes of direction in a range of economic policies has been aided by the growing influence of more encompassing interest groups. This has not, however, brought with it the disappearance of narrower groups with vested interests in increasing their share of national income (or at least preserving their existing share). (p.xii)

At the Crossroads: Militancy vs Corporatism

The agricultural policy process changed significantly under Hawke (Gerritsen, 1987a). The early militancy had prompted the Hawke Government to provide NFF leaders with an opportunity to make policy gains through de-politicised activity. However, the NFF family’s sponsorship of the 1985 rally and subsequent direct actions left them in a contradictory position. The rally had at once delivered increased access by the NFF to government and left sections of their membership with the belief that political change was best achieved through grassroots activity. The NFF leadership’s corporatist role now required them to convince members to cease militancy. Given that state farm organisations had direct members, they were left to resolve the contradiction.

The NSWLGP captured the contradiction better than most farm organisations; it was simultaneously advocating both militant and de-politicised policy approaches. In the same year as the Canberra farm rallies, LGPA members dumped wheat on the steps of Parliament House and presented the Government with a claim for $3.6 million compensation — the cost per year of its economic policies (Lawrence 1987, 12). In 1986, it called for its members to be prepared, at only 48 hours’ notice, to form roadblocks

\textsuperscript{34}Matthews (1991) rightly observes that it was Corporatism without Business, as the business community did not have an encompassing group. However the conclusion that business’s interests are more fragmented than labour or farmers, due to the difference between small and large businesses, is questionable. After all, white collar/ blue collar distinctions are significant in the union movement. Similarly, the differences between small scale domestic supplying farmers and large scale vertically integrated export supplying farmers are immense. Perhaps the observation of Matthews is significant in what it says about the need for business to mount collective political campaigns. In this endeavour the debate between Offe and Wiesenthal (1980) and Streeck (1992) is instructive.

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around Canberra if their demands were not met by the Hawke Government (Cribb 1986b, 17). The General Council of the LGPA, at its February 1986 meeting, canvassed the range of strategies in which members could participate in and which would advance their cause. These included withholding rates, letter-writing, applying for various forms of government assistance en masse, refuse payment of government rates and blockade Canberra and major roads (NSWLGPA 1986b).

Yet, amidst this militant rhetoric, the NSWLGPA proposed an ‘Agricultural Accord’ be entered into between the agricultural sector and the Commonwealth Government. The NSWLGPA asserted: ‘An Accord has the advantage that it provides both parties with a single forum in which to consider the totality of circumstances affecting the sector’ (NSWLGPA 1986a, 2). The NSWLGPA saw a need for the NFF to create a similar relationship with the Federal Government that it afforded the ACTU. It argued: ‘The precedents for an Agricultural Accord exist not only in the form of the Government-ACTU Accord but also in the presence of omnibus policy vehicles such as the US Farm Bill and the EEC Common Agricultural Policy’ (NSWLGPA 1986a, 2). The reference to these overseas vehicles of farm policy implied that the NSWLGPA was advocating a return to high levels of government intervention in agriculture.

The NFF was furious at the public release of the proposal and opposed its content on a number of grounds. Correspondence from NFF Secretariat staff indicate its opposition centred on the proposal’s implicit acceptance of ACTU-Government accord, an arrangement which the NFF had opposed in its Interest Rate Taskforce paper released on the same day (Campbell 1986; Trebeck 1986). Trebeck claimed that the approach advocated by the proposal locked the NFF into ‘a series of inane consensus type policy statements’, as well as arguing for ongoing government-consultative arrangements that would lead to the further expansion of government. Apart from the substantive disagreement on policy principle, the submission was criticised as economically inaccurate, hence undermining the credibility of the farm lobby (Campbell 1986; Trebeck 1986). David Trebeck (NFF Director) signed his letter off with ‘Hawke just learnt a
lesson about the risks of making policy on the run. LGPA is yet to learn it’ (Trebeck 1986).

Whilst both the NFF and NSWLGPA were committed to some form of corporatist relationship, there was disagreement on how it should be secured. The NFF was convinced it could achieve its economic rationalist policy direction without committing farmers to concrete targets or formal agreements. This position prevailed and instead of pursuing further government assistance the NFF adopted an economic rationalist stance and pursued cost reduction measures, identifying ‘... individual inefficiency amongst farmers and wage inflexibility in the wider community as two of the main problems facing agriculture’ (Lawrence 1987, 201). However, the pace of reform was often too much for some NFF member organisations, in particular those commodity groupings still receiving assistance (Connors 1996, 229).

Controlling the Militants

Despite the leaders having returned to the bargaining table from the barricade, it took until 1987 for the NSWLGPA to finally wrest back control of the agenda from militants. Farm polls in the ‘National Farmer’, whilst hardly a scientific instrument, consistently illustrated a disillusionment with state farm organisations, support for the NFF and a growing enthusiasm for militancy (Cribb 1984, 24-28; Cribb 1985, 20-21; Cribb 1986a, 24-26). This placed increasing pressure on the LGPA to re-invent itself and, in particular, to tie itself more closely to the popularity of the NFF.

In 1987, the LGPA changed its name to the NSW Farmers’ Association (The Land 1990, 21). The name change signalled a new orientation towards a more tightly run and professional interest group. The NSWFA was able to deny its competitors financial and political recognition by virtue of its own economic strength and political palatability. This tactic effectively robbed groups such as the RAM and the Canowindra Reform

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35Gerritsen (1992, 107) rightly identifies that the NFF’s philosophy of economic rationalism is intermittently broken by a return to a form of agrarian socialism. The example cited in his article is the call for handouts by the NFF for drought assistance. The NFF’s economic rationalism does not extend to user pays for the provision of rural infrastructure and some specific industry assistance.
Group of popular support. Ultimately, ‘rebel’ leaders had no choice but to rejoin the NSWFA, with the necessary assurances that their grievances would be given more attention in future.

Whilst the NSWFA backed off from militancy, it still encouraged member participation in political activity. Many of its major campaigns in the 1980s relied on member participation for their success. Campaigns against fringe benefits tax and pay increases for farm workers included threats that if policy was not changed members would refuse to pay both tax and wage rises. In essence, militancy was replaced with coordinated member involvement in implementing sanctions. This policy of member participation and involvement was not carried through into the 1990s.

Series of organised local or regional meetings replaced the large-scale rally that was the hallmark of the 1980s. The NSWFA response to the 1990 rural crisis comprised endorsing unspecified ‘direct action’ and then, as a NSWFA publicist described, using local meetings to enable ‘members to let off steam’ (Stapleton 1990, 10). Needless to say the final ‘direct action’ did not eventuate. This tactic has helped maintain pressure on governments whilst placating members calls for prompt action, maintaining their focus on non-political matters and keeping them from endangering the formal political ‘bargaining’ process. This approach supported the ‘myth’, promulgated by the NFF family, that the solution to the crisis in the agricultural sector lay at the feet of the individual farmer and that they must increase productivity/efficiency or leave the industry

Corporatism and the Professionalisation of the NFF

Throughout the late 1980s the Hawke Government pursued the formation of ‘Policy Councils’ for each agricultural commodity. These were established to replace the old

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36 A similar argument is made about the German Farmers’ Federation (DBV) faced with explaining the contraction of the farm sector and its socio-economic consequences. Heinze and Voelzkow (1993, 32) observe that ‘...causes and socio-economic consequences of contraction were largely individualised by the DBV (eg. by explaining it in terms of entrepreneurial failures), and thereby ignoring it as an associational problem.’
Statutory Marketing Authorities (SMA) that had become a repository for many farm organisation leaders during the McEwen era. A selection committee made up of farm representatives and other notables appointed members to the new councils. This was done to ensure those with the appropriate expertise obtained positions of influence. The minister referred day-to-day policy-making to these councils leading to farm organisation criticism that he was abdicating his ministerial responsibility and deflecting their policy concerns (Gerritsen and Abbott 1988, 11).

Ultimately, the aggressive policy position of the NFF was accompanied by active participation on, and detailed representations to, various quasi-governmental committees and commissions such as the Industries Assistance Commission (IAC), the Australian Agricultural Council (AAC) and the Economic Planning Advisory Council (EPAC). The commencement of Senate Standing Committees provided additional forums at which farmers needed to be represented (Campbell 1985: 214). Further initiatives such as the Agrifood Council and the recent ‘Supermarket to Asia’ strategy37 created formal links between business, farmers, bureaucrats and politicians.

Whilst the NFF’s early participation in corporatist forums was often marked by antagonism, on balance the NFF and the Labor governments of both Hawke and Keating had a close relationship (Connors 1996, 61). However, the close relationship did not extend across all policy areas. Whilst on some issues, such as trade, they were close allies, on others, such as labour-market reform, they were enemies (Gruen and Grattan 1993, 62). Consequently, the NFF has had to adopt a strategy of lobbying on a policy-by-policy, issue-by-issue basis. This approach is reflected in the NFF’s participation in temporary coalitions with other peak groups around specific policy issues. For instance, the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) and the NFF put a joint proposal to the Federal Government that led to the development of the National Landcare Program. Again, in 1994 the NFF and the Australian Workers’ Union (AWU) put together a three-year deal agreeing on the level of payment for shearers, cooks and shed hands, thus

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37 The latter initiative brings together agribusiness in the form of Woolworths, with government and primary producers to develop an integrated approach to creating sustainable export industries.
avoiding the need for costly recourse to the arbitration commission. This strategy also reflected a realisation by the NFF that the bush was a declining force in politics and needed allies to exact maximum influence (Connors 1996, 249).

The trend toward a corporatist relationship with government continued till the end of the Keating Labor Government. In his address to the 1995 Annual Conference of the NFF, the then Prime Minister congratulated the peak interest group for its approach to policy. He revealed that from a government point of view, there was ‘... not much more they could ask for ...’ from an interest group. The NFF was praised for ‘... being able to look beyond sectoral interest ... [and having a] ... comprehensive approach to policy’. The NFF had changed farmer producer groups from a ‘rent-seeking distributional coalition’ to an encompassing organisation (Matthews and Warhurst 1993, 94).

Given the non party-political approach of farm organisations since the early 1980s, one would expect a level of continuity between the rural policy process of Hawke/Keating and that of the Howard Coalition Government. As with the previous government, areas of conflict with the NFF have been in those instances where it has watered down commitments to a reduction in tariff protection to the Automotive and Textile Clothing and Footwear sectors. This represents an unravelling of the NFF’s bargain of withdrawing assistance in return for reform elsewhere in the economy and, as such, will always be a source of tension.

However, as Matthews and Warhurst (1993, 95) maintain, for producer groups ‘party politics does matter’. The expectations for positive and rapid change are far greater amongst the farming constituency when a National Party member is Minister for Primary Industry than a Labor member\(^3\). Consequently, this raises the likelihood of tension. Further tension may arise when the Nationals who, now in government, want to retake

\(^3\)These expectations are based on an ignorance of the cabinet system which largely rules out unilateral decision making by the minister in a manner which would advantage one sector over another.
the agenda setting role that the NFF have been undertaking since the demise of the Fraser Government in 1983.39

2.11 Conclusion
The history of the political representation of farmers is a story of transition from one formation to another; from local grassroots groups, to local independent members of parliament, to parties, and to interest groups. The movement from one formation to another reflected the needs of primary producers to extend influence beyond their locality onto the state and then federal political scene. Up until the 1960s primary producers exercised considerable influence through the parliamentary system, first through a dedicated party and then through associations. When primary producers could no longer maintain a dedicated political party, their emphasis swung back to interest-group politics. This shift in turn catalysed a major set of reforms to the gaggle of primary-producer groups then involved in representational activities.

Within this broader transition, the refinement of the farmer interest-group structure has involved a transformation from organisational fragmentation to amalgamation (Connors 1996). Whilst in most cases groups worked together (especially under the joint farmer and graziers’ committee which oversaw the running of the Country Party), organisations resisted relinquishing their discrete identities and autonomy. Crucially, up until the NFF’s formation, producers organised around divisions that correlated with land ownership, wealth and social status. The amalgamations of the late 1970s were, therefore, hard won.

An important observation from this historical analysis is that the organisational amalgamation necessary to form the NFF family was forged in order to meet the needs of the policy process. The political costs of organisational disunity and of poorly researched policy propositions were great enough for leaders to advocate amalgamation. Clearly it was not a decision driven by the emerging homogeneity of farmers’ interests. Whilst the

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39The inability of the government to reach a consensus solution on WIK through deliberations with interest groups may in part be due to the Nationals unwillingness to have the NFF seen as ‘delivering’ results.
Chapter Two  A History of Political Representation of Farmers in Australia

widespread economic downturn of the late 1970s provided a useful point of reference for all primary producers, the social, economic and political divergences remained.

The means by which the NFF achieved amalgamation sheds new light on the representative paradox and the challenges identified in Chapter One. It would suggest that the paradox is a repercussion of the basis upon which the NFF family was originally constituted. It reflects the leadership’s rush to produce the united voice that the political environments demanded even though no such voice could be said to exist amongst the grassroots members of the Federation. Both this chapter and that which preceded it provide evidence that the social and economic conditions of many farmers have not fostered unity of interests in the period since formation. Therefore, the conditions for the representative paradox to emerge have been extant since the formation of the NFF.

The extent of organised protest, militancy and the existence of ‘splinter groups’ is evidence of the fragility with which the new organisations exercised representative dominance during the mid-1980s. Ironically, it is these factors which seem to explain why this paradox has not manifested itself earlier. The involvement of members in policy activities allowed divergences to, in some ways, be vented and discussed. However, professionalism, financial security and recognition by government became paramount whilst direct participation by members, transparency and internal democracy slowly became secondary. Significantly, the NFF family was designed at a time when the farm sector was battenning down the hatches for a Labor onslaught. It was designed to facilitate the autonomy of those elected to lead, under the guidance of the best experts money could buy. The development of a family of hierarchically organised professional interest groups, with the support of successive federal governments, has generated the necessary authority to secure control over militant elements and see to the dissolution of splinter groups. However, the development of this autonomy seems to have correlated with the emergence of the paradox.

The National Farmers’ Federation family of organisations is now ensconced as the dominant avenue for the political representation of farmers’ interests. According to
Connors (1996, 61): ‘Today, a farm organisation’s reputation is judged more on the quality of its research and presentation than the noise it can make in the media or its influence with the National Party’. It appears the NFF came to concur with these remarks and has conducted itself accordingly. However, the foundation upon which it was established and the logic for its subsequent development raises serious questions about the long-term success of such a strategy.
First Intermediate Reflection

Periodisation of Farmers’ Political Representation

The first section of the thesis has problematised the activities of the NFF and NSWFA, presented the thesis questions and provided a detailed background of a history of farmer political representation. This intermediate reflection ties the history into a periodisation, indicating the type of representation, the formation and the catalyst for the transition between formations.

It is possible to review the history of the political representation of farmers in Australia and identify a number of periods within which a particular type of political formation dominated others. Tensions exist in each period between the dominant formation and others, in addition to tension between organisations of like strategy. The term ‘dominant organisation’ refers to the entity that is the focus for articulating and aggregating farmers’ interests. A change in organisation can be said to have occurred when the entity acting as the dominant articulator and aggregator has been replaced.

The history presented in Chapter Two established two reasons for change. The first are external considerations. These factors are felt by the organisation itself and provide it with a set of imperatives it needs to satisfy to maintain its influence. These factors typically reflect the opportunity structures set by the political system. For instance, the establishment of the party system forced primary producers to change their strategy of influence from independent local members to a dedicated Country Party. The second set of factors emerges from within the organisation. These internal factors reflect the lived conditions and experiences of the constituency the group represents. These factors are driven by the economic, social or cultural experience of farmers. Assuming that farmers, given historical conditions, choose between formations implies a level of instrumental

\[\text{Footnote: Formation is distinct from organisation. For example, parties, interest groups or movements are formations as they have different political logics or rationales on which they operate. However, the Liberal, Labor and Country parties are competing organisations within what can be called an electoral political formation.}\]
rationality. The suggestion that farmers collectively choose a formation or form of political representation, a vehicle and a target that will maximise their influence, is difficult to substantiate empirically. One cannot point to a single event or discussion in which farmers decided such matters. It is most probable, as is reflected in the history outlined in the previous two chapters, that farmer orators and political thinkers develop innovative strategies and then seek to persuade the constituency of its merits. Farmers then can be said to choose one formation over another by virtue of their support, which gives the formation legitimacy and may lead to establishing its dominance.

As is indicated in Table IR.1, the history of farmer political representation, as presented in Chapter Two, can be charted with respect to the type of formation, its organisation and the rationale for its ascendency.

This first section of the thesis has provided a snapshot of the NFF family as it currently stands and a history of the formations farmers have utilised to achieve political representation since colonial times. The purpose of such a historical journey has been to illustrate that interest groups are but the most recent and dominant political formation used by farmers to exercise influence over the direction of agricultural and, increasingly, economic policy. It is all too often assumed that the NFF family is a ‘natural’ feature of the political landscape. This first section of the thesis has as one of its major outcomes the recognition that the NFF’s existence is contingent on both the prevailing political environment of the organisation and the social and economic environment of their constituency. This has significant implications for explaining the representative paradox.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Dominant type of Formation</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Transitional Rationale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early 1800's-1850's</td>
<td>Grass Roots Associative</td>
<td>Local Association's</td>
<td>Parliaments not accessible by majority of primary producers Issues more amenable to local activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850's-1920's</td>
<td>Electoral</td>
<td>Local member's</td>
<td>Extension of suffrage made the local member a valuable political advocate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945-1960's</td>
<td>Parliamentary &amp; Sectoral</td>
<td>Partisan support of Country Party through Primary Producer Interest Groups</td>
<td>Lack of success at gaining majority government convinced farmers that they needed to partially distance themselves from the Country Party and lobby government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970's- Early 1980's</td>
<td>Militant Sectoral</td>
<td>Farm Interest Groups and militant activist groups</td>
<td>Declining farm numbers forced the Country party to pursue different demographics. Farmers forced to take their specific concerns through their own associations. Lack of professional representation and poor material conditions amongst the grassroots led to militant activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid 1980's-present.</td>
<td>Professional Sectoral</td>
<td>Professional Peak Interest group system. Largely Bi-partisan.</td>
<td>The militancy needed to be restrained to retain credibility with government. New extra-parliamentary forums and financial limitations (external/ organisational considerations) forced professional amalgamated and rationalised farm organisation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The most significant implication is the suggestion, as captured in the above table, that the transition between formations is catalysed by a range of external and internal factors. Importantly, the most recent transition to the NFF family was largely catalysed by trends in the external environment of the then commodity organisations rather than any emerging homogeneity in the experience of the farming community. This suggests that internal interest structures have not driven organisational amalgamation. The NFF family was formed not as a reflection of a united constituency, but under the threat that without the appearance of unity and an increased budget it would lose influence. One could therefore conclude that amalgamation does not indicate interest unity.

Secondly, previous to the NFF family’s formation, divergences within the ‘primary producer’ constituency based on class, economic conditions and political views were able to translate into a multitude of organisations without any political cost. This is in stark contrast to the situation that prompted the formation of the NFF family. When contrasting the conditions at both historical points, the key difference appears to be that in the 1950s and 1960s the state treated agricultural issues on a commodity by commodity basis. As such, the commodity-based groupings were rarely brought into direct conflict. This suggests that the way in which the political system frames issues and draws boundaries around relevant political communities (hence denoting which interest groups need to be included) has a significant bearing on the cost registered for political disunity within the ‘primary producer’ constituency.

Finally, up until the time when the NSWLGPA moved to rename itself the NSWFA, primary producers had been directly involved in political activities. However, after that time the role of membership participation in the political activities of the interest groups declined. The diminishing role of members in its political activities coincides with an increase in the discontent of membership with leadership. This would suggest that participation acts to dissipate the political cost of divergent members’ interests.

The history outlined in this chapter has provided some unexpected insights about the behaviour of an interest group, its political significance and what drives its development.
These insights add further currency to the questions raised in the first chapter. In particular, these insights lead one to further question the 'success' of the NFF and adds further weight to the questions raised about the potential instability that the representative paradox may introduce into the activities of the NFF family. The next chapter will examine the literature aimed at understanding the behaviour of interest groups in general and the development of farm interest groups in Australia in particular. This literature, which had its high point in a flurry of activity in the late 1960s and 1970s, has been aimed at explaining the nature of these groups and the manner in which they have changed in response to the political environment in which they operate. The goal of Chapter Three is to examine whether existing theoretical approaches can assist in developing a systematic account of the representative paradox and the unexpected features of the NFF's behaviour and development revealed in the previous two chapters. The ultimate outcome of this examination of the literature will be to develop a new framework and lens to explain interest-group behaviour. This is the task of Chapter Four.
Chapter Three

'Successful' Australian Farmer Interest Groups?

'A true understanding of interest groups can be achieved only by starting from their internal workings, not by looking first or only at their pressure-group activities.'
(Sekuless 1991)

3.1 Introduction

Since 1979, the NFF family of farm interest groups has been recognised as the principal vehicle for the political representation of Australian farmers and has played a significant role in a range of public policy debates. As a consequence of their profile in both economic and rural policy, numerous studies of specific policy issues have included a brief reference to their policy position (See Gerritsen and Murray 1987; Gerritsen and Abbott 1988 & 1990; Gerritsen 1992). In this public policy literature, no specific evaluation of the organisation's efficacy is made beyond elaborating the nature of their representations to government and public inquiries or the extent of their participation in public debates. However, in the few studies that examine the NFF family of farm interest groups as individual organisations, researchers typically offer an evaluation of the effectiveness or success of the particular group under study.

The consensus in the contemporary literature is that the NFF has been successful. As was revealed in Chapter One, this conclusion accords with the general tenor of the comments of politicians and bureaucrats. However, these conclusions are notable for their contrasts with the available evidence, canvassed in Chapter One, which suggests the NFF family face a number of significant challenges. There is also an intuitive incongruity between labelling the NFF family as successful in the context of evidence from commentators and other empirical sources regarding the attitudes and economic state of a large section of its membership. These disparities are significant enough to warrant a sustained and detailed investigation. Yet before such an investigation is launched it is important to note that these evaluations are in no small way the result of using a particular evaluative framework. Consequently, this framework must first itself be the subject of investigation.
Chapter Three  ‘Successful’ Australian Farmer Interest Groups?

In the Australian context, researchers have generally adopted a framework for examining farm interest groups that is designed to evaluate their success. Within this framework success is generally equated with the degree of influence they exercise with government and measured in terms of the achievement of stated organisational policy objectives.

The assumptions upon which the ‘success’ framework is based have their genesis in the broader theoretical literature on interest-group behaviour. It is important that these assumptions are presented in terms of existing theoretical approaches to interest groups such that an attempt may be made to reconstruct a new approach to understanding interest-group behaviour. Clearly, if one can identify the theoretical argument that underpins the assumptions then these can be specifically addressed in the new theoretical formulation and the debate advanced productively.

This chapter will establish how researchers have analysed the NFF family and what analytic or evaluative insights they have provided into the NFF family’s activities. In Section 3.2, the conclusions of these authors will be reviewed and discussed and the approach used by these researchers to come to their conclusions will be briefly examined. It will be argued that these assumptions have their roots in particular paradigms that underpin the research of interest groups. Consequently, a review of the interest-group literature will be conducted in Section 3.3. In Section 3.4 the theoretical assumptions underpinning the ‘success framework’ will be summarised. The reasons why these assumptions pervade the Australian farm interest-group literature will be explored in Section 3.5. The questions raised in the literature, but not adequately addressed, will be restated in Section 3.6.

3.2 Accounts of Farm Interest-Group ‘Success’

Even prior to the formation of the NFF, Australian farm interest groups had attracted the attention of a small group of researchers who undertook dedicated studies (See Jinks 1985 for a comprehensive list). The amalgamation of farm interest groups was the major focal point of this literature. Those influenced by Beer and Eckstein have highlighted the increasing importance of ‘producer’ groups in the economic governance of capitalist
nation states and the contributions federalism and cabinet forms of government made to the formation of monopolistic groups (Campbell 1971; Harman 1968; Richmond 1979). The other major theme in the literature was the nexus between organisational unity and political influence (Anderson, 1972; Campbell 1966, 1971, 1972; Corbett 1972; Dawson 1982; Harman and Smith 1967; Harman 1972). In both instances, these debates prompted discussion of what constitutes an effective farm interest group.

The early work on NSW farm interest groups emphasised influence as the central plank of effectiveness. Grant Harman’s Ph.D. on the NSW Graziers’ Association (GA) made the Association’s effectiveness the major theme (1968). According to Harman, the Association’s ‘... effectiveness in politics must be judged primarily on the basis of the political influence or power it commands.’ (1968, 360). However, this was complemented by another consideration: ‘... the assessment of members, leaders, and staff concerning the group’s success in achieving its goals.’ (1968, 374). Given the absence of ‘splinter groups’, the small ‘turnover in membership’ and the small ‘number of members who fall into arrears with their annual contributions’, Harman concluded that members of the Graziers’ Association were well-satisfied (Harman 1968, 374). Therefore, ‘On the basis of political influence, its impact on other political actors and the political system, and the assessment of its members, leaders and staff, the GA must be regarded as a relatively effective pressure group.’ (Harman 1968, 375).

In his Ph.D. on the United Farmers’ and Woolgrowers’ Association (UFWA), Richmond (1979) identifies three questions that are central to assessing group efficacy. They are: ‘1. How well are the operational goals realised? 2. How successful does the group perceive itself? 3. How adequately are the participants satisfied with the actions of the group?’ (Richmond 1979, 50). These factors seem to accord almost exactly with those of Harman

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1 Harman uses unsubstantiated membership numbers as an indicator of satisfaction. But what is more unsatisfactory with his analysis is the use of the term ‘splinter groups’ to refer to any organised competition. There was organised competition to the GA, however it was certainly not a splinter group. The United Farmers and Woolgrowers’ Association (UFWA), was the competing interest group. Whilst it did not have the same level of resources as the GA, it was in competition for members. Further the existence of this competition would logically make splinter groups less likely because dissatisfied members would most probably change between existing groups rather than move into non-institutionalised politics.
(1968). According to Richmond, the answers to these questions are largely contingent on ‘determinants of success’. These are defined as: A. Environmental constraints; B. Nature of group; C. Contributory factors; D. Intended effect; E. Desired benefits; F. Methods and tactics.

This formulation makes some important acknowledgments. Principally, it recognises that in maintaining member satisfaction it is not only the achievement of stated organisational goals that are important but also the means by which they are achieved. Richmond also recognises the difference between operational and stated group goals, which is an advance on the prevailing orthodoxy. Additionally, Richmond acknowledges the environment as an important influence on group operation.

Both Harman and Richmond identify two aspects of group success or efficacy: the degree of the group’s influence and the degree of member satisfaction. The influence of a group is determined by measuring the extent to which it has reached its stated goals, whilst membership levels measure member satisfaction. In both these works, it has been implied that by achieving its stated goals a group satisfies its members. That is, influence leads to increases in membership levels.

In a departure from policy influence, Smith and Harman argue that the first task for a general farm organisation is ‘winning and holding members.’ (1981, 225). They argue that membership numbers provide ‘... a substantial proportion of the finance available to organisations and their standing with governments.’ In so doing, they do make a crucial distinction between two types of support, financial commitment and policy commitment (Smith and Harman 1981, 225). It is clear that Smith and Harman see these types of commitment as positively correlated — policy commitment necessarily leads to financial commitment.

Apart from the argument of Smith and Harman, it is evident that when evaluating Australian farm interest groups, researchers have focussed on assessing the influence of the group. When they have done so, most have found them to be quite successful.
Chapter Three

‘Successful’ Australian Farmer Interest Groups?

Consequently, more recent studies have tended to assume influence as the measure of success and proceeded to explain the source of that influence. In so doing, they have emphasised the significance of external factors. For instance, Abbott chose to focus on the ‘channels of access’ open to pressure groups — the enabling factors for the exercise of influence (Abbott 1996, 20). According to Abbott, access and, hence, the capacity to influence, is granted on the basis of both high internal authority and external legitimacy. With respect to agricultural groups, Abbott concludes they ‘... enjoy a level of external legitimacy that offsets their relatively low internal authority.’ (Abbott 1996, 44). This has resulted in agricultural groups being ‘... influential out of all proportion with the small percentage of the population they represent.’ (Abbott 1996, 43). Their external legitimacy is a result of urban Australia’s fascination with rural Australia, which means ignoring farm interests is difficult ‘... without running the risk of damaging electoral consequences that may extend beyond the farm vote itself.’ (Abbott 1996, 44). In asserting that opportunity structures in the external environment provide the power by which farm interest groups attain influence, Abbott almost implicitly rejects the significance of membership numbers and internal discipline as a factor in attaining access.

Other studies have pursued the themes of professionalism and organisational unity as sources of influence. In the most recent study of farm organisations in Australia, Connors (1996) traces the amalgamation of farm organisations at federal level under the National Farmers’ Federation (NFF). Whilst suggesting it ‘... is beyond the scope of this book to assess the performance of the NFF ...’ (Connors 1996, 259), he is confident ‘... that such an examination would place the NFF at the top of Australia’s pressure groups.’ (Connors 1996, 271). For Connors, the NFF is successful by virtue of the degree of influence it exercises. The NFF’s influence is generated from its professional and responsible approach to policy. He refers to the manner in which the NFF, rather than request handouts, ‘Has been the leader in the quest for a more efficient and competitive economy, prepared to do the detailed research into areas of reform that will benefit its members over the longer term’ (Connors 1996, 271). In contrast to the farm interest groups that
Chapter Three  'Successful' Australian Farmer Interest Groups?

went before it, Connors celebrates the NFF’s unification of farmers under one umbrella, which in turn secures it additional influence.

With respect to the second aspect of measuring success — member satisfaction — Connors appears to join Abbott in discounting its relevance to the question of the NFF’s success. Indeed, Connors has highlighted the deleterious effect that the NFF’s success has had on its relationship with members. Connors acknowledges that ‘To many farmers, the NFF is seen as an organisation that has raced well ahead of the rank-and-file thinking with its economic rationalist agenda.’ (Connors 1996, 270). His confidence that the repercussions of such a gap will be contained is based on the nature of the NFF constitution and the economic security provided by contributions from state organisations. These state organisations support the NFF philosophy and ensure its authority is maintained amongst the membership. ‘The positions of authority in the State affiliates generally ensures that the NFF is put in the best possible light both at conferences and in their organisational newspapers.’ (Connors 1996, 267)². Connors’s confidence that the NFF’s policy thrust will remain consistent is further buttressed by the claim that ‘... few farmers attend branch meetings or annual conferences. Policies are formulated on their behalf by organisation executives and opportunities for ordinary farmers to express a viewpoint ... are rare.’ (Connors 1996, 266). The implication, therefore, is that the NFF, as a political representative, acts as a ‘benevolent dictator’. But even more importantly, the implication is that the lack of input by members to group policy is not a relevant factor in determining success.

Whilst the benchmark of stable membership numbers, established by Harman, remains a measure of ‘success’ in Connors’s work, he has down-played the importance of membership satisfaction to achieving influence or ‘success’. In his analysis, members are

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²Motions at recent NSWFA conferences criticising the NFF’s performance support Connors observations. The Executive largely defended the NFF and sought amendments that watered down the criticism and threats to withdraw support. This is not sinister in itself, as it is important that the rank and file membership appreciate the real difficulties of lobbying in Canberra. However, as will be canvassed in a later chapter, the defence of the NFF is often based on a disempowering political polemic, which makes members feel 'unknowledgeable', rather than a discursive one that empowers members.
placated rather than satisfied. This placation is achieved by the internal ‘disciplinary’ mechanisms of the federation’s state member organisations. The NFF is portrayed as operating apart from popular control, responsive not to the members’ perceived interests, but to the long-term interests of farmers, which apparently the NFF leadership is best able to define. The excuse offered for the NFF’s approach is the apparent widespread apathy and disinterest of farmers for the political process (Connors 1996). However, whether this apathy necessitated a benevolent NFF or a benevolent NFF facilitated the apathy is a moot point.

The contributions to various texts that comment on farm interest groups tend to adopt the position taken by Connors\(^3\). On the theme of status with government, Trebeck (1990) claims that the NFF is held in very high esteem with government and extremely professional. He states that ‘The NFF has achieved considerable success over the past decade’ and ‘... overall the NFF has exceeded the expectations of its more optimistic supporters ... its stature grew quickly to that of one of the country’s more responsible, innovative and visionary industry organisations ...’ (Trebeck 1990, 138).

Matthews (1991 &1994) presents the NFF as a successful group facing challenges. Given that the NFF represents an overwhelming majority of farms in Australia, he concludes, ‘... the NFF can rightfully claim an organisational monopoly in representing Australian farmers.’ (Matthews 1994, 206). Matthews proceeds to identify the declining importance of agriculture (both economically and electorally), the emergence of conflict between traditional farmers and those more orientated to ‘agribusiness’, and possible conflicts between commodity sections (especially over protection), as the factors challenging the NFF family. In apparent contradistinction to Abbott’s (1996) argument that factors in the external environment shape access, Warhurst observes that the NFF remains successful despite these trends (Warhurst 1994, 74). Both Matthews and Warhurst anticipate a

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\(^3\)It is important to note that most of the contributors are economists or public policy analysts dealing with topics of rural and industry policy. Their conclusions are based on a passing interest in farm organisations rather than a sustained period of study. Despite this, it is felt that their approach still warrants analysis.
Chapter Three  ‘Successful’ Australian Farmer Interest Groups?

decline in the level of external legitimacy Abbott identified as the key to the NFF’s success.

The general approach adopted to examine farm interest groups has also been adopted in discussing the effectiveness of business associations in Australia, of which the NFF is included. For instance, Wanna (1992, 76-7) equates effectiveness with the ‘policy effectiveness’ of the group. Accordingly, ‘The access and influence of business associations often depends on whether they are seen as expert, disciplined, and as serious and reliable policy players.’ (Wanna 1992, 76). It is this view which has prevailed in the analysis of the NFF in terms of ‘success’. He does point out that, ‘Issues such as the type of organisation, the degree of centralisation, the capacity to intervene in policy processes, the vision of the leadership, are all significant factors which advance or constrain associational effectiveness.’ (Wanna 1992, 77). However, what remains absent is a reference to membership.

Assumptions of the ‘Success’ Framework

An indicative, but not necessarily exhaustive, review of analysis of farmer interest groups in Australia reveals that a relatively common framework has been applied in assessing their success. The early analysis of Harman and Richmond emphasised two aspects of group effectiveness or success: influence and member satisfaction. It is these two aspects of success that have preoccupied evaluations of Australian farm interest groups.

Both influence and member satisfaction have been measured consistently throughout the literature. Influence has been measured in terms of the achievement of stated goals. Members’ satisfaction has been measured in terms of membership numbers and the absence of splinter or competing groups. The relationship between these two factors has been variously presented. Whilst the work of Smith and Harman emphasised member satisfaction as being an important precursor to interest group influence, the overwhelming conclusion in the literature is that influence brings with it member satisfaction.
Chapter Three  ‘Successful’ Australian Farmer Interest Groups?

Over time, the literature has tended to use success or effectiveness interchangeably with influence. Group influence has been variously described as emerging from a group’s reputation with government, degree of institutionalisation (insider status), encompassingness and the responsibility to look beyond sectoral interests. The more recent studies on the NFF family, such as those by Abbott and Connors, have noted the importance of the group’s external environment in the achievement of its goals. Member satisfaction has not been a central issue in this analysis, instead it has been assumed to flow from the achievement of influence. This relationship has negated the need for researchers to directly inquire into the satisfaction of members. Indeed, in a signal that member satisfaction has lost currency as a determinant of success, Connors suggests that the NFF family’s success has come despite members’ satisfaction and involvement.

Having understood this framework it is clearer on what basis the NFF family has been generally described as effective or successful. According to the most recent manifestation of this framework, emphasising influence, the NFF family is successful because it has achieved its stated goals. For those who apply the broadest interpretation of success as defined by Harman (1968), incorporating members’ satisfaction, the NFF family is successful for the additional reasons that its membership levels are high and it has no identifiable competition.

Whilst a consistent framework has been applied, the framework itself demands numerous leaps of faith. The first centres on the implicit assumption that the influence or ‘success’ of the group and member satisfaction is positively correlated. What if member satisfaction and policy success were to become counterpoised? Could the achievement of membership satisfaction ever lead to a group being unsuccessful? Whilst Connors raises the possibility of a tension between achieving group goals and maintaining members’ satisfaction, this possibility has not been explored and its implications examined.

The second relates to the suggestion that membership’s support of group goals logically leads to a financial commitment. What if policy commitment and financial commitment could be separated? Is it possible that farm organisations could gain finance from
members and standing with government without members joining as a consequence of their support for the group goals?

Thirdly, whilst Connors asserts that member satisfaction is not necessary for the success of the NFF, could not this lack of responsiveness to membership result in a growing dissatisfaction by farmers with State Farm Organisations and, hence, threaten the NFF’s legitimacy and authority? How does such a divergence, no matter how well ‘covered up’ by leadership, destabilise the organisation and make the NFF less influential?

Finally, whilst Abbot attributes the NFF’s success to external factors Warhurst maintains it is maintaining its success despite a diminution of precisely these same external factors. This contradiction highlights questions around the relationship between internal and external factors of interest-group behaviour. In what way do internal and external factors shape access and influence? How do they relate to one another? Are they independent or contingent?

The justification for the leaps of faith comes from the assumptions regarding why groups form, why members join, the role of groups and their impact on democracy. These assumptions are embedded in the bodies of theory that underpin the study of interest-group behaviour. A review of this literature will identify these paradigms and assist to answer why researchers of Australian farm interest groups have been drawn into implicit use of these assumptions.

3.3 Theory of Interest Groups

Attempts at understanding the nature of interest groups can be categorised into three broad schools — pluralism, rational choice and neo-corporatism. Interest-group researchers draw upon the assumptions implicit in these approaches when conducting empirical investigations. Given that a substantial part of this thesis involves making some informed comment on the empirical accounts of Australian farm organisations, identifying these assumptions is crucial. A review of each one of these approaches and a general critique will be provided.
However, before proceeding it is important to make a brief comment regarding the division of interest-group theory into these three schools. A similar division is utilised by Meyer and Imig (1993) and Cawson (1986), although not defended. Yet a defense is necessary in light of many critiques to the effect that corporatist and pluralist group-state relations can co-exist within the same polity (Matthews 1993, 243-4). Matthews’s remark was with respect to using these theories to describe the prevalent relationship between interest groups and the state, and used in this way it is an eminently reasonable criticism. However, these paradigms are more significant in what they assume about the relationship between individuals and groups; that is, the represented and their representative organisation. It is on this basis that Olson’s theory of collective action is presented as a competing set of ideas. Clearly Olson’s significant contribution is not in characterising the relationship between groups and the state, rather it is in his characterisation of the relationship between represented and representative. In the context of the analysis of interest groups, pluralism, rational choice and corporatism, whilst not ‘unified bodies of theory’, can be considered to have some ‘basic affinities’ (Abbott 1996, 13).

Some have argued that pluralism has been articulated with insufficient coherence and, as such, it constitutes an anti-theory (Jordan 1993). Others have argued that most characterisations of pluralism are instead characterisation of ‘group theorists’ (Martin 1983). In response, one can merely point out that pluralist authors share a common view regarding the significance of interest groups in political life and the same tradition of a descriptive characterisation of group-state relationships. Therefore, despite these criticisms, ‘group theory’ and the more recent additions by pluralists such as Dahl and Beer are treated together.

**Pluralism**

The early elaboration of a pluralist perspective came from ‘group theorists’, the major proponents of which were Bentley (1908), Truman (1951) and Latham (1952). In their formulations, interest groups themselves were irrefutable evidence that interests existed.
Chapter Three  ‘Successful’ Australian Farmer Interest Groups?

These theorists, dominant until the 1960s, asserted that ‘... like-minded people join together to enhance their political power in order to achieve public policies that serve their common interests.’ (Salisbury 1984, 66). As a consequence, mapping the activities of groups would reveal the underlying structure of interests in society. Truman, in particular, is associated with the further assertion that ‘... interest groups emerge more or less automatically in response to environmental changes that render necessary the representation of new political interests.’ (Schlozman 1984, 1007). Consequently, group theorists suggested that whilst interests reside with groups of individuals in society the realisation of that common interest may be catalysed by external events.

The pluralist position embellished on this early formulation. A key, yet subtle, difference was a deviation in the way the state was understood. Whilst group theory left open the possibility of a positive autonomous state (a possibility demonstrated in post-World War II New Deal policies in the US), pluralists emphasised the virtues of a fragmented and internally competitive state (Garson 1978, 92). A further difference was the reduced emphasis accorded group competition in relation to protecting democracy. Pluralists such as Dahl argued that a broad consensus within society regarding the rules of procedure, the range of policy options and the legitimate scope of political activity, protect democracy (Held 1987, 194; Garson 1978, 92-93). Consensus in society was generated by the ‘socialisation of conflict’ arising from public group conflict. Consequently, pluralists came to assert that the result of interest-group conflict, rather than the interests of the strongest group, constituted the public interest (Garson 1978, 94).

Broadly, the pluralist perspective can be understood by its claims that society composes a broad and fragmented range of interests (dispersed inequalities); these interests are organised and represented by groups; these groups compete with one another for influence; and it is this competition between groups that ensures no one group dominates all others. The state acts as an arbiter amongst these competing factions, and the consensus reached between groups bounds a domain within which the state can act and, hence, protect democracy. (Held 1987, 195; Thomas 1993, 7; Jordan 1993, 58). Rather than the elaboration of a theoretical position, these tenets read more like a description of
observable political behaviour in a democratic state. This is because pluralists were principally concerned with the ‘empirical’ nature of democracy. However, this original concern with description developed to a point where they ‘... tended to slide from a descriptive-explanatory account of democracy to a new normative theory.’ (Held 1987, 196). This tendency, according to Held, has led pluralists to explain that the apathy and lack of participation in interest groups merely indicates ‘... how little political participation is necessary for the successful functioning of democracy.’ (Held 1987, 197).

According to this tradition, each ‘group’ in society has an identifiable interest, an interest that the group members are best able to define for themselves. These as yet unorganised groups will form an organisation to pursue their particular interest with the state. It is asserted that any group in society is able to identify themselves as an exclusive group and subsequently to organise themselves to express their interests in the political sphere. The issue as to what catalyses group formation is contentious. For instance, more contemporary pluralists such as Beer (1982), who have come to be known collectively as neo-pluralists, argue that the post-World War II extension of the welfare state has acted as a catalyst for group formation. The groups that formed as a result of this development are referred to as functional groups. However, the conventional thesis has been that interest groups signify a more spontaneous expression of an underlying interest structure in society.

Pluralists have specific assumptions regarding interests (Cawson 1986). The interests of citizens are simply those preferences expressed by that person and they may, therefore, be measured through research instruments such as questionnaire or interview. From this assumption, two further assumptions are imputed. Firstly, it is imputed that the more intensely an individual holds an interest the more likely they are to participate in an interest group or other form of collective action. Secondly, no disparity will exist between the interests of members and their organisations (Cawson 1986, 7).

A similar set of assumptions applies to the behaviour of groups themselves. Groups principally present demands to the state; the direction of influence characterised as
Chapter Three  ‘Successful’ Australian Farmer Interest Groups?

primarily unidirectional, from groups to the state. The extent of pressure from groups over an issue is interpreted as a barometer to public feeling on an issue (Cawson 1986, 10). For pluralists, power is about pursuing one’s goals against resistance from others. In this sense, the extent of one group’s power in relation to another is best revealed by whose policy goals are reflected in public policy (Cawson 1986, 13).

In this model of political organisation every citizen has an equal ability to influence their political environment through the organisation of interest groups. Therefore, the range of interest groups vying for the state’s attention best reflects the range of interests resident in any society. It follows that a vibrant interest-group sector reflects a vibrant democratic polity. The competing demands of interest groups are claimed to result in democratic outcomes. In this sense pluralism rests ultimately on the liberal democratic tradition of political philosophy, one which advocates ‘... the constitutional state, private property and the competitive market economy as the central mechanism for coordinating individuals’ interests.’ (Held 1987, 42).

The assumptions of pluralism came under challenge from a range of studies purporting to illustrate that the American pressure-group system was over-representing business as opposed to the interests of workers and the poor (See Schattschneider 1960; Schlozman 1984) and internally undemocratic (McConnell 1966). The mounting studies discrediting pluralist assumptions prompted pluralism to reduce its claim from being a ‘basis for understanding general principles of politics’ to ‘a way to construct hypotheses about a specialised segment of the polity — interest group behaviour’ (Garson 1978, 139). However, some have attempted to reformulate pluralism under the banner of neo-pluralism, shedding the assumption that polyarchy necessarily leads to democratic outcomes and conceding that business does start from a powerful position in the interest-group system (See Manley 1983, Dahl 1983, and Lindblom 1983, for a discussion of neo-pluralism). A range of reforms to democratic institutions, such as the inclusion of those considered marginalised, have been suggested in order to counter the dominance of particular groups (Young 1989; See also discussion in Ryden 1996, 87-96).
More recently, researchers have continued pluralism’s empirical tradition of documenting the contribution interest groups make to the policy process (Marsh 1997, 324). This approach utilises the same assumptions regarding interests and groups as that of orthodox pluralism, however, it deploys new metaphors to characterise the pattern of interest group and state relations. Metaphors such as ‘policy community’ and ‘policy network’ have been introduced into the vernacular of political scientists to describe the full range of participants in policy-making (Wright 1988, 606; Coleman et al 1996). In an effort to not only describe who constitutes any given policy network but also to analyse how they operate, the style of the policy network has become a significant element in this theory. Two styles of policy network appear in the literature as it relates to agricultural policy, namely corporatist or pressure-pluralist (Coleman et al 1996). The development of frameworks to establish the character of policy networks has become a focus for study in its own right (See John and Cole 1995).

**Rational Choice**

Those advocating economic models of politics provided the most significant challenge to the pluralist conception of interest groups. They adopted the dual assumptions that individual citizens were both self-interested and employed a calculative rationality, and that these principles guided collective action (Reisman 1990). In so far as influence from group to state was understood as predominantly unidirectional in nature, rational choice formulations accorded with that of the pluralist’s. For instance, Downs argued that citizens demand policies they calculate as maximising their personal advantage and, in turn, politicians supply policies they calculated to be the most popular — vote maximising (See Reisman 1990, 12).

However, Mancur Olson (1965 and 1982)\(^4\), perhaps the best-known and most-influential proponent of rational choice, challenged the pluralist’s assumption regarding the ‘group

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\(^4\) Dunleavy (1988, 24) provides a concise outline of Olson’s major arguments regarding interest group organisation. ‘Rational Actors should join a group and support costly forms of activism only where (i) their individual welfare-gain from the group’s success, discounted by (ii) the probability that their individual contribution is decisive in achieving group objectives; plus (iii) the private benefits of group membership or activism; outweigh (iv) the costs of joining or supporting group activities’. See Moe (1980) for a sympathetic development to Olson’s work.
basis’ of society. In particular, he took issue with assertions that interest-group formation signified the expression of a latent interest in society and that group goals reflected members’ interests (Olson 1965, 117). The pluralist assumption that a good which was beneficial to all members of a group would be produced in a collective manner by that group without the need for coercion was, according to Olson, a ‘liberal fallacy’ (See Kimber 1993, 38).

Olson’s argument suggests, in opposition to pluralists, that consensus around a set of group goals does not necessarily lead to collective action. He argues that it is ‘...important to distinguish between the obstacles to group-orientated action that are due to a lack of group consensus and those that are due to a lack of individual incentives.’ (Olson 1965, 60). He argues that the failure of a group to form may reflect the lack of incentives rather than an absence of consensus or shared interests. Consequently, group formation, particularly that of a large constituency, requires both consensus and selective incentives. Selective incentives, Olson argues, are supplied by entrepreneurs who organise groups in order to reap maximum financial and political benefits. It is via this logic that Olson reaches the conclusion that entrepreneurs catalyse group formation.

The pluralist assumption, that an individual’s decision to take up membership of a group implies identification with group goals, was refuted. Olson’s rational-choice theory proposes it is irrational for individuals to join groups whose goals, once attained, would be shared equally by all regardless of membership (Olson 1965, 127). Benefits that would be shared by all members of a discrete section of the community were labelled as ‘public goods’, whilst those gaining benefits without contributing to their attainment were labelled ‘free-riders’. Given the assumption that most members of a constituency would not participate in collective action for the attainment of public goods — they would free-ride — members would have to be attracted through selective incentives. These incentives would render membership cost-effective and, hence, rational.5 His assertion

5 The exception to the scenario presented relates to group size. In small groups it is supposed that no selective incentives need necessarily be supplied as potential membership is small and the benefits more easily distributed.
that members do not join out of identification with group goals was supported by evidence that ‘... participation in large voluntary organisations is very much less than that theory [traditional] would suggest.’ (Olson 1965, 59).

In the ‘Rise and Decline of Nations’ (1982), Olson argues that the proliferation of interest groups has reduced the economic competitiveness of many nations. His theory that the demands of groups are not genuine articulations of members’ interests but the short term wants of entrepreneurs supported this critique6. However, Olson has had to confront the evidence that some groups have apparently looked beyond their immediate self-interested positions. Olson explains this evidence by introducing the concept of ‘encompassingness’ (Olson 1982, 50). He argues that if a group held within it a sufficiently heterogeneous range of interests, then on any one issue the group would encompass representatives of both winners and losers. Given the number of members, it would also have to be conscious of the effects their demands may have on inflation, interest rates and other significant macro-economic indicators. The group, therefore, would internally aggregate diverse views into a policy thus ensuring that the national interest remained a key criterion of decision making.

Olson’s theory of collective action, utilising the concepts of ‘free riding’, ‘selective incentives’ and ‘public goods’, gathered support amongst political scientists, particularly in the United States, as a way to understand the formation, operation and management of interest groups. It inspired Moe (1980) to develop a framework in which the work of interest-group ‘entrepreneurs’ is characterised as maximising benefits and minimising costs for prospective members. Others have used this framework to examine the strategies for recruiting and mobilising amongst organisations ranging from interest groups and social movements to protest groups and voluntary associations (See Prestby et al 1990; Hansen 1985; Sabatier and McLaughlin 1990; Marsh 1976). This framework has

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6 The short-term wants of entrepreneurs does not imply that leaders superimpose their wishes onto those of their members. Rather, that they seek out public policy solutions which provide short-term selective benefits for their members instead of a long term strategic plan which may lead to a secure future for their constituency.
spawned ‘exchange theory’ which has attempted to explain both the formation and maintenance of groups (Nownes and Neley 1996).

Olson recognised that in some cases non-economic incentives, for instance ‘prestige, respect or status’, could motivate collective action (Olson 1965, 60). However, Olson maintained that these incentives were still private goods that accrue only to those who participate and, therefore, their addition did not weaken his analysis (Olson 1965, 61). This initial addition to an ‘economic’ theory of collective action was the first of many. Not only do solidary and purposive factors now accompany financial costs or benefits (Knoke 1990), but also it is now generally acknowledged that each individual has a unique subjective calculus by which costs and benefits are defined.

The constant amending of the framework has led some to question its usefulness. Forsyth and Young (1991, 538. fn.21), for instance, argue that ‘To call these benefits selective incentives ... is to preserve the model at the expense of stretching the sense of the term to unrecognisable dimensions.’ Given that costs and benefits may be re-calculated based on an individual’s participation and, hence, ‘selective incentives’ may include things which contradict ‘rational’ objective explanation, the accounts best able to explain group membership are those that characterise decisions to contribute and participate as developmental rather than instrumental (Forsyth and Young 1991). That is, joining a group is understood as a recurring rather than a one-off decision (Dunleavy 1988, 32). A range of such concerns has led to a reformulation of the ‘rules’ of an economic theory of collective action, rather than a re-assessment of the suitability of economic theories in their entirety (See Sandler 1992). Others have argued that an Olsonian framework has wrongly characterised political activity as ‘... little more than a means to attract supporters and provide organisational maintenance (Meyer and Imig 1993, 255).

The concept of ‘free-riding’, a central plank of rational choice theory, has come under attack from the likes of Kimber (1993) who defends the ‘group politics’ assumption that it is rational to join an interest group. He argues that ‘... at the moment of decision, Olson is not relying on the same self-interested calculation for all individuals.’ (1993, 41). For if
Chapter Three  ‘Successful’ Australian Farmer Interest Groups?

he were, all rational individuals would decide not to join the group and the good would not be produced, hence no public good would exist for an individual to ‘free-ride’ upon. Consequently, he asserts that ‘... the organisation will fail and that the collective good will not be provided...’:

… only under the unrealistic assumptions both that A has no information about the behaviour of others and that he arbitrarily (and wrongly) assumes he is different from the others... (Kimber 1993, 44).

Therefore, the stability of the interest-group system can be explained by the relatively unchanging nature of individual perceptions regarding the net benefits to them of generating particular public goods. In this way, Kimber invokes the pluralist notion that groups reflect the pattern of preferences in society.

The work of Dunleavy (1988), who advocates a ‘group identity’ approach, is illustrative of efforts to address these criticisms. His main critique is that Olson’s approach emphasises the objective characteristics of a group rather than the perceptions of these characteristics by the constituency that the group purports to represent. He argues: ‘... the really crucial difficulties in recruiting members do not concern free-riding [efficacy constraints] but rather overcoming perceptual and acceptance constraints on group joining.’ (Dunleavy 1988, 49). Therefore, why people join groups is best explained by: a) their perception that a group identity exists, that a given group represents that identity, that they fall within that identity; b) their acceptance that the identity implies specific set of interests, that the given group promotes those interests and that they share the interests; and c) their level of information regarding the efficacy of the group, such that they believe it is a viable group in promoting the interest and that their participation will enhance their benefit from their interest. Dunleavy emphasises how people ‘learn’ that interest groups are relevant and, in doing so, implicitly challenges the pluralist notion that latent sets of interests reside in civil society. The logical extension of Dunleavy’s work is to consider by what mechanisms groups assist potential members to learn about and determine their interests.
Chapter Three

'Successful' Australian Farmer Interest Groups?

Neo-Corporatism

Neo-corporatist literature, predominantly from Western Europe, has reinvigorated the analysis of interest groups. It returned to a group-based view of society, with an emphasis on the representation of economic groupings through formal peak interest groups. However, it departed significantly from pluralism in terms of understanding the role of the state, the relationship between group and member interests and the role of group leaders.

Amongst corporatists, there has been a degree of conflict over whether corporatism refers to a total economic system (Winkler 1976) or merely a system of interest intermediation (Schmitter 1982). It is the contemporary view that the system of interest intermediation as defined by Schmitter is in fact a prerequisite to corporatism, which in turn is understood as a mode of policy concertation '... in which major interest groups are integrated with the state' (Bray and Walsh 1995, 21).

Despite the inevitable definitional debate, corporatism remains a discrete explanatory framework with some discernible major elements. Corporatism involves cooperation between peak interest groups, representing capital and labour, essentially on issues of economic policy, in a tripartite arrangement with the state, where the groups have a responsibility for the administration, implementation and legitimation of agreed upon public policy to their members (See Martin 1983, 89; Panitch 1980).

It is widely acknowledged within the literature that corporatism faces inherent contradictions that make its arrangements fragile and, consequently, threaten its persistence. The source of contradiction varies. Schmitter (1982, 266) argues that the precursors for corporatism — the restrictions on new or competing groups, hierarchical groups, passive membership and professionalised representation — make its legitimation in western political cultures difficult. Panitch (1980, 175), however, argues that corporatism embodies the continuing class struggle in capitalist society and, consequently, he claims that corporatism is particularly unstable for labour organisations.
‘Successful’ Australian Farmer Interest Groups?

As such, labour organisations are inclined to withdraw temporarily from de-politicised arrangements and are prone to outbursts of militancy.

Schmitter asserts there are four possible scenarios under which corporatism is vulnerable to collapse. The groups can be ‘undermined’ by dissatisfied members, ‘outflanked’ by other kinds of organisations (social movements or parties), the number of interests involved in corporatist structures can ‘expand’ and the emergence of single-issue movements could ‘displace’ the functional divisions and interests which underpin corporatist formations in favour of party or movement politics (Schmitter 1982, 268-273). It is Schmitter’s first scenario, in which corporatism is ‘undermined’ by members of participating interest groups, which has attracted most attention. This is not because it is accepted as the most likely cause of corporatism’s demise, but that it may best reflect the dynamics of corporatism in operation. In Schmitter’s characterisation, the increasing distance between group leadership and their members will result in members viewing their representatives as undemocratic and unrepresentative. As a consequence, they may leave, challenge the leaders, or split and form an alternative (usually more narrowly focussed) group. This activity will threaten the ability of the leaders to ‘deliver’ membership.

In an argument akin to that deployed by Olson, Schmitter believes that the undermining of corporatism is unlikely to be complete given that group leaders have at their disposal selective goods which they can use to convince members to stay. Further, leaders may tactically withdraw from corporatist negotiations only to renew the arrangement once the internal organisational pressure dissipates. Ultimately, he argues that members of these interest groups come to see them as a service delivery organisation, where they exchange a membership fee and expect efficient professional service in return. Consequently, any members who are looking for direct participation, authenticity or self-expression would expect to find it in a political party or social movement. One is only to assume from Schmitter’s argument that he believes members would not be disillusioned at the absence of such features in interest-group activity.
Chapter Three  'Successful' Australian Farmer Interest Groups?

A number of implications flow from the closed and de-politicised group-state relationship present under corporatism. It is these implications which differentiate corporatism from the work of pluralism and rational choice. Whilst pluralism views groups as the disinterested articulators of interests, corporatism views groups as integral to shaping interests, even disciplining and controlling members (Cawson 1986, 12). Contrary to pluralism, corporatism characterises the relationship between interest groups and the state as multi-directional. And, rather than close group-state relations inevitably leading to 'state capture', as Olson suggests, the state has in many countries used interest groups as a means of achieving demand control, program implementation and legitimation. Similarly, whilst pluralists viewed a group's interest position as the aggregate of member views, corporatism interprets the process of organisation as instrumental in the formation of individual interests (Cawson 1986, 9). The argument that a generalisable interest is not an input into an interest group but an outcome prompted a discussion regarding the class basis of interest formation and the organisability of labour as opposed to capital (Offe and Wiesenthal 1980; Streeck 1991).

Given that groups are important tools for the state, group formation is not automatically viewed as a direct result of a section of society realising an interest and organising to represent it. Rather, it may be as a result of government sponsorship or the cajoling of relevant 'organisers' in that sector. Further, the maintenance of a group may be assisted through actions of the state. For instance, the state may grant status to favoured groups and restrict access to others (Cawson 1986, 18). In this way, the state is not a neutral umpire, but an active participant in the activities of the interest-group sector.

3.4 The 'Successful' Interest Group

The way in which these theories emphasise only part of interest-group activity is best revealed when using them as frameworks for evaluating the 'success' of an interest group; a task which a large proportion of empirical studies of farm interest groups are devoted. Each of these three major schools of thought regarding interest groups — pluralist, rational choice and neo-corporatist — focuses on one aspect of their operation and privileges it above others. Given that two of the three approaches reflect activities
under specific regimes of state-group relations, success is predominantly understood in external terms. Despite a focus on influencing policy, internal measures of success are often implied. Whilst internal and external assessments can and are made, the link between the two is generally not explored.

In terms of pluralism, success is interpreted in external terms and measured on the basis of how many of the groups stated goals were attained. Pluralists would try to measure the degree of influence the group had in specific policy issues or campaigns by conducting a series of policy case studies assessing the impact of the group on outcomes. Given that taking up membership is equated with membership’s support for group goals, internal success is not prominent in pluralist considerations. However, from this assumption one can impute that it would be measured as membership density (current membership as a percentage of total constituency).

In the rational-choice model, external success is not a major consideration. Whilst in Olson’s later work ‘encompassingness’ was considered a positive characteristic, external policy influence was only important to the degree that it contributed to membership growth. Internally, success is measured as membership numbers and the level of financial resources obtained by the organisers. For both pluralist and rational-choice theories, the indices for measuring internal ‘success’ are the same, however, the causal explanation is different. For rational choice, an increase in membership and resources is attributed to the expertise of ‘organisers’ who have successfully managed the incentive mix of the organisation whilst for pluralists it is testament to the way in which the interest-groups’ policy platform resonates with its constituency.

For corporatists, success would be the attainment of institutionalised access to state apparatus. It is often noted that to achieve this status internal changes are undertaken. This entails the development of a professional and hierarchically ordered group which is able to ‘negotiate’ with other peak groups in a depoliticised forum and ‘deliver’ membership such that implementation of agreed upon policy can be achieved. It would come as no surprise then that the ‘professionalisation’ of interest groups and the
development of corporatism coincide. In many ways they are preconditions for one another. Again, internal ‘success’ is rarely mentioned, although the percentage of members a group has as a total of the potential constituency (its membership density) is often noted. The extent of genuine involvement members have in the groups’ operation is not often explored, however the constraints of corporatism on the internal governance of participating interest groups is noted.\footnote{Schmitter (1982, 260) associates with corporatism a situation where groups may ‘... play an active role in identifying and forming those interests ... [and] ... actively and coercively govern the behaviour of their members, especially through devolved responsibility for the implementation of public policy.’}

The assumptions adopted in the empirical studies of farmer interest groups in Australia seem to generally accord with pluralist assumptions. These assumptions have persisted, even in the most recent studies of the NFF, despite significant changes in the political environment and the state interest-group relationship (Connors 1996; Abbott 1996). The only real concession to corporatist explanatory frameworks in the Australian literature is noting a rise in the professionalism of groups as an associated effect of the unification of the group structure.

\subsection*{3.5 Explaining the Pervasiveness of Pluralist Assumptions}

Despite the general repudiation of group theory and the criticism of pluralism, the assumptions of this school of thought seem to pervade the discourse and conventional characterisations of politics offered by Australian commentators and researchers. It is not being argued that those explaining the formation of public policy or the activities of Australian farm interest groups specifically adhere to or consciously advocate a pluralist model, as pluralism has never been the orthodoxy in Australian political science (Condren 1985, 56). As Irving (1985, 317) has noted, Australian political science is still of the view that the parliamentary system remains the source of political power, rather than the exchange between interest groups.\footnote{Irving (1985, 318) makes the point that pluralism was adopted as a code for a non-class base in society. In this way a pluralist society is one without class. Parliamentary parties competing for government and control of the decision making process constituted pluralism.} Yet the empirical focus of Australian interest-group research has led to pluralism’s primary assumptions gaining an implicit currency within the confines of farm interest-group studies. Pluralist assumptions...
regarding the distribution of power, role of the state, function and formation of groups, significance of group membership and nature of interests have been implied in most explanations of farm interest-group behaviour. When the focus of study is the history or role of farm interest groups in particular policy debates, pluralist assumptions serve to buttress rationales for group behaviour attributed by researchers. They tend to be a default to which researchers turn when they need to ascribe imperatives and make more meaningful conclusions about interest-group behaviour as part of a public policy study\(^9\).

The tendency to return to these assumptions as a default when considering interest groups can be most clearly traced to the use of a range of linguistic, analytic and middle-range theoretic devices. These devices project a stereotypical view of the imperatives informing interest-group activity and provide a rationale for excluding analysis of the internal relationship and subsequently avoid a critical evaluation of the assumptions employed. Three devices are particularly prominent: the use of groups as the basic unit of analysis and the equation of interest-group organisations with their nominated constituency, the use of the term 'pressure group', and the typology used to categorise groups.

**Groups as Unit of Analysis**

In studies on rural policy, discussion generally turns on the stated public positions of the various stakeholders. Stakeholders are those groups within society who would objectively appear to have a 'stake' or an 'interest' in the outcome of an issue. The entity articulating the position for that group tends to be the relevant interest group. This has two implications. Firstly, social groups, regardless of whether the individuals within its boundaries share a common interest, are imposed on a context by researchers and used as a basic unit of description and analysis in policy issues. Secondly, the social group becomes synonymous with the interest group that purports to articulate its interests. In newspapers, books and research publications the NFF or NSWFA are used interchangeably with farmers. This reinforces the notion that the group in question is the sole representative of that constituency, and gives a misleading view of the nature of

\(^9\)Condren (1985, 56) cites Parkin (1980) argument that pluralism is not the orthodoxy in political science research but is presented as such for the purposes of teaching — 'a propaedeutic myth'.
representation. This characterisation is contingent on a) the group representing a suitable majority of the constituency (membership density) b) that the constituency actually has a generalisable group interest to represent (that the group has political as well as categorical significance) and c) that the pattern of interests in society accord with those objectively determined by researchers. The contingent nature of these assumptions is rarely recognised (See discussion in Chapter Nine, Section 9.4).

**Typologies**

It is customary in Australian literature to categorise interest groups according to the characteristics of the constituency they represent. Categories such as producer groups, business groups, promotional groups or sectional groups are typical examples (See for instance, Matthews and Warhurst 1993, 88-92; Matthews 1980, 447-473; Marsh 1995). This form of categorisation reinforces the pluralist assumptions that every relevant social base has an attached set of interests that a corresponding interest group represents. Describing interest groups in such a manner also reinforces the notion that interests represented by interest groups are principally economic in nature and objectively calculable. Single-issue organisations are a little more difficult for a pluralist to categorise. However, they have been accommodated into this theory by referring to them as promotional groups or issue movements. The only difference between issue movements and interest groups is the source of their membership; issues movements draw their constituency from society in general rather than a ‘functional’ section of society\(^{10}\).

**Pressure Group terminology**

In the Australian literature, organisations such as the NFF are often referred to as pressure groups. This linguistic term itself reinforces the ‘success as influence’ equation. The concept of ‘pressure’ group implies that society exerts pressure on the state in a unidirectional manner with the primary aim of changing the government’s course without

\(^{10}\)In earlier categorisations, the reference to ‘promotional’ interest groups covered those promoting ideas to society as a whole rather than advocating the interests of a particular constituency (See Matthews 1980, 448). References are also made to vertical and horizontal cleavages in society. Vertical corresponds to those divisions defined by class (in relation to economic role) and horizontal as those divisions within and across classes (Offe 1972, 95).
actually taking government itself (Ward 1995, 25). The term ‘pressure’ implies that the principle imperative of group is the presentation of members’ demands to the state. It tends to reinforce the notion that interests are already formed and exist in a latent state ready to respond to any perturbation which adversely effects its optimisation. This implies that assessing whether a group is representative can be achieved by simply comparing the goals of the group with the objectively calculated interests researchers impute to the membership. In contrast, the term ‘interest’ group has a broader connotation. The reference to ‘interest’ reminds researchers that these groups are representing interests, highlighting the need for interests to be organised. The use of the term ‘interest group’ is preferred as it refocuses attention on the dual role for groups — organising interests and representing interests.

Apart from the adoption of specific theoretical or analytic devices, perhaps one of central reasons for the pervasiveness of this pluralist-inspired framework is the lack of dedicated Australian interest-group studies. Despite observations regarding the proliferation of interest groups in the Australian context (Sekuless 1991, 10), the study of interest groups seems to be neglected. Many attempts have been made to understand their role in particular policy issues and, as such, their treatment has been an incidental concern rather than a focus for study. This has had two related implications. The first is that in the case of agricultural interest groups, economists and those dealing in public policy have generally written the various book chapters about farm organisations or interest groups. There is an absence of dedicated interest-group scholars, which is even more acute with respect to agriculture. Secondly, the study of interest groups in Australia has typically been weak with respect to theory building and in conceptualising the development of interest groups themselves. Most have been studies on the influence groups have in matters of public policy and, consequently, little emphasis has been directed at the internal or organisational aspects of these groups.

11 However the ABS recognised the need for information in this area and in 1995-96 commissioned the first survey of the ‘interest group industry’. (ABS 1996, Cat. 8639.0)
3.6 Outstanding Questions

The net effect of the framework adopted by Australian researchers is to bracket off member satisfaction and the repercussions of policy on members from the influence activities of the leadership. Organisational goals are taken as the true expression of members’ views and, as such, effectiveness is measured by the degree to which the group goals are achieved. On this basis, conclusions of effectiveness are simply statements about how well the group has matched its activities and goals with the demands of the political environment. That is, effectiveness has been defined as the provision of structures to maximise influence.

The adoption of this framework, with its pluralist assumptions, has obscured a number of important questions regarding the operation of Australian farm interest groups. Whilst researchers may identify these questions, the implicit assumptions of the current framework often encourage researchers to assume answers rather than look further for evidence. Three interrelated aspects of membership warrant further comment — participation levels, the lines of internal division and the impact of group-state relations on group-member relations.

The framework and its assumptions have encouraged a view that participation levels in an interest group are not important. For instance, whilst Connors (1996) mentions the participation levels are low, no explicit exploration is made as to what impact this has on the ‘success’ of the NFF family. Yet questions such as how contingent on membership involvement is the NFF family in its representations to government, and how has the pattern of participation fluctuated over time, seem crucial to evaluating the NFF’s representative contribution.

This framework encourages the view that organisational amalgamation reflects a unification of members’ interests. Consequently, few have questioned whether the NFF’s organisational amalgamation has actually led or accurately reflects the degree of homogeneity of members’ views. Dawson (1982, 11) foreshadowed residual disunity within the membership when she noted that the NFF ‘... still contains within it much
Chapter Three  ‘Successful’ Australian Farmer Interest Groups?

divisiveness which may in the long run hamper its effectiveness.’ Campbell (1971, 156) has suggested that the issue of ‘unity’ had been confounded with that of ‘united action’, claiming that whilst politicians may prefer to deal with one organisation what they actually require is for industry to deliver it a consensus on the relevant issues. The significance of Campbell’s argument is that he separates the fragmentation of organisations from the fragmentation of interests where these have typically been assumed as positively correlated. Campbell’s ultimate concern is that the need of government rather than the desires of members to express a genuinely unified set of interests is motivating organisational amalgamation. Little significant exploration of this has been undertaken.

Further, the nature of the group’s relationship with the state is not conceptualised as an influence on the relationship between groups and their members. Despite significant changes in the rural policy process and the role of farm organisations in that policy process, the same measures of success used by researchers to analyse the Graziers’ Association in the 1960s are employed to analyse the NFF and its SFOs in the 1990s. Finally, both Matthews and Warhurst have suggested that the NFF has remained ‘successful’ despite an increasingly hostile political environment. Despite this conclusion, exactly how the NFF family has achieved this has not yet been explored.

3.7 Conclusion

The NFF family has been evaluated as successful by most commentators and researchers. Its monopoly over the interest representation of farmers, status with the state and ability to attain organisational goals, is the evidence offered to support this claim. The assumptions that members’ interests necessarily equate with group goals and that joining the group equates with supporting group goals seem to obviate the need to examine the relationship between SFO’s and their members. In turn, high membership numbers and the absence of credible competing interest groups are the indices used to uphold the validity of these assumptions. Clearly, the assessment of success currently rests on the activities the NFF conducts to influence policy.
Chapter Three 'Successful' Australian Farmer Interest Groups?

As was implicit in the comments of Warhurst (1994) and Matthews (1993), the NFF family's capacity for influence and, hence, success, is generally viewed as contingent on its ability to shape its organisational development and influence activities according to changes in the political environment. It is undoubtedly the case that the NFF family's transition into a disciplined, professional and hierarchically organised peak interest-group organisation was aimed at maintaining its capacity for influence in the face of its changing environment. The success with which the NFF family has orientated itself to the challenges posed by trends in the political environment is illustrated by its significant impact on the paradigm change in agricultural policy. However, the contrast of the NFF family's apparent 'success', with the plight of a vast section of the farming community under the NFF supported trade-liberal policy paradigm and the reported disillusionment of SFO members, highlights the absence of the internal dimension of interest-group activity in the current framework.

The conclusion that the NFF family are successful is in no small way due to the framework used by researchers. The theoretical review in this chapter has illustrated that the analysis of the NFF family of interest groups has been guided primarily by pluralist assumptions. Even where concessions have been made to corporatist models of interest-group influence activities the inferences about the internal workings of the group remain pluralist in nature. If the themes introduced by corporatist models had been recognised then issues such as how members relate to their organisations, how group goals are formed and what impacts the group-state relationship has on the group-member relationship would have been raised. This 'success' framework has employed a range of linguistic, analytic and middle-range theoretic devices that have bounded off areas of group activity from analysis. These devices have been deployed in such a manner as to render the investigation of membership recruitment, participation in organisational governance and the mechanism by which member consent and legitimacy is elicited, as unnecessary.

However, the literature and the available empirical evidence suggests that it is precisely these issues of internal governance which absorb much of group leaders' time and
resources and, consequently, explicate much of the activity of interest groups in providing political representation. As a result, this approach to assessing the success of the NFF family leaves a number of outstanding questions.

It would be inaccurate to suggest that these assumptions have been adopted uncritically. In the context of assessing the effectiveness of interest groups in terms of influencing public policy, Matthews (1993) identifies some problematic inferences. These include; ‘Inferring Influence from Outcomes’, ‘Inferring Influence from a Group’s Internal Resources’, ‘Inferring Influence from Access’, ‘Inferring Influence by Observing who Prevails in Decision-Making’, and ‘Inferring Influence from Structural Position in the Economy’ (Matthews 1993, 237-240). Whilst these echo concerns raised earlier about the pluralist assumptions implicit in the ‘success’ framework, they relate specifically to assessing influence. What is absent is the identification of the many inferences made about member satisfaction and the reason for membership. The task is, therefore, to build on Matthews’ critical evaluation of pluralist assumptions pertaining to the measurement of influence and onto those related to gaining and maintaining membership.

Clearly the most profitable path to addressing these questions is to develop a new framework. This framework must confront the internal inconsistencies in the assumptions used by the current framework and address them in a systematic fashion. It must build upon the current framework in such a way that the questions identified in this chapter are answered. Of primary importance is the question of the effectiveness of farm interest groups in representing the interest of their entire membership. In addressing this issue the new framework must not only reflect the group activities aimed at policy influence but those aimed at gaining and maintaining members.

The next chapter will develop a new framework for the examination of interest-group behaviour. It will emphasise the internal and external dimensions of group activity and use both to determine a new basis from which to evaluate group success. The new framework will be a composite of all three theoretical perspectives. The normative expectations about the relationship between the representative and the represented,
expounded under pluralism, are a good base from which to commence building a model. The corporatist model of the policy process forces modifications to this basic pluralist foundation. In particular it suggests that the direction of influence between group and state is multi-directional and that this has implications for the level of involvement members can have in advocacy activities. Whilst this new framework may be largely inspired by the model of the policy process offered by corporatists, their theory does not offer a cogent picture as to the way in which internal group workings may be altered to accommodate the demands of a closer relationship with the state. Theorists talk of a group disciplining members, but just how this is achieved remains elusive. Consequently, rational choice is a useful starting point in attempting to fill in the detail omitted by corporatist accounts of interest groups. Rational choice has further significance given it appears to have had a large impact on the way Australian farm interest groups have responded to a rise in member dissatisfaction.
Chapter Four

Understanding Interest Groups Beyond ‘Success’

4.1 Introduction

Analyses of farm interest groups in Australia have concentrated almost exclusively on assessing their effectiveness. In so doing, they have drawn upon a framework with largely pluralist assumptions. Given this scope, it is not surprising that the NFF family’s activities have generally been interpreted as effective. In the most recent analysis of the NFF, Connors (1996) adopts the position that its formation has enabled farmers to ‘speak with one voice’, and as a direct consequence their interests have been more easily advanced. Further, the increased level of resources now available to the NFF family has increased its level of professionalism and, as a consequence, it is now held in high regard by those political actors with whom it interacts. According to the orthodox ‘success’ framework drawn upon by Connors, the NFF family’s success is a result of its unified structure, encompassingness and professionalism; all of which has enabled it to become the dominant spokesperson for Australia’s farmers.

Whilst the NFF family is deemed to be ‘successful’ by most commentators, many have also noted that it has championed policies that have inflicted significant hardship on large sections of the farming community and that this has had specific organisational ramifications. For instance, Connors notes the existence of disillusionment and the lack of participation by members of SFOs (Connors 1996). Doubts are raised about the extent to which amalgamation reflects an underlying unity of farmers’ interests (Campbell 1971; Dawson 1982). Researchers have observed how the NFF has been successful despite an increasingly hostile external environment (Matthews 1993; Warhurst 1994). Yet in each instance further exploration of these issues has been curtailed. Questions such as how crucial is member support to NFF success, does the NFF family’s formation reflect an increased interest homogeneity amongst farmers and how has the NFF remained successful despite the increasingly hostile political environment, have not been specifically posed.
Chapter Four

Understanding Interest Groups Beyond ‘Success’

Whilst these questions appear legitimate given the available evidence (see Chapter Two), they have not been raised in any preceding analysis of the NFF family of organisations. These questions have been overlooked because the framework applied to understanding interest-group activity does not entertain the potentialities reflected in these questions. The current framework does not conceive of a scenario where interest-group behaviour is driven by any other need than to maximise influence, let alone the possibility that these activities may have deleterious effects on securing member support. According to Streeck (1992, 106), the possibility that the internal and external activities of a interest group may not be complementary, or even contradictory, ‘… has been systematically underestimated in the “pluralist” tradition of interest-group theory which has viewed interest associations as the exclusive, “democratic” creation of their members.’

The basic pluralist assumption, as identified by Streeck, pervades analyses of the NFF family. Consequently, its capacity to exercise influence continues to be the focus of critical comment. Given the current framework, the evidence of disillusionment is not given serious consideration or due significance. Instead, disillusionment is considered to be a result of members being under-informed about the policies and, as a consequence, simply failing to recognise the positive implications of the group’s policy measures. Inadequate communication between members and the leadership is often identified as the problem, and enhanced communication strategies the solution (Connors 1996). Alternatively, it is suggested that disillusionment reflects the fact that farmers are innately less amenable to collective organisation, that is, ‘naturally’ individualistic.

The picture painted of the NFF in Chapters One and Two challenges the ‘leaps of faith’ demanded by the ‘success’ framework for evaluating interest-group behaviour. Firstly, it suggests that organisational reforms aimed at increasing the capacity for influence can have a deleterious effect on the capacity of the group to secure the support of their members. Consequently, it suggests that an interest group can secure influence without the support from members. Secondly, it suggests the NFF can gather financial support
without members necessarily supporting their goals. Thirdly, it suggests the NFF’s lack of responsiveness to its members may bring about negative long-term consequences.

Clearly, a more comprehensive analytic framework is necessary; one that is sensitive to the entire range of forces that drive interest-group activity and that examine activities beyond those aimed at policy influence. It is to this task that this chapter turns. The framework must both ensure that the appropriate questions are asked about the relationship between support and influence, and assist in investigating and resolving those questions.

The theme of internal and external group activity referred to by Streeck will be developed in Section 4.2. The hints contained in the traditional interest-group literature regarding how to resolve these questions will be revealed and references in recent literature explored. In Section 4.3 the new framework for the analysis of interest groups will be outlined. However, the activity of interest groups exists within the context of two other dimensions of activity. Individuals may participate in collective activity through a range of other formations or they may prefer activity that is not of a collective nature. Section 4.4 will develop two dimensions within which the framework for understanding interest groups exists.

4.2 External and Internal Dimensions to Group Behaviour

In considering a new framework, it has become increasingly clear that the external and internal ‘dimensions’ cannot be considered in isolation. In order to fully appreciate the behaviour of interest groups one must assume that they simultaneously operate under two imperatives, one reflecting the activity in each dimension, and that a relationship exists between their execution.

Given the general interest-group literature’s preoccupation with ‘how they exert policy influence’ and the absence of study into internal group activity, it has been claimed there is a ‘stagnation of ideas’ in the study of interest groups (Dunleavy 1990, 468). Whilst this stagnation was evident in the review of the major schools of interest-group analysis (see
Chapter Four  Understanding Interest Groups Beyond ‘Success’

Chapter Three, Section 3.3), each school of theory offers some directions that provide a point from which to commence a reconstructive analysis. Pluralism, for instance, proposes that when influence activities are directly contingent on internal support no tension exists between internal and external dimensions. Corporatism suggests external and internal activities are interdependent. That corporatism is described as unstable implies a degree of tension between the external and the internal dimensions of interest-group activity (Panitch 1980; Schmitter 1982). Rational choice theory suggests that leaders, through the application of selective incentives, can somehow detach internal support from external influence activities. In sum, the three perspectives complement each other in such a way as to provide a starting point from which to consider a new framework.

A number of authors have picked up on the implicit references to the duality of group behaviour. Davis and Wurth (1993) argue that ‘Interest groups constantly confront a tension between external and internal objectives: charting a strategy within the larger political environment in order to pursue the groups’ interest(s) and integrating otherwise autonomous actors in order to sustain the group.’ (Davis and Wurth 1993, 435).

An internal-external framework has been applied to an examination of trends in EC farm organisations (Moyano 1990). The development of farm organisations are explicated in terms of ‘organisational structures’ (internal dimensions), and ‘political and social spheres’ (external dimensions). Organisational structures include ‘... the factors motivating agriculturalists to associate with others in order to defend their interests, the type of organisation created, the emerging structure of representation and the ideological discourse upon which each organisation develops its political platform and bases its relations with government and other social agents.’ (Moyano 1990, 182). The organisations’ activities in the ‘political sphere’ are concerned with influencing those institutions that are charged with creating and implementing agricultural policies (Moyano 1990, 183). Activities in the ‘social sphere’ encompass the manner in which agricultural organisations act, as agents between other groups within agricultural society, as agents of socio-cultural mobilisation and as ‘systems of ideological reference’.
Similarly, Schmitter and Streeck (1981) argue that two logics inform the intermediation activities of interest groups, a ‘Logic of Membership’ and a ‘Logic of Influence’. The values, interests and collective identity of the members determine the Logic of Membership. The ‘constraints and opportunities offered to associations by their institutional environment’ constitute the Logic of Influence (Streeck 1992, 105).

Whether labelled, ‘logic of influence’, ‘external objectives’ or ‘political and social spheres’, these authors are all referring to the group’s interactions with its organisational environment aimed at influencing those institutions necessary to change policy or attain group goals. Similarly, ‘logic of membership’, ‘internal objective’ or ‘organisational structures’ all refer to the activities undertaken by the group to elicit support from members; whether this manifests itself as financial contributions or action. Comprehending these two dimensions separately is unproblematic. In each, the organisation modifies its activities pursuant to either the demands of its external or internal environment. However, each dimension has interrelationships with the other, which introduces immense complexity. Typically, this relationship is characterised as one of tension.

Interest-group organisations must build internal structures that ‘respond to both logics equally and simultaneously’ (Streeck 1992, 105). However, striking a balance between the two logics is not easy, as they may not be complementary and in some instances may even be contradictory. Interactions with membership require not only the ‘... authentic expression and successful pursuit of members’ interests but also on the ability of the association to punish free-ridership and to apply authority to extract a continuous flow of resources.’ (Streeck 1992, 106). Similarly, successful exchanges with interlocutors (the state and other groups) ‘... requires an ability not just to mobilise but also to compromise,

1 Schmitter and Streeck (1981) discuss interest groups as having two ‘organisational’ logics: the ‘logic of goal formation’ and the ‘logic of efficient implementation’. However these logics refer to the way a group develops formal and informal organisational procedures. Given that this thesis is developing a model of the imperatives an interest group may have in terms of its intermediation activities, these logics are not of prime importance. The concepts of representation and compliance, and the tension between influence and support, are introduced later on to capture some of the concerns of these logics.
that is, to moderate the demands of the membership and to ensure that they abide by negotiated agreements.' (Streeck 1992, 106).

Given the already well-documented propensity for authors to make inferences about one dimension based on investigations of the other, Davis and Wurth (1993, 437) argue that '... the internal and external dimensions of interest-groups’ behaviour must be kept analytically distinct, such that the relationship between them becomes something to investigate, not simply assumed.' This argument highlights the danger in assuming a ‘natural’ coupling exists between responses to the external environment and to internal demands. The danger of such a practice arises because it overlooks that leaders can actively manage the relationship between the two. That the two dimensions are actively managed as opposed to being determined by one another necessitates a third dimension to group activity; one in which the way interrelationships between the two imperatives are moderated.

The role of resolving this tension is generally attributed to group leaders. The purpose for managing this tension is to create some space for the association to act with the requisite degree of ‘autonomy’ from its members (Streeck 1992, 105) and the need to guarantee the ‘survival’ of the group (Offe and Wiesenthal 1980). According to Streeck (1992), the balance between the two logics is struck via modifications to the organisational structures. However, whilst the state may ‘lend’ the association status and sanctioning power in return for deliverance of members, and members may be willing to trade support for authentic representation, these may be incompatible within the same organisational structures. As Streeck argues, ‘... associations are likely to find it difficult to produce their two tradable commodities, compliance and representation, at the same time and through the same structural arrangements’ (Streeck 1992, 106).

The noted instability amongst interest groups participating in corporatist arrangements suggests that the ease with which the two tradeable commodities can be produced is, to some degree, contingent on the style of the policy process. However, the uneven pattern with which this instability manifests itself, a contrast particularly evident between labour
unions and business associations (Panitch 1980), suggests that the interests being represented is an additional factor in determining the ease with which these two commodities can be produced. According to Offe (1972, 85), the ‘primary’ interests of large ‘status’ groups with relatively homogenous interests are easiest to organise. However, status and functional groups include all the broad categories of capital and labour — those groups defined by their economic roles. This obscures the significant degree of variability that exists between the way in which capital and labour can organise and are capable of conflict (Offe and Wiesenthal 1980). The variability between classes can be explained with respect to whether individual goals are pursued best individually or collectively. There is general agreement that business or capital is predisposed to pursuing their goals individually as opposed to collectively and labour vice versa (Streeck 1992; Offe and Wiesenthal 1980). However, the explanation for this situation diverges between what could be labelled ‘class-based’ (Offe and Wiesenthal 1980) and ‘organisational-based’ approaches (Streeck and Schmitter 1985; Streeck 1992).

Streeck and Schmitter (1985, 126) argue that the significance of associational action is diminished where a group can achieve their interests by acting individually. They suggest that:

\[\textit{this may be less of a problem for categories of interest where individual actors are very weak and dispersed (e.g. farmers, workers, petty bourgeoisie), but could pose a serious challenge in those categories where “going-it-alone” through market power or state influence is a promising alternative (e.g. capitalists and some privileged professions).}\]

The absence of encompassing business associations in most western democratic states has generally been taken to confirm the view of Streeck and Schmitter that business finds encompassing associational activity more unstable than labour (see Traxler 1993; Matthews 1991).

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2 Offe refers to primary interests as those with most obvious importance for specific social groupings, such as opportunities for consumption and investment, coverage of social risks and allocation of leisure time.

3 Offe suggests here the major economic groupings of farmers, business and labour A status group is one in which identity is derived from economic status. This can be contrasted with those ‘horizontal’ groupings that represent interests largely unattached to any primary economic grouping. Hence organising on the basis of promoting good public health or a cleaner environment is a much tougher proposition.
Chapter Four  
Understanding Interest Groups Beyond 'Success'

For Offe and Wiesenthal (1980), the efficacy of associational versus firm-level activity is less about a constituency's dispersion or market power (although this is a symptom of difference), and more about the commensurability of interests. It is the objective and narrow nature of business interests that allow business associations to adopt minimal interactions with their members and an informal mode of interaction with the state — a monological logic of collective action (Offe and Wiesenthal 1980, 86 & 91). Conversely, the fragmented nature of workers' interests means that unions must actively establish a dialogue with their members such that a common goal is developed from the diverse range of interests extant within the constituency — a dialogical logic of collective action. Further, this 'dialogue' must occur after formation, which deprives the leadership of a collective interest on which to base efforts at recruitment. In organisational terms, this means the internal imperative for business groups is merely one of membership, whilst for labour organisations the internal imperative involves membership and, subsequently, goal formation (Traxler 1993, 676)\(^4\).

These two 'logics of collective action' have clear implications with respect to managing the tension between influence and support in order to attain autonomy and survival (Offe and Wiesenthal 1980). That both the interests and goals of business are formed prior to collective action, and further that they are objectively calculable, places business associations in a position to exercise autonomy from membership without the problems of member disenfranchisement. Consequently, associational leaders can exercise high levels of autonomy without the need to also secure survival externally. Where interests are incommensurable prior to input into the interest group, as is suggested in the case of

\(^4\) Despite Offe and Wiesenthal's argument, Streeck asserts that the lack of encompassing business groups is evidence that '...the addition of one more member to a capitalist association seems to increase its internal heterogeneity to a much greater extent than the addition of one more member of a trade union' (Streeck 1992, 89). These conclusions arise from a comparison of '...the number of trade unions and business associations representing the interests of capitalists and workers located and producing in identical economic sectors' (Streeck 1992, 88). In a similar vein Traxler (1993) has made an interesting test of a range of theories, including that of Offe and Wiesenthal (1980), that purport to explain the link between class and organisability. However, following Streeck (1992) he has taken an organisational approach, one in which only the visible dimension of political power is examined. He uses the number of organisations as a measure of generalisability, the membership density as a measure of associability, and the number of affiliates to a peak groups as a measure of governability (Traxler 1993, 677-78). This approach capitulates the unthinking habits that necessitated the critique of conventional appraisals of farm groups in Australia, inferring from the external 'observable' dimension to the internal dimension.

121
unions, the representative cannot exercise high levels of autonomy without first establishing a common goal. Without a process of goal formation, they risk members becoming concerned that their interests have not been taken into account and withdrawing support. To remove such limitations they must exchange internal for external guarantees of support (Offe and Wiesenthal 1980, 107).

4.3 Framework for Analysis: The Imperatives of Interest-Group Representation

A variety of authors have identified a gap in the existing interest-group literature and tentatively replaced it with various conceptions of the same theme: an internal-external dimension to group activity. In so doing, they have made three broad conclusions with respect to interest-group behaviour, which provide the basis for a new framework. Firstly, interest groups have two dimensions to their activity; one related to maintaining membership support and one related to achieving influence. Secondly, these two dimensions are interrelated in a manner that can be characterised as one of tension. The extent to which the relationship is characterised by tension varies depending on the group-state relationship (external environment) and the nature of the interests being represented (internal environment). Thirdly, it is unsatisfactory to assume a ‘natural’ coupling between characteristics of the external and internal dimensions of group activity. Instead, it needs to be recognised that leadership manages the inherent tension between the internal and external dimensions of group behaviour in order to secure survival and autonomy. They must be able to produce representation to elicit support and produce compliance to elicit influence.

The next step is to formalise these insights into a framework for examining interest-group behaviour. On the basis of these three conclusions it is possible to distil three imperatives that underpin the activities of interest groups: political influence, membership support and autonomy and survival. This framework further develops the internal-external theme in such a way as to enable a fuller analysis and explanation of the activities of the NFF family of organisations.
Political Influence: Interest-Group ‘Success’

The imperative generally attributed to interest groups is that of achieving political influence. That is, undertaking activities aimed at influencing institutions in order to achieve the stated goals of the group. It is by measuring influence that analysts have typically determined a group’s ‘success’.

The ease and manner in which the group goes about attaining its goals will reflect the political environment it works in. That is, its output environment. Important factors in the political environment may be described, changes monitored and its influence on the group’s output analysed. Given that interest groups generally wish to influence public policy, the strategies and tactics used to attain success are typically reflected in state-group relationships. The prevailing institutional or bureaucratic arrangements for policymaking are also crucial factors in dictating the nature of a group’s activity, the manner in which its demands are made and the substance of those demands. The ease with which a group attains success is also contingent on its status, either economic or social. Things such as the economic, political and social significance of the group are important in establishing the status it receives from the state and the authoritativeness of its position. The encompassingness of the group is also important in determining the degree to which the state may view it as a useful ally.

Despite convincing arguments that it is those groups that can resolve a policy problem who most often influence policy (Browne 1989, 378), when assessing the capacity for influence analysts typically focus on a group’s access to government. Consequently, one should assess the extent to which groups provide what is needed by government when attempting to understand their capacity for influence. Given that the target of influence is the predominant factor in determining the type of outputs a group produces, one must also consider those occasions where the state is not the target. In these instances what is

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5 Note that these are all externally observable characteristics. As with many commentators, the state tends to infer internal characteristics from the observable external ones.
being organised (inputs) may prove more important than the political environment in determining influence\(^6\).

**Imperative Two: Membership Support**

The second imperative relates to leadership’s interaction with current and potential membership in order to elicit support. Support can be expressed in a range of observable ways that generally correlate with degrees of participation (see Richardson 1995, 76-77). Members can provide support through financial contributions via membership subscription, participation in meetings, taking part in activities to publicly support group goals, or taking on leadership roles. These variations in support can be usefully understood by placing them under two headings: a ‘willingness to act’ and a ‘willingness to pay’ (Offe and Wiesenthal 1980). The use of the word ‘willingness’ implies that leaders may only have to create a proclivity amongst members to behave in a particular way rather than actually modify behaviour in an observable manner. A willingness to act involves members backing up their leader’s demands in a coordinated manner. A willingness to pay means that members’ support is limited to paying subscription fees. These different conceptions of support have divergent implications on the expectations of representation. The first implies that members must be involved in the conduct of group affairs and requires dialogical linkages between representatives and the represented. The other implies that interests can be determined objectively and, consequently, members would simply fund the best means of calculating that interest. This requires only monological attachments between representatives and the represented. It is important to recognise that maintaining a ‘willingness to act’ without members actually acting is a less stable position for leaders than that of maintaining a ‘willingness to pay’.

The objective measure of support is encompassingness; the number of actual members as a percentage of the total possible members. However, it can also be assessed in terms of how satisfied members are with group goals and their willingness to participate in actions

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\(^6\)The author has in mind instances where civil society is the target of influence, and, hence, participants characteristics and status (categorical or identity related) may in fact be a greater determinant of success than external factors. This also relates to defining ‘success’ as the attainment of participation itself, as is the case in many self-help movements.
aimed at attaining group goals. This could be further extended to the level of active member participation in the group’s electoral or voting activities and the degree to which members actively revise group goals and deliberatively determine their common interests. The measurements adopted generally accord with the theoretical framework applied to understand the significance of groups, hence the dominance of externally observable measures such as encompassingness.

Groups undertake membership recruitment campaigns and manage organisational incentives such that members continue contributing resources and non-members take up membership. Consequently, the group’s interactions are guided by what motivates people to join and stay a member. As was indicated in Chapter Three (Section 3.3), arguments have been made that people join because of individual material rewards (Olson 1965) and out of belief congruency with leaders or agreement with group goals (Bentley 1908; Truman 1951). However, the emergent consensus is that members respond to a mix of motives. It is generally conceded that groups offer three types of inducements: material incentives, solidarity incentives and normative incentives (Moe 1980; Knowe 1990; Pretsby et al 1990). Consequently, interest-group activity aimed at securing support often includes exclusive individual incentives (such as provision of services and discounts on certain items), the sponsorship of meetings that foster and support social interaction, and the provision of activities (such as participation in branch meetings, protesting, letter-writing, voting or election to leadership roles) which promote a feeling amongst members that they have directly or indirectly influenced the agenda.

The recently advocated ‘developmental’ (Young and Forsyth 1993) and ‘group identity’ (Dunleavy 1988 & 1990) approaches to viewing the decision to take up membership have implications for understanding this imperative. The developmental approach suggests that members may join because of selective incentives but may become interested in group goals. This is particularly the case where a collective interest can only be determined after group formation. The ‘group identity’ approach suggests the decision to join is contingent on the production of group identities which members identify with, group boundaries that they believe they fall within and group goals that they believe their
participation will contribute to the achievement of. Consequently, groups must project an identity to which current and potential members identify and through which members can interpret changes in their environment. Both these approaches indicate interest-group leaders must constantly attend to members’ changing needs.

The ease and means with which member support is developed depends, in part, on the environment within which these members operate. The constituency’s geographic dispersion, level of education, social isolation, economic prosperity and potential size are amongst many of the characteristics that determine the degree of difficulty in executing the internal imperative. A further consideration is whether certain groups of citizens are inherently more heterogeneous and, hence, harder to organise, than others (Offe and Wiesenthal 1980). A final important factor is whether the emphasis on pursuing interests on a collective, as opposed to an individual, basis differs amongst groups (Offe and Wiesenthal 1980; Streeck and Schmitter 1985; Streeck 1992).

These factors are not as ‘objective’ as they may first appear. Consequently, one of the most significant tasks for leaders is reinforcing to members those characteristics that make eliciting support easier. For instance, leaders can create a view amongst group members that they are homogeneous, have similar interests and that they have a high degree of political power which is best exercised collectively. This type of activity is best exemplified in the practice of constructing a boundary around a group. Interest groups project a boundary within which a social grouping is encapsulated. Those encapsulated within the boundary are referred to as the group’s constituency as it is from this group that they draw members. One may think of the way these boundaries are drawn as conforming to a specific logic (Streeck and Visser 1997, 322). In the case of farmers, this boundary has traditionally been assumed to accord with the sectoral boundary; that is, the economic grouping of farm owners said to have a ‘proprietorial interest’. Consequently, one can describe this as a sectoral logic. However, a range of other logic exists. A ‘political logic’ means that the boundaries around constituencies are drawn to conform to the party political views of individuals, whilst ‘organisational viability’ implies that boundaries are drawn in such a way as to maximise the survival of the organisation
(Streeck and Visser 1997, 322). Indeed, in the context of the history in Chapter Two and the First Intermediate Reflection, one could argue that farm organisations have moved from a situation where political, sectoral and organisational logic coincided to one of almost complete separation.

**Imperative Three: Autonomy and Survival**

Whilst it has been argued that an interest group has two discrete imperatives (to achieve influence and secure support), it is apparent that both are interrelated; the pursuance of one is in some way contingent on the other. Consequently, there is an implied, although too often forgotten, third imperative. This third imperative entails managing the relationship between the imperatives of influence and support. Whilst some commentators imply that they are mutually exclusive, the emerging consensus in the literature seems to suggest that the relationship is characterised by tension. Consequently, interest-group organisations must in some way manage the two imperatives such as to resolve this tension.

Group leaders\(^7\) who attempt to move the relationship from that of ‘tension’ to ‘complementarity’ undertake the third imperative. It is accomplished predominantly through altering the organisational structure, articles of association and constitution, procedures, political tactics, and, more subtly, through organisational communication strategies and ideological innovation. Therefore, to assess this imperative one needs to examine the structure, procedures, and communications (with the constituency and other institutions in the political environment) employed by the interest group.

The relationship between influence and support imperatives establishes the space within which group representatives can exercise *autonomy* (Streeck 1992). In this context, complementarity means establishing the necessary conditions whereby the leadership attain sufficient autonomy from its members to achieve influence without losing support in the process. Generally, the more autonomy required the more difficult it is to maintain complementarity.

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\(^7\) Group leaders include senior elected office bearers and those staff employed in the secretariat.
It is important to pause a moment in order to clarify the basis on which the relationship between the two dimensions is described as in tension. This is necessary as some commentators may argue that tension between the two dimensions is a condition particular to a corporatist policy process. Such a response is anticipated given that the literature highlighting this scenario generally originates from Western European accounts of interest groups under neo-corporatism. However, the key factor in producing tension is not corporatism itself, but conditions that are more pronounced under corporatism. Tension arises when group leaders, subsequent to coming to an agreement with members, modify their position in the context of discussions with the state or another interlocutor. Or, alternatively, when group leaders, subsequent to agreeing to a bargain with other political interlocutors, recant on an agreement in the context of discussions with their members.

What this demonstrates is that tension is introduced into the relationship between support and influence when group leaders have to bargain with other groups or the state. Therefore, in any instance where a group's leadership must deviate from the demands of members in the process of pursuing political influence — a potentiality that exists in all but the most extreme pluralist accounts of the policy process — the ongoing support of members is jeopardised. Consequently, whilst the intensity of this tension undoubtedly fluctuates dependant on the style of interaction between the state and interest groups (decreasing on a continuum from corporatist to pluralist) this tension constitutes a fundamental dynamic of interest-group behaviour.

The precise reason as to why support and influence are brought into tension in the context of granting leaders autonomy to bargain is twofold. Firstly, in granting support, membership inevitably looks past the leadership to its relationship with the political interlocutors they bargain with. As a result, they scrutinise the degree to which these activities reflect the authentic representation of their interests. Secondly, in granting influence, the interlocutors with whom an interest group bargains inevitably look past the group leadership and scrutinise their relationship with the membership they represent. In
so doing, they are particularly interested in the degree to which the leadership can deliver their membership's compliance on the bargain they have agreed upon. Consequently, the tension arises because delivering the authentic representation necessary to secure support from members is not always complementary to delivering the compliance of members such that influence with political interlocutors is secured. This flux of imperatives generates a complex picture of the role of group leaders as is depicted schematically in Figure 4.1.

**Figure 4.1. Imperatives of Interest-Group Leaders.**

The notion that members and the state look past interest-group leadership when agreeing to deliver support and influence assists in explaining the tension between these imperatives. It is the argument of this thesis that tension exists because both the imperatives of influence and support are secured through the activities of leadership in the opposite dimension. For instance, group leadership needs to elicit influence from the state, for which they exchange member compliance. Conversely, group leadership needs to elicit support from membership, for which they exchange authentic representation. The tension arises because the 'commodity' that the leadership exchanges with the state or with members, such that it can elicit influence or support, is reproduced in the opposing sphere to that in which it is required to be exchanged. That is, compliance is exchanged for influence in the external dimension yet the conditions for the reproduction of compliance exist as part of the internal dimension of group activity. Conversely, whilst support is delivered by members in the internal dimension it is exchanged for authentic representation, which is produced by leadership in the external dimension (See Figure 4.2).
This further clarifies the relationship between support and influence. One can now say that support is not directly contingent on influence, as has previously been claimed. Rather, they are related by virtue of the fact that activities aimed at eliciting influence and the production of authentic representation (on which support depends) both coexist in the external dimension. Consequently, they are functionally interdependent rather than directly contingent. This means that there is room for the relationship between support and influence to be managed by actions of leaders in both the internal and external dimension.

The nature of the interests being represented also has a significant bearing on the degree of tension necessary to extract autonomy. The members of some constituencies may believe their interests are objectively calculable and, consequently, that they are best represented by experts with high degrees of autonomy. Conversely, members of some constituencies may believe their interests to be so internally heterogeneous that deliberations are necessary to resolve inconsistencies and contradictions. In the first instance, the compliance required for success will be unlikely to diminish the members’ perceptions that their interests had been authentically represented. As such, representatives would be granted high levels of autonomy. In the second instance, members would scrutinise the authenticity of their representation, thus hindering the act of securing compliance. Consequently, low levels of autonomy would be granted.
Chapter Four  
Understanding Interest Groups Beyond ‘Success’

The generally deleterious effect of increasing autonomy on membership support highlights the second outcome of the third imperative: survival. Typically, the guarantee of a group’s survival is considered to flow directly from the support of members. This is because the power of the organisation is generated by the members’ willingness to conduct conflict (Offe 1972). Therefore, it follows in political orthodoxy that without membership support leadership’s attempt at influence would lack legitimacy and authority, consequently threatening its survival. On this basis, the overarching concern in achieving complementarity is obtaining a guarantee of the organisation’s survival (Meyer and Imig 1993, 261). However, according to Offe and Wiesenthal (1980, 107), interest groups are able to substitute these internal guarantees of survival for external guarantees. That is, groups can be afforded power by the state. Consequently, they can exercise substantial autonomy without the concern that an associated drop in support will undermine their survival. This scenario is, however, contingent on the associated drop in support being limited to members’ willingness to act for the group, a proclivity no longer required when external guarantees of survival are afforded to a group. The willingness of members to maintain membership by paying their membership dues must be protected. In such a process, support that is contingent on a ‘willingness to act’ is replaced with support that is contingent on a ‘willingness to pay’.

The Three Imperatives

These three imperatives illustrate a more holistic understanding of the role of interest groups. However, given that interest groups operate under three imperatives, rather than the one as was previously assumed, evaluating a group is a much more complex task. No longer is it adequate to assess the influence of a group and merely assume that a group’s influence is proof enough that the members are satisfied and their interests are being pursued in a genuine fashion. Rather than be conceived purely as instruments for achieving policy goals, this framework encourages analysts to consider the manner in which interest groups have to actively manage a number of relationships. Consequently, they should be understood as responding to changes not only in the organisation’s
political environment but also in the environment within which their membership is immersed.

One must be able to assess the performance of the group in eliciting both support and influence. Further, one needs to explore the way the group produces authentic representation and compliance in such a way as to secure support and success, hence creating some space for leadership to exercise autonomy. Just as importantly, one needs to establish which of the two imperatives is adopted as the organising principle for the interest group and, consequently, which set of environmental factors, internal or external, drive the measures devised to manage the interrelationship between the two imperatives.

Under the current framework all external activities that constitute demands on the state or other external interlocutors are interpreted as activities aimed at influence. The new framework makes it clear that one cannot automatically assume that activity in the external dimension is aimed at achieving influence. Vice versa, one cannot automatically assume that activity in the internal dimension is aimed at securing members' concurrence with stated group goals. Therefore, it is necessary to discern those external activities concretely aimed at influencing interlocutors and those aimed at symbolic representation. Similarly, one needs to separate those activities aimed at gaining support for their policies from those activities aimed at gaining influence without addressing the degree of member concurrence with group policy goals.

The emphasis on leadership managing a tension between influence and support can be read as implying the perpetration of something decidedly undemocratic. Leadership certainly has such a connotation in the analysis of political organisations arising from the work of Michels (1915 & 1962). Whilst this imperative can often lead to anti-democratic and misrepresentative practice, particularly within closed policy networks (such as under corporatism), it also holds the possibility of forming a feedback loop between institutionalised politics and civil society (See Cohen and Arato 1992). It has a dual

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8 See Skogstad (1985, 741) who attempts to make such a distinction by separating interest group activity into 'interest articulation' which is symbolic in nature and 'policy responsiveness' which is more concrete.
potentiality; to democratise as well as rationalise. Hence, both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of this imperative are important.

There are] ... dual possibilities inherent in modern associational life. On the one side, the reduction of associational life to formal, bureaucratic and closed organisations (corporatist systems), on the other, the revitalisation of voluntary associations through internally democratic, open and public forms of group life. In our view, indeed, the resolution of all the alternatives in question in a democratic direction depends primarily on the outcome of this last alternative. (Arato and Cohen 1988; 52)

Rather than assuming the third imperative logically results in leaders suppressing members demands in order to 'save' important links and, hence, influence with government, one could equally anticipate a scenario whereby this imperative could be equally satisfied through 'transparent' feedback from political society to civil society and vice versa.

4.4 Interest Groups in Context: Two Planes of Political Representation Levels and Linkages

The conceptualisation of interest-group behaviour as being governed by three imperatives provides a more rounded perspective from which to explain group behaviour. However, interest groups, as intermediate institutions between state and society, do not operate in isolation. Consequently, some additional concepts need to be introduced which complement the three imperatives of interest groups and place them in the broader context of political formations that contribute to political representation.

In interest-group studies it is often assumed that all the demands of the relevant constituency will be channelled (or filtered) through the interest group and subsequently presented to the state for action. However, there are a number of other levels at which political activity or exchange can occur between a constituency and the state. It will be argued that one can conceptualise political representation along two planes: the horizontal and the vertical. The range of formations through which citizens can act collectively are placed along the horizontal plane. These formations include political parties, formal interest groups or associations, single-issue protest groups and social movements (the historical periodisation in the First Intermediate Reflection reflects this diversity). However, collective action is not the only way in which citizens can pursue
their interests. Consequently, the vertical plane reflects the level at which interests are pursued. Action can either be at the above association, association, cartel, or firm/individual level. The horizontal plane denotes the range of formations available to citizens to represent themselves at the collective level. The vertical plane denotes the alternative levels for citizens to pursue their interests. On the vertical plane, individuals may make a decision regarding the different levels of action available to them, and, if they decide on collective action, then they have a choice on the horizontal plane regarding which formation. This can be presented schematically (See Figure 4.3).

**Figure 4.3. Two Planes of Political Representation.**

**Vertical Plane: Levels**

A critical factor in examining the political activity of a group of citizens is the degree to which goals can be achieved through sub-associational, associational and above associational levels (Offe and Wiesenthal 1980, 83; Streeck and Schmitter 1985, 121; Traxler 1993, 686; Bell and Warhurst 1993). The degree to which associational activity is important for a group indicates the significance of the interest group in representational terms. Consequently, the degree to which autonomy will threaten support is, to an extent,
contingent on the importance of associational versus sub-associational or above associational-level activity. The four levels of activity generally considered to exist along the vertical plane are individual/firm, cartel/cooperative, associational and above associational.

Below the association, individuals (whether business units or individual citizens) can take measures to respond to their environment. This may entail a business unit altering a product mix, a corporate public affairs unit undertaking ‘issue management’ activities, or an individual undertaking a quality assurance scheme. Secondly, firms may informally collude or formally cooperate in an attempt to exercise some influence over the market. The associational level implies that individuals seek advantage by pooling resources, hence, creating political leverage. Organisationally, it can mean the formation of an interest group, political party or social movement. Finally, a constituency may gain advantage by virtue of the economic-political system’s need to ensure the reproduction of that constituency’s interests such that the integrity of the economic and political system as a whole is maintained.

This last aspect of representation is the preserve of business: ‘The entire relationship between capital and the state is built not upon what capital can do politically through its associations ... but upon what capital can refuse to do in terms of investments decided upon by the individual firm.’ (Offe and Wiesenthal 1980, 86). The privileged position held by business is due to its status as one of the ‘... strongest social forces whose interests and concerns extend over all spheres of government.’ (Redner 1996, 406). In the context of this overarching power, interest-group formation, firm-level responses and cartel formation are actually supplementary forms of business influence. It is precisely this last point that suggests capital’s preference to pursue change at a firm level does not mean that collective action is harder to achieve, just that it is less necessary. In this way, the fragmented nature of business representation through association level action merely supports the argument that business is less reliant on collective action to push its interests (Offe and Wiesenthal 1980) rather than business interests being more heterogeneous (Streeck 1992). Given that this thesis deals with neither business nor labour
organisations, but with a group who occupy what is at the very least an anachronistic class location, it is not proposed to dwell on the intricacies of the class dimensions of the argument. It is, however, necessary to recognise the increasing importance of associational level activity as levels of interest heterogeneity rise.

This framework draws attention to the layered nature of political activity and, hence, enables one to examine the way responsibilities for pursuing interests are apportioned between collective associations and individuals. Additionally, this plane of action illustrates how perturbations at the level of the market and the state have implications for associational activity. Organisational leaders must manage the needs of their members and those of the state, the needs of which are founded in different systems that, in turn, are governed by different imperatives. Members are operating within a market (whether a capital or labour market) that is governed by economic imperatives and, as such, the ‘...economic market forces may prove too strong to be contained by associational compromise ...’ (Streeck and Schmitter 1985, 127). The state exists within a bureaucratic system in which the group’s actions may threaten the ‘authority’ of state officials who may act to weaken group power to take back control (Streeck and Schmitter 1985, 127).

As suggested by Streeck and Schmitter, in their role as business people, citizens may respond to perturbations in the market within which their business is situated. However, what is often neglected is that, as citizens, they also respond to changes in the society and culture within which they are situated. Consequently, changes in the values, interests and beliefs expounded in society also have ramifications for the association level of action. As with changes in the market and the bureaucracy, changes in society can undermine the efficacy of the collective level of political action or merely render a type of formation other than interest groups more efficacious at achieving political representation.

In their study of Australian business associations, Bell and Warhurst concluded that a ‘division of labour’ existed between those tasks handled by associations and by firms. ‘Both individual and collective forms of business representation appear to operate in tandem and on a complementary basis; the exact division of labour being dependant on
Chapter Four  Understanding Interest Groups Beyond ‘Success’

the level of generality of the issue.’ (Bell and Warhurst 1993, 217). This reinforces that whilst on the vertical plane there are four distinct levels of activity, they are also functionally interdependent. As markets (the environment of firms) society (the environment of individuals) and polity (the environment of associations) vary, so, too, will the mix of levels utilised to address concerns.

Horizontal Plane: Linkages

Whilst interest groups have tended to be examined in isolation, a growing literature has considered the relationship between interest groups and a range of institutionalised and non-institutionalised collective political formations. These formations include parties, interest groups, social movements, protest groups and local voluntary associations. The other obvious mode of representation is direct participation between citizen and state. One, of course, must also recognise that citizens can choose not to participate at all.

Some have focussed on the competition between interest groups (Meyer and Imig 1993, 258) proposing a ‘sectoral analysis’ be adopted. In this formulation, all organised groups considered to have broadly similar policy concerns are treated as composing an interest-group sector\(^9\). Within a sector, groups both compete for resources (including government status, membership and finances) and form alliances. A growing literature has pursued the relationship between protest groups and social movements or interest groups (See Kitshcelt 1985, Meyer and Imig 1993).

The literature also suggests competition may exist between formations rather than within interest-group sectors. It has often been noted that one of the functions of interest groups is to filter particular grievances from the political process (Offe, 1972). These surplus grievances, some argue, have been taken up by non-institutionalised politics in the form of new social movements (Steinmetz 1994, 195). Others see a broad disenchantment with political institutions which for many political scientists has refocused attention on civil society as the space for the conduct of a ‘new politics’ (Offe 1985 & 1996; Haberman

\(^9\)This would hold true for public interest groups, where a constituency cannot be defined, however in this thesis farmers are the constituency, and therefore the sector is best defined not by goals but by the vocational status of the constituency.
1987; Cohen and Arato 1992). Whilst the solution to this malaise often involves a devolution of politics back to civil society (for example, Cohen and Arato 1992), others advocate an enhancement of popular control via direct democracy or even ‘re-inventing community’ (Sullivan 1995).

However, for some the disillusionment is particular to the party system with suggestions that parties are being increasingly challenged by single-issue movements, interest groups and minor parties (See Lawson and Merkl 1988). In this context some have advocated that interest groups have an important role to play in governing the modern capitalist state (Cohen and Rogers 1992; Marsh 1995; Hirst 1994 & 1996)\(^{10}\). Yet, just as parties may decline, interest groups may also challenge other formations. As Streeck and Schmitter (1985, 127) observe, ‘electoral competition may bring to power parties representing “true citizen interests” the effect of which will be to deprive interest groups of their constituent base.’

The continuity between non-institutionalised and institutionalised political organisations is made on the premise that interest groups compete with other institutionalised and non-institutionalised political organisations for the participation of a given constituency with given sets of interests. Consequently, when activists cannot achieve change through institutionalised means and where access to institutions of political control is limited or denied, they may pursue non-institutional action through formations such as social movements (Offe 1985; Meyer and Imig 1993). In general, continuity and competition between these formations is a consequence of the propensity for citizens to find a formation that will facilitate the expression of the demands they wish to voice.

The manner in which citizens negotiate the political landscape, choosing between formations on the basis of which will assist in voicing rather than filtering out their demands, has prompted some to find a broader concept than formation. The concept of linkage has proven useful. Key (1964) sets out the range of ‘institutions of democracy’

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\(^{10}\) A small literature has developed which can be referred to ‘associationalism’. See Politics and Society vol.20, no.4, 1992, which is dedicated to a discussion of ‘Secondary Associations’.
that act in a linkage role between represented and representatives — political parties, representative bodies (consultative councils etc), electoral procedures, non-party associations and groups, and other less formal linkages (Key 1964, 11). Whilst Key understands linkages to be organisations themselves, Lawson (1988, 16-17) argues that linkages (participatory, electoral, clientelistic or directive) are generated by organisations. Lawson (1988) argues that dissatisfaction with the major parties really represents the failure of a key linkage between citizen and state. When this linkage, required by a section of the citizenry, is not provided citizens seek new formations that can recreate the linkage. This is an important point because it implies there is room for a particular formation that is being deserted to undertake reform in such a manner as to recreate the necessary linkage. That is, a formation can, within limits, modify the linkage it provides such that it maintains support.

It is apparent that any analysis of interest-group activity should be made in the context of other formations that may also lay claim to representing the same set of interests or the same constituency (they may not be the same). This approach provides significant scope to detect any transitions between formations. Further, it encourages analyses of interest groups to consider the manner in which the group differentiates itself from other formations that may also be competing for dominance in representing a constituency and/or a set of attached interests.

Importantly, it must be recognised that formations differ in their source of power or authority, modes of organising and in the stimulus of their formation. For instance, social movements utilise symbols that resonate with broader society (inclusive identities), whilst interest groups generally utilise symbols that partition off one set of citizens from the other (particularist or exclusive identities). Social movements derive their power from the intensity of member concern as opposed to interest groups that gather power from member numbers, financial resources or the economic status of the social group that makes up its constituency.
Chapter Four  Understanding Interest Groups Beyond ‘Success’

In terms of creating a new framework, the horizontal plane discourages two assumptions implicit in the ‘success’ framework. Firstly, it challenges the assumption that the existence of a unitary group to represent a social category indicates interests of that category are relatively homogenous (homogenous enough not to require an additional interest group)\(^{11}\). This is achieved by recognising the full range of formations available to citizens. Secondly, this plane discourages the conclusions that the absence of opposing interest groups signifies that the constituency has homogeneous interests and that they are satisfied with existing policies. Given that interest-group politics is only amenable to views expressed in a particular manner (Offe 1972), if issues are as much about social or value heterogeneity as economic inequality then other formations may be more appropriate for expressing them (McVeigh 1995). Consequently, one cannot assume that action to restore economic equality will be limited to interest-group activity alone. Therefore, one cannot assume that the contours of underlying interests in society will be registered on the map of interest-group politics.

The Fourth Interest-Group Imperative

The horizontal plane is the most visible as each avenue generally corresponds to some sort of tangible organisational vehicle. Consequently, it is this plane that is most often the subject of political analysis and which, in the context of farmers, was described in Chapter Two. The dynamic nature of the political landscape illustrates the degree of competitive pressures amongst interest groups, and between interest groups and other formations. These pressures also require managing. Hence, the vertical and horizontal planes imply a fourth and final operational imperative for interest-group leaders; maintaining dominance as a representative vehicle along the horizontal plane and managing the ‘division of labour’ along the vertical plane\(^{12}\).

Generally, this is achieved through a change in tactics. For example, an interest group may break off corporatist-type arrangements and utilise the threat of members’ direct

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\(^{11}\) As a consequence of this logic, Connors (1996) for instance can imply that the formation of the NFF family signifies the completion of a process of the homogenisation of Australian farmers’ interests.

\(^{12}\) Kavanagh (1970) argues that defending the group’s hegemony as representative of a constituency is one of the central tasks of an interest group.
action as political leverage. This may be in response to their diminishing electoral and economic power which threatens their status with government (and hence influence), or that members are increasingly sabotaging ‘bargained consensus’ by participating in militant activity and suggesting formation of non-institutionalised protest groups to oppose existing interest groups (threats to survival). It may involve, however, less radical measures such as redefining group goals, a situation that may eventuate where the environment has changed such that the initial reason for a group existing no longer prevails. In severe cases it may have to discredit or destroy a competitor. Where groups do not succeed in destroying one another ‘... an accommodation takes place and jurisdictional boundaries are agreed upon, so that as a result the condition of monopoly is restored.’ (McConnell 1966, 124).

It is important to note that in many instances the attainment of imperative four is merely an adjunct to achieving imperative three. That is, the tension between influence and support (imperative three) is often the factor that would cause an interest group to be convinced that its dominance is being threatened. As such, it would prompt the group to adopt action to refine and reform its approach (imperative four). Similarly, action to ameliorate imperative three would in most circumstances be likely to ameliorate imperative four.

4.5 Conclusion: Implications for Analysis of Australian Farm Interest Groups

Building on the suggestion that interest groups have an internal and external dimension a new framework has been developed to examine their behaviour. Importantly, the new framework addresses the ‘leaps of faith’ (Chapter Three, Section 3.2) implicit in the ‘success’ framework. By conceptualising group behaviour along the lines of the four

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13This notion of redefining group goals to prolong organisational life has a number of antecedents. Clark and Wilson (1961, 157) use the notion of intended displacement of goals as a way of describing the phenomenon of a group formally redefining purpose in order to prolong its life. Barnes (1987, 167) takes a different approach. She describes the way groups use ideological innovation to extend group life. If a group’s strategy fails over a period of time it may invoke new explanations of crisis such that past group actions are recast as beneficial. The argument is that redefining group goals does not necessarily imply redefining formal goals but may imply a redefinition at the ideological level.
imperatives one can entertain a whole range of possible interpretations of group activity. Rather than all activities being interpreted as somehow related to serious attempts at influencing policy, analysts can now view them as related to how interest-group leaders elicit influence and support, and deliver compliance and authentic representation, such that autonomy and survival are secured.

The possibility, however remote one deems it to be, that interest groups could manage to reduce the contingent relationship between influence and member support has significant implications for the analysis of interest groups. If this were possible, as is indicated in the new framework, conclusions regarding interest-group ‘success’ — attempted by most researchers of Australian farm interest groups reviewed in this thesis — would no longer measure the degree to which farm interest groups have managed to authentically articulate and aggregate\textsuperscript{14} their members’ demands. Rather, it would measure the success of a group’s professional secretariat in substituting their expert definitions of farmers’ interests for that of the farmers themselves. This underscores the limitations of analysing interest groups solely from the external dimension (Davis and Wurth 1993).

Additionally, examining the ‘success’ of farm interest groups in isolation addresses the issue of representation very narrowly. Such an approach equates attempts at influence and the voicing of demands by interest group leaders as representation, which does not allow for the authenticity of this activity to be examined. The new framework illustrates that voicing demands is undertaken in a broader context of the relationship between a representative and the represented. It is this relationship which sets the parameters for what is authentic representation.

This framework is useful in highlighting just those issues that have been identified as important in the case of the NFF family of organisations — questions such as how crucial is member support to NFF success? Does the NFF family’s formation reflect an increased interest homogeneity amongst farmers? and How has the NFF family remained

\textsuperscript{14}Scott (1980, 225) amongst others refers to interest groups as undertaking functions of demand articulation and aggregation.
‘successful’ despite the increasingly hostile political environment? In terms of the new framework these questions can be framed as follows. How have the NFF family secured ‘influence’ (as evidenced by the paradigm change in agricultural policy) despite failure to secure ‘support’ (as evidenced by dissatisfied members)? How is it that the NFF family’s success is impervious to the reduction in support from its constituency? How does it secure survival imperatives in the context of reducing support? What measures are taken to maintain complementarity between the pursuit of influence and the requirement for support? How does it deliver representation and compliance?
Second Intermediate Reflection

Complementarity as the Analytical Lens

Chapter Three has examined in some detail the approach adopted by Australian researchers to evaluate the activities of farm interest groups in Australia. It was found that commentators and researchers have largely adopted pluralist-inspired assumptions about group behaviour. This has not been a conscious approach, but rather a default to which analysts have reverted in order to explain the behaviour of interest groups in public policy debates. The absence of a sustained and theoretical literature on interest-group behaviour in Australia has led to these assumptions enduring largely unchallenged.

Chapter Four has built on these conclusions to create a lens through which to view interest-group behaviour. The new lens asks the interest-group researcher to place the notion of complementarity at the centre of their analysis. Rather than a preoccupation with success, read influence, this new lens promotes researchers to see this as one imperative amongst four. The primary task ascribed to interest-group leaders should be to create complementarity between these imperatives rather than solely achieve influence.

Complementarity brings with it an associated set of implications for the orthodox view of interest groups. Foremost, it introduces a sense of duality into the actions of interest groups. Where once before a policy stance was viewed in terms of the leadership seeking to gain influence on a particular point of public policy, one must also consider whether it has not been a symbolic act to gain member support. The symbolic nature of the pronouncements of interest-group leaders has long been suspected. However, this new framework allows for the suspicion to be more formally integrated into an overall analysis.

Secondly, the analyst is encouraged to take a closer look at the way the prevailing political environment encourages groups to adopt particular patterns of interest representation, and the impact this has on their relationships with members. Again,
Second Intermediate Reflection  Complementarity as the Analytical Lens

corporatist literature, in particular, has touched on this subject. However, it has done so in a one-dimensional manner. That is, those corporatist relationships between group and state necessarily freeze out members who necessarily leave the group. Clearly, the new framework considers the relationship between membership, participation and agreement with group goals, should be investigated independently rather than imputed from only one element. In so doing, one will be better able to evaluate the contribution of interest groups to representing their members, and more broadly, to democracy.

The new analytical framework has addressed many of the theoretical omissions in existing frameworks identified in Chapter Three. In the context of examining the NFF family of interest groups, the new analytical framework should allow for a more critical analysis of the evidence presented on the NFF and NSWFA. Further, it will ensure that evidence not previously included in the description and analysis of past research will now be considered and new explanations of the NFF family's behaviour may arise. The next two chapters will use this lens to examine the reform process undertaken by the NFF family to address the challenges outlined in Chapter One.
Chapter Five

The Logic and Assumptions of ‘Second Wave’ Farm Interest-Group Reform

5.1 Introduction: Defining the Challenges

It was established in Chapters Three and Four that to comprehensively understand the behaviour of an interest group, in this case the NFF family, one needed to place complementarity at the centre of analysis. According to the new framework, the task of achieving complementarity between interest-group imperatives falls to the leaders of such organisations. At the time of the NFF’s formation, commentators did not utilise such a framework and, as such, interpreted the move as a logical organisational step simply reflecting the way farmers’ interests had become united.

However, reviewing the history of the NFF’s formation (presented in Chapter Two) in light of this new framework, provides a different perspective. In the 1970s, changes in the political environment of farm interest groups were eroding their capacity to exercise influence. Leaders became convinced that unless they presented a unified voice and were better resourced their influence would be gradually reduced. The militant mood of the membership created a positive environment for the eventual amalgamation. That is, members were supportive of this move as it acted to channel this militancy in a powerful fashion. This catalysed the series of amalgamations that gave life to the NFF family of organisations, what will be referred to in this thesis as the ‘first wave’ of reform. The amalgamation was a step by leaders to create complementarity between the need for influence and that of support in order to ensure survival.

Through this new analytical lens, the history of organisational changes presented in Chapter Two takes on a new significance. The NFF post-formation is a case in point. In the time since the NFF family’s formation a new set of challenges began to manifest itself. These changes have included the pace of structural adjustment/deregulation, electoral change, bureaucratic/administrative change, economic changes and, more recently, the impact of socio-political movements. In this context, a growing consensus
emerged that national economic policy was the lever by which the farming community could achieve its policy goals. However, this conclusion revealed a new set of limitations on the fledgling NFF family’s success. Whilst its tactics and resources were well suited to exercising influence in general agricultural policy, they had yet to be tested with regard to broader macro economic policy. This led Campbell to conclude that the capacity of farm interest groups ‘... to shape such [general economic] policies is substantially less than in the case of traditional agricultural policy.’ (1985, 223).

Since the mid 1980s, and in a departure from the policy pursued by the previous collection of separate federal commodity organisations, the NFF family’s policy agenda has emphasised macro-economic reform in preference to the reform of specific agricultural policies. To successfully reorientate itself in such a way as to be influential in the general economic policy area, farm interest groups have adopted a different approach to policy-making. Broadly speaking, they have taken on the role of policy-making partner within predominantly corporatist policy networks. Specifically, farm leaders have adopted bargained consensus as a policy development model, participated in interest-group coalitions formed on an issue by issue basis and used economic research as a tool to ‘inform’ specific policy debates. Table thumping, intimidation and threats have been replaced by rational economic argument, researched policy positions and the expectation that all interested parties will have to give ground to reach consensus. As was intimated in Chapter One, this role has assisted a managed change in the paradigm underpinning general agricultural policy (Coleman and Skogstad 1995).

This strategy is reflected in Donald McGauchie’s presidential address to the 1995 NFF Annual Conference:

The task for the NFF then is to demonstrate that our agenda is in the overall national interest as well as the interest of the farm sector. If we adopt a purely sectional approach, we are not going anywhere.

That means we have to construct alliances with other interest groups to widen our base of political support. It also means our proposals must be well researched and able to withstand public scrutiny. (McGauchie, 1995)
Chapter Five  The Logic and Assumptions of 'Second Wave' Reform

The NFF family's change in policy role and strategy was well documented in Chapter One. And as was documented in Chapter Three, researchers and commentators have attributed the NFF family's ongoing 'success' to precisely this strategy. The NFF has recognised that this new approach to pursuing policy has specific repercussions — increased criticism from membership and a decline in SFO membership (see Chapter One, Section 1.7). These ramifications have undone the previous state of complementarity held to together by the 'first wave' reforms. Consequently, it has had to respond to the organisational challenges this strategy has provoked whilst protecting the influence it confers. That is, again leaders have had to create complementarity between the imperatives of influence and support.

In the mid-1990s a flurry of consultancies, reports, strategic plans and reviews were conducted by the NFF family. The NFF produced 'NFF Review: Issues paper' (NFF 1994) and 'NFF Strategic Plan' (NFF 1996b), whilst the NSWFA commissioned 'What are we here for?' (Michels Warren Pty Ltd 1993) and the SAFF produced the 'Strategic Plan 1997-2002' (SAFF 1997b)\(^1\). The intensity of the 'review' activity reflects the level of urgency with which the NFF family has proceeded in its redesigning of the system of farmer interest groups. An urgency catalysed by the accelerating rate of decline in SFO membership numbers and the financial difficulty experienced by some SFOs\(^2\).

The NFF review and various SFO review processes have been focal points in forcing the NFF family leadership to consider the implications this new approach to pursuing policy goals would have on its internal organisation (Section 5.2). This information will be complemented by the results of a survey of all SFOs and CCs that was conducted in early 1995\(^3\) (Section 5.3). Collectively, these sources illustrate the organisations' assumptions

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\(^1\) These represent the most significant documents available to the author.
\(^2\) Some state organisations are seeking to reduce their financial obligations to the umbrella NFF organisation. A number of SFO's have signalled an intention to resign wholly or partially from the NFF, whilst some SFO's have relinquished seats on NFF Councils to save money.
\(^3\) With the cooperation of the NFF Executive Director, Rick Farley, a survey was sent to each CEO of the CC's and SFO's (See Appendix Seven for copy of the survey form, cover letter and report). Only two of the Commodity councils replied so the process was not worth reporting. However, of the ten SFO's, five replied. Fortunately the future of CC's is to a large degree dependant on the support they have from SFO's who supply a bulk of their funding. Therefore, the results of the SFO's are the most significant.
regarding the supportiveness of its environment, the needs of its members, the challenges it faces as an organisation and the appropriate ways to address these issues. Most importantly, these reviews signify attempts at creating complementarity. If the amalgamations of the late 1970s and early 1980s are termed ‘first wave’ reforms then this response will constitute what can be referred to as the ‘second wave’ reforms.

As expressed in the reviews and surveys, the NFF family has had a consistent approach to generating complementarity. However, the assumptions underlying these proposals are contradictory. It is the SFOs that ultimately have to implement any reforms to achieve complementarity, as they are the only organisations to have direct members. Therefore, Section 5.4 and 5.5 will investigate the NSWFA’s report into membership loss in order to detail how the ‘second wave’ reforms have been implemented. This will indicate how these contradictions were resolved in practice. Section 5.6 reviews the ‘second wave’ of reforms and questions to what extent they have been successful, arguing that the contradiction between rational choice and pluralist-inspired responses has not been adequately resolved. It will be argued that the ‘second wave’ reforms, as defined by the NFF and implemented by the NSWFA, do not address the problem of member disillusionment with the NFF family’s policies. As such, they do not explain how member support will be limited to a willingness to pay. The outstanding questions about the implementation of ‘second wave’ reforms will be enunciated such that they can be addressed in Chapter Six.

5.2 Formulating the NFF Family’s Response: The NFF Review Process

In order to canvass responses to challenges it faced, the NFF commenced a Review Process in 1994. In February of that year, the NFF’s Executive Committee resolved:

That NFF instigate a review of the NFF which is all encompassing and includes a review of the structure, administration, funding, communication and the constitution. (NFF 1994)

A Task Force was established with a wide-ranging terms-of-reference. The Task Force was to examine the division of responsibility between the NFF, Commodity Councils and State Farm Organisations, the possibilities for obtaining greater efficiencies in dealing with policy issues, communication between organisations and the long-term funding
base. The review process produced two documents available to the author, an ‘Issues Paper’ (NFF 1994) and a Strategic Plan (NFF 1996b). The ‘Issues Paper’ (NFF 1994), in particular, indicates the NFF’s view of its environment, the tactics it has adopted and the implications this has for its organisation.

**Implications of Influence Strategy**

According to the NFF, its environment was increasingly demanding. The shift in power from the States to the Federal Government and the increase in the number of issues pursued through Ministerial Councils (Federal and State Ministers), meant that Government and member organisations were requesting its involvement in more issues, a trend the NFF says will continue (NFF 1994, 4). In addition, the NFF saw itself under increasing competition for the attention of government. According to the report the:

NFF effectively is in competition with all other interest groups for the time and attention of government. For example, over 50 interest groups presented pre-budget submissions this year. (NFF 1994, 9).

The Review reaffirms the strategy the NFF have adopted in order to maintain their influence. According to the NFF, ‘The philosophy of successive Councils [NFF] has been to create a competitive economic environment within which industries and individuals prosper according to their efficiency and expertise.’ (NFF 1994, 3). This is an approach that complements the pursuance of broad macro-economic reform.

Yet, the NFF acknowledge that the new strategy of pursuing the ‘big dollar issues’, such as economic settings, industrial reform, trade policy, transport and farm input costs has had some significant implications. In the first instance, the NFF acknowledge that there is an increasing distance between the grassroots and the leadership; one that has to be overcome by better communication. Given the complexity of these issues they admit that the majority of farmers do not understand them well. Subsequently, ‘... the direct benefits to individual farmers from such issues are difficult to quantify and communicate.’ (NFF 1994, 4). Further, given that the NFF has no direct members, their role is not well understood by farmers and even some staff of member bodies (NFF 1994, 3).
Chapter Five

The Logic and Assumptions of 'Second Wave' Reform

The NFF’s approach to policy change also has direct implications for the role of membership in policy development. The new policy approach requires office bearers to contribute increased levels of time and money. The NFF acknowledges that the time and financial demands on leaders of farm organisations means that older and wealthier farmers are more likely to be involved. Consequently, ‘Farm organisations may not always be entirely representative. Women in particular are under-represented.’ (NFF 1994, 11). Additionally, the broadening range of issues in which organisations are involved requires office bearers who are more skilled and experienced in a range of non-agricultural policy areas. Therefore, ‘Unless elected representatives have a wide range of skills and experience, there is likely to be a heavy reliance on staff for policy development. That situation has potential danger.’ (NFF 1994, 11). To ameliorate this situation the use of ‘special purpose members’ is advocated. This would allow skilled business people, who would not otherwise put themselves through the electoral process of farm organisations, to take on an active and influential role. Measures such as the education and training of farmer representatives and the Australian Rural Leadership Program are also advanced as a means to broaden and diversify the pool of potential leaders (NFF 1994, 12).

The final implication of this policy role was an increased demand for financial resources. The broad range of issues upon which the NFF was asked and expected to have input was placing further pressure on SFOs to fund the national bodies (NFF 1994, 13). The expansion of the issues that require input to include the environment, food safety, chemical use, and consumer issues, has placed increasing demands on the resources of farm interest groups. They must spread existing resources over a broader number of issues in addition to hiring staff away from core commodity areas. The professional staff necessary to conduct a credible research-based approach to advocacy is expensive to acquire and retain.

Despite the admission that its present strategy of influence a) threatens membership involvement, b) does not enhance the representation of women and c) leads to a lack of understanding about the nature of policy issues, the report does not indicate that a
Chapter Five  The Logic and Assumptions of 'Second Wave' Reform

revision of these strategies is necessary. Indeed, the report does not address any of these implications. Instead, the review identifies the lack of resources as the central limiting factor in the NFF family’s future success. The response to the lack of resources has been distilled down to two options.

NFF must either;
▪ reduce the number of issues in which it is involved, (this would require considerable discipline by member bodies, NFF’s Council and Executive Committee), or
▪ increase its budget (NFF 1994, 13).

In adopting this approach the NFF seems to be suggesting that the only repercussion of its political strategy that has implications for its ongoing influence is a lack of resources. This does not mean that the NFF views as unimportant the problems of the declining scope for member involvement in policy-making and the increasing communications gap between leaders and members. Rather, it reflects the assumption that these are in some way the result of a lack of resources and, as such, can be remedied by the application of more resources⁴.

The Response: Increasing the Budget

Given the NFF’s reluctance to reduce the number of issues over which it has coverage, the favoured option is increasing the budget. The report states:

The NFF can increase its budget by:
▪ increasing levies on member bodies, for which State farm bodies ultimately will pay;
▪ increasing membership — new industries, better organisation of horticulture, associate members;
▪ increasing non-levy income, i.e. greater involvement in commercial activities, utilising the bulk purchasing power of farmers throughout Australia;
▪ seeking project funds from government and R&D corporations. (NFF 1994, 13).

The first strategy involves SFOs contributing more money. This may be achieved by:
▪ point of sale levy collection on an “opt out” basis;
▪ more effective commercial services;
▪ greater coverage of associate members. (NFF 1994, 13).

The levy collection system is already operating in Tasmania. Producers are levied a percentage of the price received for their produce at point of sale, unless they specify they

⁴ The evidence from those SFO’s, such as the NSWFA, who have adequate funds suggests the NFF’s confidence that extra resources will alleviate these problems of representation is ill founded.
do not wish to contribute to the TFGA (NFF 1994, 10). The other two approaches are already being pursued to varying degree by SFOs.

The second strategy for increasing funding involves the NFF expanding its membership base. The ‘associate’ category has allowed for some new industries to join. The horticulture industry is identified as worth pursuing despite its currently fragmented nature (NFF 1994, 11). If it could be organised and convinced to take up NFF membership, considerable resources would accrue to the NFF family. The governance issues that would emerge from broadening the membership base are not discussed, which is a significant oversight given the attention the report draws to the current problems of communicating with existing members.

The third strategy of pursuing commercial activities has generally attracted little support. This is because of concerns that enhanced economic autonomy may make the NFF less responsive to its member organisations, detract from core policy advocacy work and reduce the existing commercial opportunities of state organisations (NFF 1994, 9). As is noted in the report, the first two objections do not seem to apply to state organisations who have pursued commercial activities with vigour over recent years in order to enhance their income (NFF 1994, 9).

The final suggestion, to pursue government funding, has been rejected in the past. This is due to its potential to reduce the independence of the NFF, increase administration costs, distract the NFF from policy advocacy and increase parliamentary scrutiny over its affairs (NFF 1994, 10). The funds from R&D corporations may present fewer problems given that CCs are involved in selecting the board members and that their funds are producer levies.

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5This is interesting given the more recent comments by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Primary Industries and Energy, Senator David Brownhill who called on all sectors of the Horticultural Industry to consider the benefits of a united horticultural body. (The Land 1997b, 4). A similar call has been made to the Wine industry (The Land 1997d, 24). It would appear that to have an organised and orderly representative system is in both their interests. One in a financial sense and the other in a policy sense.
Chapter Five The Logic and Assumptions of 'Second Wave' Reform

Of the measures considered, the NFF concludes that increasing the membership of SFOs is the most promising way to boost NFF resources. An indication that SFOs concurred with this decision came when the NSWFA President noted that:

The present structure of the NFF and its constituent commodity councils has served us well since its inception but the financial drought it is facing because of the inability of the States to find the necessary funds will force structural changes. (Crawford 1995, 5)

Assumptions about Members: Why members join?

The review document makes two things clear. Firstly, the NFF intends continuing the present policy agenda and associated tactics despite conceding that it has contributed to a situation where members often don't understand the nature of the issues being pursued on their behalf and cannot quantify the direct benefits accruing to them from the NFF's activities. Secondly, the report maintains that it must increase the resources available to it and that this must be achieved primarily through increasing the membership of SFOs.

Given that the membership of SFOs such as the NSWFA are in decline, when the NFF indicates that it wishes to increase SFO membership what it really means is reversing the loss of membership. Consequently, the report turns to what measures the NFF and SFOs can employ to realise a membership reversal. The task in relation to complementarity is to make the way support is gained consistent with the way influence is currently achieved. The measures suggested by the NFF reflect what it believes is the reason why farmers refuse to join the SFOs. Two different diagnoses are implicit in the report. These can be referred to as the 'communications gap' and 'free-riding' diagnosis.

The NFF initially attributes the cause of membership decline to a 'communications gap' between members and itself. Its initial response is to close the gap through a renewed effort at communicating with members. In formulating this response the NFF clearly implies that if members were to become aware of their activities, they would find them consistent with their own views and, hence, would join their relevant SFO. The NFF clearly assumes, in line with pluralist assumptions of member behaviour (see Chapter Three), that a high degree of consistency is likely because all farmers are part of a discrete group with a shared world view and value system.
Chapter Five  The Logic and Assumptions of 'Second Wave' Reform

Under the first diagnosis, the report’s two conclusions would seem to be in conflict with one another. The conflict arises because in order to gain members the NFF must make them more aware of the NFF’s activities. Yet, as the report admits, the policy role it fills and the influence strategy it employs inhibits the communication necessary to create such awareness. Given the influence strategy is not to be changed, it remains to be demonstrated how such awareness can be generated.

Later in the review document the problem of membership levels is restated as one of ‘free-riding’. The document asserts that ‘Most State farm organisations suffer from “free-riders” who derive benefits from the policy advocacy of farm organisations, but who are not members.’ (NFF 1994, 9). The term ‘free-riding’, drawn from rational-choice theory (see Chapter Three, Section 3.3), invokes a number of different assumptions. Firstly, it implies that members accurately perceive the NFF’s activities as advantaging the entire constituency (a necessary condition for group objectives to qualify as ‘public goods’ and for non-membership to be defined as free-riding). Secondly, it assumes that farmers are principally self-interested utility maximisers who refuse to join because they calculate the benefits of non-membership to be greater than that of membership.

The set of rational-choice assumptions, implicit in the ‘free-rider’ diagnosis, does not imbibe the same conflict between the report’s two conclusions. This is because ‘free-riding’ suggests that members are fully aware of the NFF’s activities but choose not to join because the benefits of those activities accrue to them independent of their membership status. The free-riding diagnosis assumes that a problem of awareness does not exist at all, which means that the NFF does not need to change its policy tactics such that it can turn around membership decline.

Clearly, a degree of ambiguity exists in the assumptions underlying the NFF’s diagnosis of the problem of membership decline. On one hand they claim that the communications gap between it and its members is the central issue. Yet it cannot explain how such a problem can be overcome without altering its external influence activities. On the other
hand it suggests that farmers are unwilling to become members as they receive the value of the NFF’s activities regardless. This implies that farmers fully understand the value of the NFF’s activities. These positions contradict one another over whether farmers who refuse to join the NFF do or do not see the value of the NFF’s activities. Consequently, each of these explanations — ‘communications gap’ and ‘free-rider’ — suggest that the NFF address the issue of gaining members in a different manner.

Clarifying the assumptions

For the NFF, increasing its resources hinges on reversing the decline in the membership of SFOs. However, the manner by which this is to be achieved is unclear. Finding clarity requires identifying the assumptions made about the motives that underlie the decision of their members not to join. The report offers two diagnoses, each of which employs a different set of assumptions. One has its roots in pluralist thought and the other in rational choice. Having identified these assumptions it is possible to determine the range of available responses to membership loss that flow from them.

The pluralist approach makes a link between an individual joining an interest group and the individual’s awareness and agreement with the group’s role and policies. Consequently, there are two explanations for the disillusionment and decline of members. The first is that disillusioned or non members are in agreement with the goals of the group but are just unaware that those goals are actually being pursued. The second is that members are aware of the goals but just do not agree with them.

In the first instance it is assumed that the interests of disillusioned or non-members are already consistent with those of the interest group. That is, a collective interest is an input into the group. Given such an assumption, the best response by the NFF would be a more sophisticated communications strategy. The modest aim of the strategy would be to establish an awareness of this consistency amongst members. This implies that the communications gap brought about by the influence tactics employed by the NFF family can be overcome without changing its political strategy.
The alternative explanation consistent with pluralist assumptions is that membership decline is an indication that members recognise the aims of the organisation but simply do not agree with them. If this were the case the only satisfactory response would be to create a more discursive form of communication with members. This form of communication would modify the goals of the organisation in a manner consistent with that of its members’ wishes. In addition to changing the policy platform of the NFF, such a form of communication would likely require significant reform to its internal policy development structure. This implies that only a change in strategy would allow the necessary communication to be conducted in order to bridge the gap.

The second set of assumptions draws on rational choice. As was described in Chapter three, rational choice makes a connection between the decision to join and the provision of exclusive goods to members. It argues that people will become members of an interest group when a specific advantage accrues to individual members from which non-members are excluded. Whilst this appears to be in opposition to pluralism, the initial pluralist concern as to whether the members agree or are aware of the organisations’ goals is still a relevant variable. As was intimated by Kimber (1993) in Chapter Three, it is important that members are aware and agree with group goals because ‘free-riding’ depends on the goods produced by the group being demonstrable public goods. The only way that ‘free-riding’ can be undertaken without emphasising agreement or awareness is when the selective incentives cover the costs of membership. Therefore, two basic models exist. If the selective good does not fully compensate members for the cost of membership then awareness and agreement with group goals would be a necessary contributing factor to an individual’s decision to join. However, if the selective incentives exceeded the cost of membership then awareness and agreement of group goals would become peripheral to the decision to join.

The ‘free-riding’ diagnosis suggests that SFOs should respond by establishing some form of ‘selective incentive’ in order to coax those who are not contributing to public goods to do so. However, the role incentives play in a member’s decision to join is contingent on the degree to which the NFF believes it can maintain agreement and awareness. With this
in mind two models emerge. Firstly, SFOs could provide selective incentives which contribute to the decision to join but do not exceed the cost of membership. These selective incentives must be exclusive, that is, not freely available to non-members. In this case the group must maintain a high degree of awareness and agreement, which in turn means they may have to change their approach to exercising policy influence. Secondly, it could provide selective incentives that exceed the cost of membership and largely obviate the need for high degrees of awareness and agreement. These selective incentives do not have to be exclusive in the sense that they are not also available from other sources outside the organisation. They must, however, be relevant, provided on a ‘cost-recovery’ basis, yet ensure that the cost of membership is recouped.

Based on the NFF’s own analysis, one can identify four alternative sets of assumptions that both seek to explain why members leave an interest group and suggest a range of responses an interest group could adopt to ameliorate the situation. Firstly, in option one, one can assume that declining membership is indicative of a lack of awareness, albeit on the understanding that an underlying basis of agreement exists between the goals of the group and membership. Secondly, in option two, declining membership can indicate that members recognise the aims of the organisation but simply do not agree with them. Thirdly, in option three, it can indicate that there exists a degree of awareness and agreement but ‘exclusive’ selective benefits accruing to members who join, as opposed to those who do not, are absent. Fourthly, in option four, regardless of the level of awareness or agreement, it can indicate the absence of selective benefits that accrue to members and cover the monetary cost of membership (subscription costs).

The NFF’s insistence that its current mode of policy advocacy is essential to achieving success means that any option that requires such a change can be ruled out. Given that the NFF’s policy strategy is considered to have contributed to a lack of awareness, yet is to remain unchanged, the NFF family must institute a reform process that obviates the need to establish communications aimed at reaching ‘agreement’. Therefore, option two must be ruled out. However, the three other options do not require modifying the political tactics of the group. Consequently, they disentangle the contingent relationship between
the NFF’s internal relationship with members and their external strategy of influence. How then do the three remaining options break this link?

If, as assumed under **option one**, the views of NFF members are consistent with those expressed by its leaders, then providing information on Federation policy positions and the rationale behind them may in fact close the communications gap and, hence, raise membership numbers. In this case, the NFF would be deploying communications strategies in a manner aimed at creating the conditions for the pluralist assumptions to be realised. Similarly, as under **option three**, if the level of agreement between members and the NFF is assumed to be relatively good, leadership may pursue measures aimed at both creating an awareness and establishing incentives exclusive to individual members. This is aimed at establishing the conditions for rational-choice assumptions to be realised. Alternatively, as under **option four**, regardless of the levels of awareness and agreement between members and the NFF, leadership may pursue measures aimed at providing individual members with selective incentives that cover the cost of subscription. The NFF, therefore, has three choices: to address the awareness levels amongst members of the benefits of its lobbying activities, to address the issue of creating exclusive benefits to members whilst also establishing awareness or, finally, to create selective benefits that fully return the subscription cost to members.

The NFF’s 1996 Strategic Plan provides an indication as to which option it believes will address the problem of attracting members to farm organisations. The first section of the report lists ‘Trends and Critical Issues for NFF’. The list includes, ‘Increasing individualism, resulting in declining membership of farm organisation.’ (NFF 1996b, 6). This comment suggests that the NFF locate the fall in membership within a broader societal change towards ‘individualism’. This lends weight to the diagnosis that membership loss is a consequence of ‘free-riding’. Importantly, it further diminishes the value of appealing to collective ‘agreement’ over policy goals as a vehicle for maintaining and increasing membership. On this basis, one can conclude that **option four** is the one most likely to be consistent with the NFF’s diagnosis of the problem of falling membership.
The NFF has charted a course for expanding its financial base rather than modifying its policy role. The plan to address the issue of financial security rests on the principle of increasing income. The vast burden of responsibility for increasing income must rest with SFOs. In this regard, the principal measure available to SFOs is to increase their membership numbers, with the resulting increase in income transferred upwards to the NFF through higher affiliation fees. Consequently, it is at the SFO level that the ambiguity between the various diagnosis of the problem of membership will be resolved. The SFOs must determine whether membership decline is best addressed through increasing either, ‘awareness’ or ‘agreement’ or ‘awareness and exclusive selective benefits’ or ‘selective incentives returning subscription costs’. As is evident, a fair degree of overlap exists between the four options. Therefore, determining which option/s has been adopted can only be determined after significant analysis of SFO activities.

5.3 The SFO’s Response: Enacting the Plan

The NFF Issue Paper clearly establishes that any significant increase in resources would have to come from an increase in the incomes of SFOs. For the plan, as outlined by the NFF, to be adopted by SFOs, it is crucial that they adopt a similar view of the challenges they face and are convinced of the utility of the NFF plan. With respect to consistency over the challenges they face, a survey of SFOs was conducted in 1995. It asked SFOs what they considered to be their biggest challenges over the next five years, how they characterised their relationship with their members and what changes they would be making to respond. The responses demonstrate a high degree of consistency with the NFF’s position.

Respondents considered the major challenges for farm interest groups during the next five years to be dealing with environmental issues, the need to raise the general awareness of rural people regarding marketing of their produce and to enhance farmers business skills. Of concern to some was the need to secure micro-economic reform for their membership. Maintaining the influence organisations had on the government was seen by over half the respondents as a challenge. Challenges were said to include
Chapter Five

The Logic and Assumptions of ‘Second Wave’ Reform

‘maintaining effective representation and influence’ and ‘maintaining relevance, effectiveness and cohesion’.

There were some admissions that convincing membership of the worth of their organisation was difficult. Three of the five organisations stated that they had a very good relationship with membership and that any tensions that did arise were often along commodity lines. Consistent with the NFF’s position, the other two stated that their membership found it hard to identify progress by the organisation. One SFO commented: ‘It often appears to be a long way from members to the executive and further still to the NFF, however, simplified communication channels and a better staff-member relationship is coming.’ Another commented: ‘Members are concerned that organisation is not achieving enough “wins” in government policy.’

In response to these issues and the changes in the policy process, three organisations mentioned reviews that had taken place and foreshadowed the likely changes that would result. Consistent with the NFF report, these changes include enhanced communication, opening up membership to other minor commodity groups and rationalising the organisational structure.

Given the consistency between the NFF and SFOs it is important to more fully explore how the SFOs have responded. The considered response has been encapsulated more fully in the review process of the NSWFA.

5.4 Formulating a Response: NSWFA review

The NSWFA, as in the past with amalgamation, pre-empted national moves towards an organisational review process. In 1993 it commissioned a consultancy firm to ‘... recommend a plan of action which, firstly, identifies the causes of the present decline in the Association membership numbers, and, secondly, will result in a permanent turnaround in those membership numbers.’ (Michels Warren Pty Ltd 1993, 1). The emphasis on membership numbers flowed directly from their importance ‘... to the overall credibility, lobbying effectiveness and financial viability of the Association.’
(Michels Warren Pty Ltd 1993, 1). Whilst the report was not penned by Association staff its recommendations are indicative of the logic underpinning the Association’s response.

The report firmly places the problem of membership decline in an historical context. In contrast to the environment of the 1960s, the NSWFA operates in a political environment in which few Australians have direct contact with farmers. The National Party’s constituency has dissolved and extends beyond the farm sector and competes with a range of other locally based groups for members’ time and resources. Agriculture is a less important sector of the economy and lobbying has become more sophisticated. Farmers, too, have changed. They are under more economic stress, are smaller and more diversified and are often involved in part-time off-farm work. (Michels Warren Pty Ltd 1993, Diagram 2).

The report concludes that at present the ‘Association operates in a way appropriate to the conditions of the 1960s, before the amalgamation of the UFWA and the Graziers’ Association.’ (Michels Warren Pty Ltd 1993, 8). This comment does not imply that the Association’s lobbying activities are inconsistent with the demands of the political environment. Rather, that members’ expectations of the Association in the 1960s were consistent with what the Association provided, however, since then, member expectations have changed whilst the Association has not. Consequently, the report focuses on the ‘… need to “position” the Association to meet members’ expectations’ (Michels Warren Pty Ltd 1993, 8). In essence, it argues that the NSWFA has responded to the changes in the policy process by adopting a new strategy of influence, yet it has failed to change the manner in which it communicates and interacts with members.

The report identifies seven key issues that have contributed to the drop in membership numbers and advocates measures to address each one (Michels Warren Pty Ltd 1993, 3-4). Firstly, the report argues that both members and staff are not clear on what the role of the Association is and should be. The traditional view of the Association has been that its focus is lobbying, albeit with an attached set of token member services. However, the problem with lobbying as the ‘product’ is that ‘… a farmer does not have to be a member
Chapter Five  

The Logic and Assumptions of ‘Second Wave’ Reform

to gain the benefits.’ (Michels Warren Pty Ltd 1993, 17). The report argues that the Association has been relying on the ‘tradition and goodwill of each generation joining and supporting the Association because their families have always been members’, or ‘expectations of lobbying performance’ to gain and maintain members. Factors that are all under threat, according to the report (Michels Warren Pty Ltd 1993, 17). It is suggested the Association offer a range of services which only members can access, thereby avoiding a reliance on these increasingly diminishing factors.

Secondly, the report identifies an absence of a service attitude amongst staff and office bearers. As a consequence of focussing on lobbying, staff generally work within their narrow areas of expertise and responsibility rather than develop a thorough understanding of the full range of services provided by the organisation. Consequently, many members become dissatisfied with the responses they receive when approaching staff.

Thirdly, the lobbying process is not well understood by members. The report claims that ‘... it is often difficult for an individual to understand how some lobbying activities have relevance to their family farm.’ (Michels Warren Pty Ltd 1993, 9). Members are not aware of achievements, have unrealistic expectations of what can be achieved and are not clear on what role the Association and other organisations play. The Association is said to overstate its influence on specific policy issues, which leads to members feeling misled. It is recommended that a member-education process should be conducted.

Fourthly, the report found that many existing services were not perceived as relevant or were not fully understood by members. Further, many services offered could either be accessed by non-members or were available from alternative sources at the same price or better by both members and non-members. As such, the report concluded that membership of the Association offered no real value for money. It was, therefore, suggested that the Association commence the marketing of services.

Fifthly, the report argued that a communications gap exists between members, office bearers and staff — a gap that has been worsening over the past 15 years. The report
concludes: ‘Care is required to convey the appropriate messages and use the appropriate forms of communication.’ (Michels Warren Pty Ltd 1993, 4). Members require face-to-face communication and view other forms as secondary. It is recommended that the Association conduct more meetings in the bush, target specific groups of members with information relevant to them and communicate more often with women and young farmers.

Sixthly, the report found that a perception exists that the Association is unrepresentative of its constituency. Further, General Council and Annual Conference were perceived as in need of rationalising, branches were often poorly run with boring meetings, the Association’s ‘style’ reflected a ‘them and us’ attitude between members and head office and some General Councillors were regarded as ineffective. On this basis the report concluded that the Association must address the issue of the representation of farmers. The report suggests this could be achieved through measures such as: giving increased attention to women, youth and intensive industries; altering the conduct of Annual Conference and the election of General Councillors; orienting the content of branch meetings towards local issues; and altering committee structures to allow experts to make a contribution without having to go through the election process.

Finally, the report observes that ‘... the majority of members are not fully aware of all elements of the Association and its services’ (Michels Warren Pty Ltd 1993, 4). Consequently, it advocates that staff and office bearers all take responsibility for actively selling membership. It is suggested that membership be sold ‘... in terms of the value for money provided in comparison to the membership fee’ (Michels Warren Pty Ltd 1993, 47).

As with the NFF’s review document, the NSWFA’s report illustrates a degree of ambiguity with respect to the issue of how to address the problem of membership decline. Concerns about the role of the association, lobbying, communications gap and the

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6The report claims that of the General Councillors ‘...70% are medium to large sized farmers or graziers. This category only represents about 30% of the total membership’ (Michels Warren Pty Ltd 1993, 40).
representation of farmers all draw on the ‘communications gap’ diagnosis. However, the points regarding service attitude, marketing of services and selling membership all draw on the ‘free-rider’ diagnosis. For instance, one part of the report advocates rectifying a communications gap through better efforts at targeted communication using appropriate media. Yet another section suggests that traditional attachments and the anticipation that participation will contribute to policy changes are both losing currency as motivational factors for farmers to join the Association. Consequently, it advocates they be replaced and/or complemented with services to which only members can gain access. Again, as with the NFF, there seems to be some confusion over what has caused the decline in membership. Is the problem of membership decline simply the result of the failure of communications procedures to bridge the increasing distance between leaders and members arising from a change in the policy process? Alternatively, is membership decline brought about by the rise of individualism in the context of weakening traditional attachments between the Association and members?

The NSWFA, unlike the NFF, have to not only define, but implement some strategy to address the decline in membership. Consequently, by tracing their activities it will be evident how these ambiguities have been resolved.

5.5 Reaction to the Report

Reaction to the report captures the inherent tensions between a ‘free-rider’ versus ‘communication gap’ interpretation of membership loss. The President argued that ‘... it was a fact of life that lobbying successes alone were no guarantee of attracting new members, or even of holding existing ones.’ A General Councillor was quoted as arguing ‘... it was on the wrong track in trying to direct the Association to become a service organisation rather than a lobbying force.’ (The Land 1994b, 102). A newspaper editorial argued that the key to arresting decline lay with ‘... convincing farmers that membership of the Association gives them an opportunity to help form policy, to be better informed about developments affecting their industry and to have at their back a strong and well-resourced organisation.’ (The Land 1994a, 12). In response to the Report’s focus on service provision a NSWFA branch secretary was reported as saying ‘... the organisation
already offered sufficient services to its members such as merchandise and financial and industrial relations advice; it now needed to redefine its role while rebuilding its membership base.’ (Dick 1994a, 9).

Amidst the ongoing public debate about why the Association was losing members and what action it should take, the Association started its formal response. The report was well received by the Association. The CEO was reported as saying most of the recommendations would be implemented (Austin 1994). Within months of its release it had precipitated the retirement of the long-standing CEO, John White, and the replacement of five long-serving membership officers (Dick, 1994b). Three management teams, comprising senior office bearers, were constituted to review the recommendations and formulate responses (Dick 1994a).

Initial Response to the Review: A problem of communications?
The initial response of the Association included measures consistent with the ‘communications gap’ diagnosis. The new CEO, Peter Comensoli, had developed a management plan to foster amongst staff the customer-service principles advocated in the review⁷. Within a year the Association adopted a new logo and the slogan ‘NSW Farmers Association for Growth’ (The Land 1994c, 16). It introduced a campaign to inform members about the role and decision-making process of the Association. According to the Membership Marketing Manager, ‘This was necessary to reinforce to members the role of their Association. It allowed greater understanding and ownership plus easier promotion to potential members.’ (Mason 1995, 21). However, the recommendations concerning the election of general councillors and the payment of branch office bearers were not implemented. No fundamental change had occurred to the structure of the Association and no concessions were made to facilitate the participation of women or youth in the ‘normal’ deliberations of the Association.

Reforms that at first appeared to be a response by the Association to the ‘communications gap’ diagnosis amounted to a more targeted promotion of the same organisational

structure that existed prior to the review. The Association did not undertake the reforms to its structure, procedures and political strategy necessary to facilitate the increased participation and ownership of the process by members — all reforms necessary to pursue option two. In line with the report, the NSWFA assumed its strategy and policies were appropriate but that it needed to ‘re-position’ itself with respect to members. It was assumed that members agreed with the NSWFA’s policy thrust and that, as a consequence, enhanced communications were necessary only in order to create an awareness of this agreement amongst members. In this way, the initial response correlated with option one under the ‘communications gap’ diagnosis. Yet, as was noted earlier, creating awareness amongst members of consistency between their own goals and those pursued by the NSWFA is also a pre-condition for option three.

As the initial flurry of activity aimed at responding to the ‘communications gap’ diagnosis subsided, activity consistent with the ‘free-rider’ diagnosis commenced. The membership manager boasted: ‘... commercial concessions has progressed to levels now where we can provide an income-positive result for nearly all members who participate.’ (Mason 1995, 21). This remark is important at two levels. Firstly, it indicates that the NSWFA had adopted the assumption that traditional attachments and the desire to contribute to policy change no longer attract or maintain membership. Secondly, and more importantly, by equating ‘participation’ with paying the subscription fee, the Association had clearly defined the limited extent to which its members were expected to be involved in its activities. What has unfolded over subsequent few years is a range of reforms that are entirely consistent with the ‘free-riding’ diagnosis.

The NSWFA’s Substantive Response: A problem of free riding!

Despite early indications to the contrary, the NSWFA came to interpret the problem of declining membership numbers in accordance with the assumptions implicit in the ‘free-riding’ diagnosis. Consequently, the substantive response made by the NSWFA was aimed at addressing the individualist and utility-maximising nature of current and potential members; conditions assumed under the ‘free-riding diagnosis’. In this context,
the initial response aimed at awareness raising, which appeared to be aimed at communications problems, finished up as a subset of a response aimed at ‘free-riding’.

The NSWFA has adopted a number of interrelated and complementary measures in order to respond to the ‘free-riding’ diagnosis. The strategy involves setting quantitative membership targets, the development of a product which can be marketed, the sophisticated and aggressive marketing of membership, broadening the membership base and the reallocation of significant levels of resources to support the recruitment of members.

Quantitative membership targets have been set by many SFOs. The NSWFA has set itself the target of 18,000 members by the year 2000 (Macaulay 1997, 16). However, there has been no equivalent focus on increasing the qualititative elements of membership such as the degree of participation. Indeed, participation has come to be equated with joining the Association.

The consistent position of the NSWFA is that they cannot sell membership based on lobbying. Therefore, they have proceeded to define a new product to market, a product that is available exclusively to members. This process has come to be encapsulated by the term ‘value-adding’ membership. The NSWFA has always provided buying, financial and industrial relations services. More recently, however, this has expanded to include discounts on interest rates, vehicles, holiday accommodation, fertiliser, phone rates and various other products or services8. In some instances these services are more attuned to reducing the cost of leisure activities rather than those associated with running a farm enterprise. Consistent with the redefinition of participation, the Association has emphasised that the cost of membership subscriptions can be recouped through member benefits. In this sense joining the Association is presented as a cost-neutral decision.

8In interest group parlance these are referred to as ‘member services’. However it is acknowledged that they are financial bonuses accruing to members only, and used as a way to attract members who would not otherwise support the group’s activities.
An aggressive marketing approach is being applied to recruitment. Firstly, specific industries and areas are targeted so as to enhance membership densities (market share) and, consequently, buttress their claim to be the key representative in that area. For instance, recent emphasis has been on developing a critical mass of members in the horticultural and intensive industries. Secondly, communications media, such as farm organisation magazines, are being designed to assist efforts at recruitment. Consistent with the ‘awareness’ raising required under option three, lists of the NSWFA’s achievements, which field officers can point to when convincing members of the organisation’s worth, are often published in prominent places within their magazine. This publication also extensively advertises the various commercial benefits of membership along with a membership form. Finally, marketing principles and techniques are becoming prominent in the recruitment process. For instance, the NSWFA has recently commenced sending out renewal notices and notification of loss of membership on a tighter time frame in order to maximise early renewals. This measure was aimed at freeing up area managers from the task of pursuing renewals much earlier so they could progress on to other tasks.

A related trend is that of broadening membership. This measure has taken two forms — promoting other smaller industries to become affiliates and promoting sections of the constituency to become individual members in their own right. The NSWFA has aggressively pursued affiliations with a range of industries. It has recently taken on the Oyster Industry as a full member and the Dairy Industry as an affiliated member (NSWFA 1997b, PR/039/97). Significantly, there seems to be no hesitancy at expanding the encompassingness of the organisation despite ongoing schisms between and within commodities.

The Association has taken some measures to address the issue of the membership of women and youth. This includes the ‘Youthlink’ scheme and the ‘Rural Leadership Program’. The Association recently convened the ‘Farmers Toward 2020’ forum, funded

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by a grant from the federal ‘FarmBiz’ scheme, as an initiative to develop future leaders (NSWFA 1998a, PR/200/98). Additionally, the Association has offered leadership training workshops for rural women. However, it is important to note that the membership categories created to facilitate the membership of groups in the community who are under represented in membership, such as youth and women, does not include the capacity to vote. Consequently, these initiatives have the effect of maximising the membership of these groups whilst not manifestly increasing their impact on the organisations’ political activities.

An injection of resources is being made into recruiting members. Since 1990, the number of area managers in the field has increased from six to 10. The NSWFA secretariat now employs a dedicated Membership Marketing Manager whose prime role it is to coordinate the recruitment of members. It also employs a Director of Commercial Services and Property who, amongst other things, negotiates commercial deals for membership. Additionally, a Cooperative Manager administers a buying service that provides discounted goods to members. The budget for Membership Recruitment and Field Service is now estimated at four times the 1985 figure of $220,000 (PA Management Consultants 1985)\textsuperscript{10}.

5.6 The ‘Second Wave’ of Reform

The package of reforms implemented by the NSWFA is indicative of a ‘second wave’ of organisational reform entered into by the entire NFF family of organisations. It can be referred to as a ‘second wave’ because the responses are a significant departure from those that preceded them, yet they form a continuing strategy to achieve the same outcome — to create the necessary conditions for complementarity. In contrast to the ‘first wave’ of reforms, which concentrated on organisational level changes through amalgamation, the ‘second wave’ of reforms employed sub-organisational level reforms.

\textsuperscript{10} 10 field staff at a cost of at least $80,000 per year is $800,000 per annum. This is without considering the salary of the Membership Manager or the costs of communicating with members and convening conferences (Based upon Macaulay, A. 1997, pers.comm., 5 August. NSWFA Membership Marketing Manager, Sydney).
Chapter Five  The Logic and Assumptions of 'Second Wave' Reform

The 'second wave' appears to incorporate elements of three different theoretical options. All of which have differing, and often contradictory, sets of assumptions. The NSWFA's initial focus on creating awareness about the goals of the organisation reflected option one. However, the awareness approach ended up being part of attempts to establish the decision to join the Association as economically rational, as per option three. Ultimately, the Association further extended the range of selective incentives it offered in order to ensure the cost of membership could be fully recovered in benefits by most members. The implementation of option four prompted the President, Ian Donges, to boast '... it's now possible for members to recoup far more money in commercial benefits from belonging to the Association than it costs to join.' (NSWFA 1997a, PR/002/97). Similarly, in 1998 he argued that '... those members participating in the Member Services schemes are more than offsetting their Association annual membership subscription.' (NSWFA 1998b, PR/039/98).

Initial figures illustrate that this 'second wave' of re-organisation has reversed the trend of decline in the NSWFA's membership numbers. Regardless of whether these increases have come from full memberships amongst the intensive industries and from the 'additional' member category who do not vote but receive the services, the measures have stemmed the tide. Interestingly, the Association attributes the increase in membership of '11 per cent in three years' to 'member discount services and other inducements to farmers' (The Land 1998c, 53). Whilst prima facie the Association can claim its reform process was a success, and as such it has achieved complementarity, it is unclear to what extent such a turnaround can be attributed to the measures labelled as 'second wave' reforms. The major concern is that the 'second wave' reforms do not establish how leaders have been able to effectively limit member support to that which is financial in nature without addressing the agreement deficit.

With respect to the model of interest-group behaviour developed in Chapter Four, the reforms are a clear example of how leaders shoulder the responsibility of managing a tension between internal and external imperatives and attempt to create complementarity between them. The 'second wave' of reform has been executed by SFOs, such as the
NSWFA, to create complementarity out of the emerging tension between the NFF family’s imperative to achieve influence and its imperative of maintaining member support. In this way the NSWFA have privileged the influence imperative and, therefore, become responsive primarily to its own political environment. Consequently, the relationship between the SFOs and members has become the dependent variable in undertaking reform.

The influence imperative was privileged in the review process through the application of a logic that bracketed off a range of possibilities for reform. As was explained earlier, it was assumed that the decline of traditional attachments inevitably meant that the only remaining point on which to sell Association membership was to offer individual financial inducements. The possibility of re-invigorating these traditional attachments, redefining what the Association expects from members and rebuilding the commitment to the organisation — described under option two — was not entertained. In fact, such possibilities could not be considered because the reforms necessary to pursue such a course of action would place in jeopardy the strategy the NFF family deemed necessary to maximise the imperative of influence. Instead, measures were devised to try and minimise the necessity to bridge the gap between members and leaders on a collective basis, that is, to foster agreement by appealing to an individual’s self-interested desire to utility maximise. For the NSWFA to create complementarity without changing its present policy role it needed to create a relationship between itself and its members that limited members’ support to that of a financial nature.

The evidence of member disillusionment in Chapter One, and the statements regarding ‘individualism’ (NFF 1996b) and declining levels of traditional attachments (Michels Warren Pty Ltd 1993) made in review reports, indicate the absence of a basic agreement between members and leaders. Ultimately, the NSWFA adopted measures that were consistent with its own concerns that the level of underlying agreement necessary to foster membership was not evident. Therefore, their final set of measures reflected option four. This option attempts to make the question about agreement irrelevant by installing self-interested economic gain as the overriding rationale for membership. However, the
'second wave' reforms documented to this point do not explain how this model was able to create complementarity whilst obviating the need to create 'agreement'. For even if members were to join for the economic incentives, what would stop them from becoming enraged with the activities of the Association and mobilising resistance to the Association's official view, hence, undermining its credibility? On a similar tangent, why is it assumed that the initial self-interested reason for membership will not develop into a different form of attachment? The 'second wave' reform measures, whilst appearing to try and install option four as a model for gaining membership support, do not explain how the need to obviate agreement was attained. Specifically, they do not establish how the Association intends on limiting the support of members to paying subscriptions and persuading them not to seek active participation and monitoring of its policy deliberations.

This leads one to conclude that the documented response of the NSWFA in its 'second wave' reforms has omitted important additional measures that assisted it to create complementarity without generating agreement. The framework in Chapter Four argues that leaders need to generate authentic representation in their activities in the external environment and that they exchange this with members for support. As such, the focus will be to look at how the NFF family leadership has generated authentic representation, or projected its generation, and then delivered it to their constituency for support. In the context of the increase in membership levels, the Association must have employed some type of communications strategy to address the issue of agreement. It implies that another set of reforms has been undertaken, but not documented, which can explain how the Association has persuaded its members to limit their expressions of support to that which is financial in nature.

5.7 Conclusion

In response to the challenges presented by the new demands of the political environment, most SFOs, even those organisations that appear financially secure, are pursuing a

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11 The argument that the decision to join is a continual (Dunleavy 1988) or a developmental (Young and Forsyth 1991, 537) process rather than a one off decision suggest this.
strategy similar to that adopted by the NSWFA. It is argued that the approach constitutes a ‘second wave’ of organisational reform amongst Australian farm interest groups. Whilst this wave has gone undetected in the literature, due to its sub-organisational nature, it is as important for political representation as the amalgamation of farm organisations under the NFF in the late 1970s and early 1980s\(^\text{12}\). The ‘second wave’ of reform, in a departure from the ‘first wave’, has focussed on internal changes to individual NFF family units. The claim that, collectively, these changes constitute a ‘second wave’ of reform is supported by the consistency with which organisational reform has been applied across all farm groups (See SAFF 1997a).

The ‘second wave’ of reform has been undertaken precisely because the SFOs wish to remain committed to their current mode of lobbying. The ‘second wave’ reforms are merely about farm interest groups securing the necessary resources from members in order to pursue lobbying more effectively. This highlights once again the inherent limitations of the ‘success’ framework that ascribes a one-dimensional imperative to interest groups. The reviews of the NFF and NSWFA both confirm that reform of both internal and external dimensions are considered together. Consequently, the biggest question to be answered is which imperative dominates reform? This lends further weight to the relevance of the new framework for examining interest-group behaviour developed in Chapter Four.

Indeed, the chapter demonstrates that the NFF family has significant challenges in terms of balancing their commitment to achieving policy influence and the need to maintain the support of their constituency. Commentators, utilising the conventional ‘success’ framework defining the NFF family as successful, have suggested its only challenges exist in its external political environment. However, this chapter illustrates that a broader range of imperatives drives its behaviour. The new framework developed in Chapter Four

\(^{12}\)The consistency is due in no small part to the dominance of a body of theory known as rational choice. I am not suggesting that all CEO’s have been familiarising themselves with the work of Mancur Olson and his successors. There is, however, evidence that a journal known as ‘The Presidents Brief’ has been instrumental in instilling the key assumption of this theory to the leaders of such organisations.
has prompted an analysis that reveals a significant deal of activity within the NFF family has been dedicated to resolving the tension between its activities aimed at being influential and activity aimed at securing the support of its members.

The problem that confronted SFOs was that the central strategy for increasing resources was through increasing membership. However, the increase in membership had to be achieved without altering political strategy which, the NFF itself identified, acted as a disincentive to membership. Consequently, that the ‘second wave’ reforms were able to increase membership without altering political tactics suggests that the NSWFA has been able to separate the contingent relationship between securing the support of its members and successfully influencing policy. That is, it has been able to reduce the tension and create complementarity. However, the inadequacy of rational choice to explain the means by which such a separation is achieved means that the NSWFA must have addressed the problem highlighted in the ‘communication gap’ diagnosis without formally acknowledging it.

With respect to reducing the contingent relationship between influence and support, a number of things are clear. It is clear that the NSWFA believes that all it requires from members to assist it maximise political influence is their financial contributions and their continuing membership. Further, it is clear that they have instigated organisational reforms to generate such support. However, it is still unclear how members will be encouraged to limit their support to these conditions. Therefore, one must be able to account for how it is the NSWFA is able to encourage certain aspects of support whilst simultaneously discouraging others. That is, how can it encourage membership and financial contributions whilst simultaneously discouraging active participation with its attendant demands for responsiveness and accountability? To answer these questions one needs examine the communications strategies employed by the NSWFA. It is here where they must overcome the need to foster ‘agreement’, which would threaten their strategy, and concentrate on awareness raising, which is complementary to their political strategy. This will be explored in the next chapter.
Chapter Five

The Logic and Assumptions of ‘Second Wave’ Farm Interest-Group Reform

5.1 Introduction: Defining the Challenges

It was established in Chapters Three and Four that to comprehensively understand the behaviour of an interest group, in this case the NFF family, one needed to place complementarity at the centre of analysis. According to the new framework, the task of achieving complementarity between interest-group imperatives falls to the leaders of such organisations. At the time of the NFF’s formation, commentators did not utilise such a framework and, as such, interpreted the move as a logical organisational step simply reflecting the way farmers’ interests had become united.

However, reviewing the history of the NFF’s formation (presented in Chapter Two) in light of this new framework, provides a different perspective. In the 1970s, changes in the political environment of farm interest groups were eroding their capacity to exercise influence. Leaders became convinced that unless they presented a unified voice and were better resourced their influence would be gradually reduced. The militant mood of the membership created a positive environment for the eventual amalgamation. That is, members were supportive of this move as it acted to channel this militancy in a powerful fashion. This catalysed the series of amalgamations that gave life to the NFF family of organisations, what will be referred to in this thesis as the ‘first wave’ of reform. The amalgamation was a step by leaders to create complementarity between the need for influence and that of support in order to ensure survival.

Through this new analytical lens, the history of organisational changes presented in Chapter Two takes on a new significance. The NFF post-formation is a case in point. In the time since the NFF family’s formation a new set of challenges began to manifest itself. These changes have included the pace of structural adjustment/deregulation, electoral change, bureaucratic/administrative change, economic changes and, more recently, the impact of socio-political movements. In this context, a growing consensus
emerged that national economic policy was the lever by which the farming community could achieve its policy goals. However, this conclusion revealed a new set of limitations on the fledgling NFF family's success. Whilst its tactics and resources were well suited to exercising influence in general agricultural policy, they had yet to be tested with regard to broader macro economic policy. This led Campbell to conclude that the capacity of farm interest groups ‘... to shape such [general economic] policies is substantially less than in the case of traditional agricultural policy.’ (1985, 223).

Since the mid 1980s, and in a departure from the policy pursued by the previous collection of separate federal commodity organisations, the NFF family's policy agenda has emphasised macro-economic reform in preference to the reform of specific agricultural policies. To successfully reorientate itself in such a way as to be influential in the general economic policy area, farm interest groups have adopted a different approach to policy-making. Broadly speaking, they have taken on the role of policy-making partner within predominantly corporatist policy networks. Specifically, farm leaders have adopted bargained consensus as a policy development model, participated in interest-group coalitions formed on an issue by issue basis and used economic research as a tool to 'inform' specific policy debates. Table thumping, intimidation and threats have been replaced by rational economic argument, researched policy positions and the expectation that all interested parties will have to give ground to reach consensus. As was intimated in Chapter One, this role has assisted a managed change in the paradigm underpinning general agricultural policy (Coleman and Skogstad 1995).

This strategy is reflected in Donald McGauchie's presidential address to the 1995 NFF Annual Conference:

The task for the NFF then is to demonstrate that our agenda is in the overall national interest as well as the interest of the farm sector. If we adopt a purely sectional approach, we are not going anywhere.

That means we have to construct alliances with other interest groups to widen our base of political support. It also means our proposals must be well researched and able to withstand public scrutiny. (McGauchie, 1995)
Chapter Five  The Logic and Assumptions of 'Second Wave' Reform

The NFF family's change in policy role and strategy was well documented in Chapter One. And as was documented in Chapter Three, researchers and commentators have attributed the NFF family's ongoing 'success' to precisely this strategy. The NFF has recognised that this new approach to pursuing policy has specific repercussions — increased criticism from membership and a decline in SFO membership (see Chapter One, Section 1.7). These ramifications have undone the previous state of complementarity held to together by the 'first wave' reforms. Consequently, it has had to respond to the organisational challenges this strategy has provoked whilst protecting the influence it confers. That is, again leaders have had to create complementarity between the imperatives of influence and support.

In the mid-1990s a flurry of consultancies, reports, strategic plans and reviews were conducted by the NFF family. The NFF produced 'NFF Review: Issues paper' (NFF 1994) and 'NFF Strategic Plan' (NFF 1996b), whilst the NSWFA commissioned 'What are we here for?' (Michels Warren Pty Ltd 1993) and the SAFF produced the 'Strategic Plan 1997-2002' (SAFF 1997b). The intensity of the 'review' activity reflects the level of urgency with which the NFF family has proceeded in its redesigning of the system of farmer interest groups. An urgency catalysed by the accelerating rate of decline in SFO membership numbers and the financial difficulty experienced by some SFOs.

The NFF review and various SFO review processes have been focal points in forcing the NFF family leadership to consider the implications this new approach to pursuing policy goals would have on its internal organisation (Section 5.2). This information will be complemented by the results of a survey of all SFOs and CCs that was conducted in early 1995 (Section 5.3). Collectively, these sources illustrate the organisations' assumptions

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1 These represent the most significant documents available to the author.
2 Some state organisations are seeking to reduce their financial obligations to the umbrella NFF organisation. A number of SFO's have signalled an intention to resign wholly or partially from the NFF, whilst some SFO's have relinquished seats on NFF Council to save money.
3 With the cooperation of the NFF Executive Director, Rick Farley, a survey was sent to each CEO of the CC's and SFO's (See Appendix Seven for copy of the survey form, cover letter and report). Only two of the Commodity councils replied so the process was not worth reporting. However, of the ten SFO's, five replied. Fortunately the future of CC's is to a large degree dependent on the support they have from SFO's who supply a bulk of their funding. Therefore, the results of the SFO's are the most significant.
regarding the supportiveness of its environment, the needs of its members, the challenges it faces as an organisation and the appropriate ways to address these issues. Most importantly, these reviews signify attempts at creating complementarity. If the amalgamations of the late 1970s and early 1980s are termed ‘first wave’ reforms then this response will constitute what can be referred to as the ‘second wave’ reforms.

As expressed in the reviews and surveys, the NFF family has had a consistent approach to generating complementarity. However, the assumptions underlying these proposals are contradictory. It is the SFOs that ultimately have to implement any reforms to achieve complementarity, as they are the only organisations to have direct members. Therefore, Section 5.4 and 5.5 will investigate the NSWFA’s report into membership loss in order to detail how the ‘second wave’ reforms have been implemented. This will indicate how these contradictions were resolved in practice. Section 5.6 reviews the ‘second wave’ of reforms and questions to what extent they have been successful, arguing that the contradiction between rational choice and pluralist-inspired responses has not been adequately resolved. It will be argued that the ‘second wave’ reforms, as defined by the NFF and implemented by the NSWFA, do not address the problem of member disillusionment with the NFF family’s policies. As such, they do not explain how member support will be limited to a willingness to pay. The outstanding questions about the implementation of ‘second wave’ reforms will be enunciated such that they can be addressed in Chapter Six.

5.2 Formulating the NFF Family’s Response: The NFF Review Process

In order to canvass responses to challenges it faced, the NFF commenced a Review Process in 1994. In February of that year, the NFF’s Executive Committee resolved:

That NFF instigate a review of the NFF which is all encompassing and includes a review of the structure, administration, funding, communication and the constitution. (NFF 1994)

A Task Force was established with a wide-ranging terms-of-reference. The Task Force was to examine the division of responsibility between the NFF, Commodity Councils and State Farm Organisations, the possibilities for obtaining greater efficiencies in dealing with policy issues, communication between organisations and the long-term funding
Chapter Five The Logic and Assumptions of 'Second Wave' Reform

base. The review process produced two documents available to the author, an 'Issues Paper' (NFF 1994) and a Strategic Plan (NFF 1996b). The 'Issues Paper' (NFF 1994), in particular, indicates the NFF's view of its environment, the tactics it has adopted and the implications this has for its organisation.

Implications of Influence Strategy

According to the NFF, its environment was increasingly demanding. The shift in power from the States to the Federal Government and the increase in the number of issues pursued through Ministerial Councils (Federal and State Ministers), meant that Government and member organisations were requesting its involvement in more issues, a trend the NFF says will continue (NFF 1994, 4). In addition, the NFF saw itself under increasing competition for the attention of government. According to the report the:

NFF effectively is in competition with all other interest groups for the time and attention of government. For example, over 50 interest groups presented pre-budget submissions this year. (NFF 1994, 9).

The Review reaffirms the strategy the NFF have adopted in order to maintain their influence. According to the NFF, 'The philosophy of successive Councils [NFF] has been to create a competitive economic environment within which industries and individuals prosper according to their efficiency and expertise.' (NFF 1994, 3). This is an approach that complements the pursuance of broad macro-economic reform.

Yet, the NFF acknowledge that the new strategy of pursuing the 'big dollar issues', such as economic settings, industrial reform, trade policy, transport and farm input costs has had some significant implications. In the first instance, the NFF acknowledge that there is an increasing distance between the grassroots and the leadership; one that has to be overcome by better communication. Given the complexity of these issues they admit that the majority of farmers do not understand them well. Subsequently, '... the direct benefits to individual farmers from such issues are difficult to quantify and communicate.' (NFF 1994, 4). Further, given that the NFF has no direct members, their role is not well understood by farmers and even some staff of member bodies (NFF 1994, 3).
The NFF’s approach to policy change also has direct implications for the role of membership in policy development. The new policy approach requires office bearers to contribute increased levels of time and money. The NFF acknowledges that the time and financial demands on leaders of farm organisations means that older and wealthier farmers are more likely to be involved. Consequently, ‘Farm organisations may not always be entirely representative. Women in particular are under-represented.’ (NFF 1994, 11). Additionally, the broadening range of issues in which organisations are involved requires office bearers who are more skilled and experienced in a range of non-agricultural policy areas. Therefore, ‘Unless elected representatives have a wide range of skills and experience, there is likely to be a heavy reliance on staff for policy development. That situation has potential danger.’ (NFF 1994, 11). To ameliorate this situation the use of ‘special purpose members’ is advocated. This would allow skilled business people, who would not otherwise put themselves through the electoral process of farm organisations, to take on an active and influential role. Measures such as the education and training of farmer representatives and the Australian Rural Leadership Program are also advanced as a means to broaden and diversify the pool of potential leaders (NFF 1994, 12).

The final implication of this policy role was an increased demand for financial resources. The broad range of issues upon which the NFF was asked and expected to have input was placing further pressure on SFOs to fund the national bodies (NFF 1994, 13). The expansion of the issues that require input to include the environment, food safety, chemical use, and consumer issues, has placed increasing demands on the resources of farm interest groups. They must spread existing resources over a broader number of issues in addition to hiring staff away from core commodity areas. The professional staff necessary to conduct a credible research-based approach to advocacy is expensive to acquire and retain.

Despite the admission that its present strategy of influence a) threatens membership involvement, b) does not enhance the representation of women and c) leads to a lack of understanding about the nature of policy issues, the report does not indicate that a
revision of these strategies is necessary. Indeed, the report does not address any of these implications. Instead, the review identifies the lack of resources as the central limiting factor in the NFF family’s future success. The response to the lack of resources has been distilled down to two options.

NFF must either;
- reduce the number of issues in which it is involved, (this would require considerable discipline by member bodies, NFF’s Council and Executive Committee), or
- increase its budget (NFF 1994, 13).

In adopting this approach the NFF seems to be suggesting that the only repercussion of its political strategy that has implications for its ongoing influence is a lack of resources. This does not mean that the NFF views as unimportant the problems of the declining scope for member involvement in policy-making and the increasing communications gap between leaders and members. Rather, it reflects the assumption that these are in some way the result of a lack of resources and, as such, can be remedied by the application of more resources⁴.

**The Response: Increasing the Budget**

Given the NFF’s reluctance to reduce the number of issues over which it has coverage, the favoured option is increasing the budget. The report states:

The NFF can increase its budget by:
- increasing levies on member bodies, for which State farm bodies ultimately will pay;
- increasing membership — new industries, better organisation of horticulture, associate members;
- increasing non-levy income, i.e. greater involvement in commercial activities, utilising the bulk purchasing power of farmers throughout Australia;
- seeking project funds from government and R&D corporations. (NFF 1994, 13).

The first strategy involves SFOs contributing more money. This may be achieved by:
- point of sale levy collection on an “opt out” basis;
- more effective commercial services;
- greater coverage of associate members. (NFF 1994, 13).

The levy collection system is already operating in Tasmania. Producers are levied a percentage of the price received for their produce at point of sale, unless they specify they

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⁴ The evidence from those SFO’s, such as the NSWFA, who have adequate funds suggests the NFF’s confidence that extra resources will alleviate these problems of representation is ill founded.
Chapter Five  The Logic and Assumptions of ‘Second Wave’ Reform

do not wish to contribute to the TFGA (NFF 1994, 10). The other two approaches are already being pursued to varying degree by SFOs.

The second strategy for increasing funding involves the NFF expanding its membership base. The ‘associate’ category has allowed for some new industries to join. The horticulture industry is identified as worth pursuing despite its currently fragmented nature (NFF 1994, 11). If it could be organised and convinced to take up NFF membership, considerable resources would accrue to the NFF family\(^5\). The governance issues that would emerge from broadening the membership base are not discussed, which is a significant oversight given the attention the report draws to the current problems of communicating with existing members.

The third strategy of pursuing commercial activities has generally attracted little support. This is because of concerns that enhanced economic autonomy may make the NFF less responsive to its member organisations, detract from core policy advocacy work and reduce the existing commercial opportunities of state organisations (NFF 1994, 9). As is noted in the report, the first two objections do not seem to apply to state organisations who have pursued commercial activities with vigour over recent years in order to enhance their income (NFF 1994, 9).

The final suggestion, to pursue government funding, has been rejected in the past. This is due to its potential to reduce the independence of the NFF, increase administration costs, distract the NFF from policy advocacy and increase parliamentary scrutiny over its affairs (NFF 1994, 10). The funds from R&D corporations may present fewer problems given that CCs are involved in selecting the board members and that their funds are producer levies.

\(^5\)This is interesting given the more recent comments by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Primary Industries and Energy, Senator David Brownhill who called on all sectors of the Horticultural Industry to consider the benefits of a united horticultural body. (\textit{The Land} 1997b, 4). A similar call has been made to the Wine industry (\textit{The Land} 1997d, 24). It would appear that to have an organised and orderly representative system is in both their interests. One in a financial sense and the other in a policy sense.
Chapter Five  
*The Logic and Assumptions of 'Second Wave' Reform*

Of the measures considered, the NFF concludes that increasing the membership of SFOs is the most promising way to boost NFF resources. An indication that SFOs concurred with this decision came when the NSWFA President noted that:

> The present structure of the NFF and its constituent commodity councils has served us well since its inception but the financial drought it is facing because of the inability of the States to find the necessary funds will force structural changes. (Crawford 1995, 5)

**Assumptions about Members: Why members join?**

The review document makes two things clear. Firstly, the NFF intends continuing the present policy agenda and associated tactics despite conceding that it has contributed to a situation where members often don’t understand the nature of the issues being pursued on their behalf and cannot quantify the direct benefits accruing to them from the NFF’s activities. Secondly, the report maintains that it must increase the resources available to it and that this must be achieved primarily through increasing the membership of SFOs.

Given that the membership of SFOs such as the NSWFA are in decline, when the NFF indicates that it wishes to increase SFO membership what it really means is reversing the loss of membership. Consequently, the report turns to what measures the NFF and SFOs can employ to realise a membership reversal. The task in relation to complementarity is to make the way support is gained consistent with the way influence is currently achieved. The measures suggested by the NFF reflect what it believes is the reason why farmers refuse to join the SFOs. Two different diagnoses are implicit in the report. These can be referred to as the ‘communications gap’ and ‘free-riding’ diagnosis.

The NFF initially attributes the cause of membership decline to a ‘communications gap’ between members and itself. Its initial response is to close the gap through a renewed effort at communicating with members. In formulating this response the NFF clearly implies that if members were to become aware of their activities, they would find them consistent with their own views and, hence, would join their relevant SFO. The NFF clearly assumes, in line with pluralist assumptions of member behaviour (see Chapter Three), that a high degree of consistency is likely because all farmers are part of a discrete group with a shared world view and value system.
Chapter Five  

The Logic and Assumptions of 'Second Wave' Reform

Under the first diagnosis, the report's two conclusions would seem to be in conflict with one another. The conflict arises because in order to gain members the NFF must make them more aware of the NFF's activities. Yet, as the report admits, the policy role it fills and the influence strategy it employs inhibits the communication necessary to create such awareness. Given the influence strategy is not to be changed, it remains to be demonstrated how such awareness can be generated.

Later in the review document the problem of membership levels is restated as one of 'free-riding'. The document asserts that 'Most State farm organisations suffer from "free-riders" who derive benefits from the policy advocacy of farm organisations, but who are not members.' (NFF 1994, 9). The term 'free-riding', drawn from rational-choice theory (see Chapter Three, Section 3.3), invokes a number of different assumptions. Firstly, it implies that members accurately perceive the NFF's activities as advantaging the entire constituency (a necessary condition for group objectives to qualify as 'public goods' and for non-membership to be defined as free-riding). Secondly, it assumes that farmers are principally self-interested utility maximisers who refuse to join because they calculate the benefits of non-membership to be greater than that of membership.

The set of rational-choice assumptions, implicit in the 'free-rider' diagnosis, does not imbibe the same conflict between the report's two conclusions. This is because 'free-riding' suggests that members are fully aware of the NFF's activities but choose not to join because the benefits of those activities accrue to them independent of their membership status. The free-riding diagnosis assumes that a problem of awareness does not exist at all, which means that the NFF does not need to change its policy tactics such that it can turn around membership decline.

Clearly, a degree of ambiguity exists in the assumptions underlying the NFF's diagnosis of the problem of membership decline. On one hand they claim that the communications gap between it and its members is the central issue. Yet it cannot explain how such a problem can be overcome without altering its external influence activities. On the other
hand it suggests that farmers are unwilling to become members as they receive the value of the NFF’s activities regardless. This implies that farmers fully understand the value of the NFF’s activities. These positions contradict one another over whether farmers who refuse to join the NFF do or do not see the value of the NFF’s activities. Consequently, each of these explanations — ‘communications gap’ and ‘free-rider’ — suggest that the NFF address the issue of gaining members in a different manner.

Clarifying the assumptions

For the NFF, increasing its resources hinges on reversing the decline in the membership of SFOs. However, the manner by which this is to be achieved is unclear. Finding clarity requires identifying the assumptions made about the motives that underlie the decision of their members not to join. The report offers two diagnoses, each of which employs a different set of assumptions. One has its roots in pluralist thought and the other in rational choice. Having identified these assumptions it is possible to determine the range of available responses to membership loss that flow from them.

The pluralist approach makes a link between an individual joining an interest group and the individual’s awareness and agreement with the group’s role and policies. Consequently, there are two explanations for the disillusionment and decline of members. The first is that disillusioned or non members are in agreement with the goals of the group but are just unaware that those goals are actually being pursued. The second is that members are aware of the goals but just do not agree with them.

In the first instance it is assumed that the interests of disillusioned or non-members are already consistent with those of the interest group. That is, a collective interest is an input into the group. Given such an assumption, the best response by the NFF would be a more sophisticated communications strategy. The modest aim of the strategy would be to establish an awareness of this consistency amongst members. This implies that the communications gap brought about by the influence tactics employed by the NFF family can be overcome without changing its political strategy.
The alternative explanation consistent with pluralist assumptions is that membership decline is an indication that members recognise the aims of the organisation but simply do not agree with them. If this were the case the only satisfactory response would be to create a more discursive form of communication with members. This form of communication would modify the goals of the organisation in a manner consistent with that of its members’ wishes. In addition to changing the policy platform of the NFF, such a form of communication would likely require significant reform to its internal policy development structure. This implies that only a change in strategy would allow the necessary communication to be conducted in order to bridge the gap.

The second set of assumptions draws on rational choice. As was described in Chapter three, rational choice makes a connection between the decision to join and the provision of exclusive goods to members. It argues that people will become members of an interest group when a specific advantage accrues to individual members from which non-members are excluded. Whilst this appears to be in opposition to pluralism, the initial pluralist concern as to whether the members agree or are aware of the organisations’ goals is still a relevant variable. As was intimated by Kimber (1993) in Chapter Three, it is important that members are aware and agree with group goals because ‘free-riding’ depends on the goods produced by the group being demonstrable public goods. The only way that ‘free-riding’ can be undertaken without emphasising agreement or awareness is when the selective incentives cover the costs of membership. Therefore, two basic models exist. If the selective good does not fully compensate members for the cost of membership then awareness and agreement with group goals would be a necessary contributing factor to an individual’s decision to join. However, if the selective incentives exceeded the cost of membership then awareness and agreement of group goals would become peripheral to the decision to join.

The ‘free-riding’ diagnosis suggests that SFOs should respond by establishing some form of ‘selective incentive’ in order to coax those who are not contributing to public goods to do so. However, the role incentives play in a member’s decision to join is contingent on the degree to which the NFF believes it can maintain agreement and awareness. With this
in mind two models emerge. Firstly, SFOs could provide selective incentives which contribute to the decision to join but do not exceed the cost of membership. These selective incentives must be exclusive, that is, not freely available to non-members. In this case the group must maintain a high degree of awareness and agreement, which in turn means they may have to change their approach to exercising policy influence. Secondly, it could provide selective incentives that exceed the cost of membership and largely obviate the need for high degrees of awareness and agreement. These selective incentives do not have to be exclusive in the sense that they are not also available from other sources outside the organisation. They must, however, be relevant, provided on a ‘cost-recovery’ basis, yet ensure that the cost of membership is recouped.

Based on the NFF’s own analysis, one can identify four alternative sets of assumptions that both seek to explain why members leave an interest group and suggest a range of responses an interest group could adopt to ameliorate the situation. Firstly, in option one, one can assume that declining membership is indicative of a lack of awareness, albeit on the understanding that an underlying basis of agreement exists between the goals of the group and membership. Secondly, in option two, declining membership can indicate that members recognise the aims of the organisation but simply do not agree with them. Thirdly, in option three, it can indicate that there exists a degree of awareness and agreement but ‘exclusive’ selective benefits accruing to members who join, as opposed to those who do not, are absent. Fourthly, in option four, regardless of the level of awareness or agreement, it can indicate the absence of selective benefits that accrue to members and cover the monetary cost of membership (subscription costs).

The NFF’s insistence that its current mode of policy advocacy is essential to achieving success means that any option that requires such a change can be ruled out. Given that the NFF’s policy strategy is considered to have contributed to a lack of awareness, yet is to remain unchanged, the NFF family must institute a reform process that obviates the need to establish communications aimed at reaching ‘agreement’. Therefore, option two must be ruled out. However, the three other options do not require modifying the political tactics of the group. Consequently, they disentangle the contingent relationship between

158
the NFF’s internal relationship with members and their external strategy of influence. How then do the three remaining options break this link?

If, as assumed under option one, the views of NFF members are consistent with those expressed by its leaders, then providing information on Federation policy positions and the rationale behind them may in fact close the communications gap and, hence, raise membership numbers. In this case, the NFF would be deploying communications strategies in a manner aimed at creating the conditions for the pluralist assumptions to be realised. Similarly, as under option three, if the level of agreement between members and the NFF is assumed to be relatively good, leadership may pursue measures aimed at both creating an awareness and establishing incentives exclusive to individual members. This is aimed at establishing the conditions for rational-choice assumptions to be realised. Alternatively, as under option four, regardless of the levels of awareness and agreement between members and the NFF, leadership may pursue measures aimed at providing individual members with selective incentives that cover the cost of subscription. The NFF, therefore, has three choices: to address the awareness levels amongst members of the benefits of its lobbying activities, to address the issue of creating exclusive benefits to members whilst also establishing awareness or, finally, to create selective benefits that fully return the subscription cost to members.

The NFF’s 1996 Strategic Plan provides an indication as to which option it believes will address the problem of attracting members to farm organisations. The first section of the report lists ‘Trends and Critical Issues for NFF’. The list includes, ‘Increasing individualism, resulting in declining membership of farm organisation.’ (NFF 1996b, 6). This comment suggests that the NFF locate the fall in membership within a broader societal change towards ‘individualism’. This lends weight to the diagnosis that membership loss is a consequence of ‘free-riding’. Importantly, it further diminishes the value of appealing to collective ‘agreement’ over policy goals as a vehicle for maintaining and increasing membership. On this basis, one can conclude that option four is the one most likely to be consistent with the NFF’s diagnosis of the problem of falling membership.
The NFF has charted a course for expanding its financial base rather than modifying its policy role. The plan to address the issue of financial security rests on the principle of increasing income. The vast burden of responsibility for increasing income must rest with SFOs. In this regard, the principal measure available to SFOs is to increase their membership numbers, with the resulting increase in income transferred upwards to the NFF through higher affiliation fees. Consequently, it is at the SFO level that the ambiguity between the various diagnosis of the problem of membership will be resolved. The SFOs must determine whether membership decline is best addressed through increasing either, ‘awareness’ or ‘agreement’ or ‘awareness and exclusive selective benefits’ or ‘selective incentives returning subscription costs’. As is evident, a fair degree of overlap exists between the four options. Therefore, determining which option/s has been adopted can only be determined after significant analysis of SFO activities.

5.3 The SFO’s Response: Enacting the Plan

The NFF Issue Paper clearly establishes that any significant increase in resources would have to come from an increase in the incomes of SFOs. For the plan, as outlined by the NFF, to be adopted by SFOs, it is crucial that they adopt a similar view of the challenges they face and are convinced of the utility of the NFF plan. With respect to consistency over the challenges they face, a survey of SFOs was conducted in 1995. It asked SFOs what they considered to be their biggest challenges over the next five years, how they characterised their relationship with their members and what changes they would be making to respond. The responses demonstrate a high degree of consistency with the NFF’s position.

Respondents considered the major challenges for farm interest groups during the next five years to be dealing with environmental issues, the need to raise the general awareness of rural people regarding marketing of their produce and to enhance farmers business skills. Of concern to some was the need to secure micro-economic reform for their membership. Maintaining the influence organisations had on the government was seen by over half the respondents as a challenge. Challenges were said to include
‘maintaining effective representation and influence’ and ‘maintaining relevance, effectiveness and cohesion’.

There were some admissions that convincing membership of the worth of their organisation was difficult. Three of the five organisations stated that they had a very good relationship with membership and that any tensions that did arise were often along commodity lines. Consistent with the NFF’s position, the other two stated that their membership found it hard to identify progress by the organisation. One SFO commented: ‘It often appears to be a long way from members to the executive and further still to the NFF, however, simplified communication channels and a better staff-member relationship is coming.’ Another commented: ‘Members are concerned that organisation is not achieving enough “wins” in government policy.’

In response to these issues and the changes in the policy process, three organisations mentioned reviews that had taken place and foreshadowed the likely changes that would result. Consistent with the NFF report, these changes include enhanced communication, opening up membership to other minor commodity groups and rationalising the organisational structure.

Given the consistency between the NFF and SFOs it is important to more fully explore how the SFOs have responded. The considered response has been encapsulated more fully in the review process of the NSWFA.

5.4 **Formulating a Response: NSWFA review**

The NSWFA, as in the past with amalgamation, pre-empted national moves towards an organisational review process. In 1993 it commissioned a consultancy firm to ‘... recommend a plan of action which, firstly, identifies the causes of the present decline in the Association membership numbers, and, secondly, will result in a permanent turnaround in those membership numbers.’ (Michels Warren Pty Ltd 1993, 1). The emphasis on membership numbers flowed directly from their importance ‘... to the overall credibility, lobbying effectiveness and financial viability of the Association.’
(Michels Warren Pty Ltd 1993, 1). Whilst the report was not penned by Association staff, its recommendations are indicative of the logic underpinning the Association’s response.

The report firmly places the problem of membership decline in an historical context. In contrast to the environment of the 1960s, the NSWFA operates in a political environment in which few Australians have direct contact with farmers. The National Party’s constituency has dissolved and extends beyond the farm sector and competes with a range of other locally based groups for members’ time and resources. Agriculture is a less important sector of the economy and lobbying has become more sophisticated. Farmers, too, have changed. They are under more economic stress, are smaller and more diversified and are often involved in part-time off-farm work. (Michels Warren Pty Ltd 1993, Diagram 2).

The report concludes that at present the ‘Association operates in a way appropriate to the conditions of the 1960s, before the amalgamation of the UFWA and the Graziers’ Association.’ (Michels Warren Pty Ltd 1993, 8). This comment does not imply that the Association’s lobbying activities are inconsistent with the demands of the political environment. Rather, that members’ expectations of the Association in the 1960s were consistent with what the Association provided, however, since then, member expectations have changed whilst the Association has not. Consequently, the report focuses on the ‘... need to “position” the Association to meet members’ expectations’ (Michels Warren Pty Ltd 1993, 8). In essence, it argues that the NSWFA has responded to the changes in the policy process by adopting a new strategy of influence, yet it has failed to change the manner in which it communicates and interacts with members.

The report identifies seven key issues that have contributed to the drop in membership numbers and advocates measures to address each one (Michels Warren Pty Ltd 1993, 3-4). Firstly, the report argues that both members and staff are not clear on what the role of the Association is and should be. The traditional view of the Association has been that its focus is lobbying, albeit with an attached set of token member services. However, the problem with lobbying as the ‘product’ is that ‘... a farmer does not have to be a member
to gain the benefits.’ (Michels Warren Pty Ltd 1993, 17). The report argues that the Association has been relying on the ‘tradition and goodwill of each generation joining and supporting the Association because their families have always been members’, or ‘expectations of lobbying performance’ to gain and maintain members. Factors that are all under threat, according to the report (Michels Warren Pty Ltd 1993, 17). It is suggested the Association offer a range of services which only members can access, thereby avoiding a reliance on these increasingly diminishing factors.

Secondly, the report identifies an absence of a service attitude amongst staff and office bearers. As a consequence of focussing on lobbying, staff generally work within their narrow areas of expertise and responsibility rather than develop a thorough understanding of the full range of services provided by the organisation. Consequently, many members become dissatisfied with the responses they receive when approaching staff.

Thirdly, the lobbying process is not well understood by members. The report claims that ‘... it is often difficult for an individual to understand how some lobbying activities have relevance to their family farm.’ (Michels Warren Pty Ltd 1993, 9). Members are not aware of achievements, have unrealistic expectations of what can be achieved and are not clear on what role the Association and other organisations play. The Association is said to overstate its influence on specific policy issues, which leads to members feeling misled. It is recommended that a member-education process should be conducted.

Fourthly, the report found that many existing services were not perceived as relevant or were not fully understood by members. Further, many services offered could either be accessed by non-members or were available from alternative sources at the same price or better by both members and non-members. As such, the report concluded that membership of the Association offered no real value for money. It was, therefore, suggested that the Association commence the marketing of services.

Fifthly, the report argued that a communications gap exists between members, office bearers and staff — a gap that has been worsening over the past 15 years. The report
concludes: 'Care is required to convey the appropriate messages and use the appropriate forms of communication.' (Michels Warren Pty Ltd 1993, 4). Members require face-to-face communication and view other forms as secondary. It is recommended that the Association conduct more meetings in the bush, target specific groups of members with information relevant to them and communicate more often with women and young farmers.

Sixthly, the report found that a perception exists that the Association is unrepresentative of its constituency. Further, General Council and Annual Conference were perceived as in need of rationalising, branches were often poorly run with boring meetings, the Association's 'style' reflected a 'them and us' attitude between members and head office and some General Councillors were regarded as ineffective. On this basis the report concluded that the Association must address the issue of the representation of farmers. The report suggests this could be achieved through measures such as: giving increased attention to women, youth and intensive industries; altering the conduct of Annual Conference and the election of General Councillors; orienting the content of branch meetings towards local issues; and altering committee structures to allow experts to make a contribution without having to go through the election process.

Finally, the report observes that '... the majority of members are not fully aware of all elements of the Association and its services' (Michels Warren Pty Ltd 1993, 4). Consequently, it advocates that staff and office bearers all take responsibility for actively selling membership. It is suggested that membership be sold '... in terms of the value for money provided in comparison to the membership fee' (Michels Warren Pty Ltd 1993, 47).

As with the NFF's review document, the NSWFA's report illustrates a degree of ambiguity with respect to the issue of how to address the problem of membership decline. Concerns about the role of the association, lobbying, communications gap and the

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6The report claims that of the General Councillors '...70% are medium to large sized farmers or graziers. This category only represents about 30% of the total membership' (Michels Warren Pty Ltd 1993, 40).
representation of farmers all draw on the ‘communications gap’ diagnosis. However, the points regarding service attitude, marketing of services and selling membership all draw on the ‘free-rider’ diagnosis. For instance, one part of the report advocates rectifying a communications gap through better efforts at targeted communication using appropriate media. Yet another section suggests that traditional attachments and the anticipation that participation will contribute to policy changes are both losing currency as motivational factors for farmers to join the Association. Consequently, it advocates they be replaced and/or complemented with services to which only members can gain access. Again, as with the NFF, there seems to be some confusion over what has caused the decline in membership. Is the problem of membership decline simply the result of the failure of communications procedures to bridge the increasing distance between leaders and members arising from a change in the policy process? Alternatively, is membership decline brought about by the rise of individualism in the context of weakening traditional attachments between the Association and members?

The NSWFA, unlike the NFF, have to not only define, but implement some strategy to address the decline in membership. Consequently, by tracing their activities it will be evident how these ambiguities have been resolved.

5.5 Reaction to the Report

Reaction to the report captures the inherent tensions between a ‘free-rider’ versus ‘communication gap’ interpretation of membership loss. The President argued that ‘... it was a fact of life that lobbying successes alone were no guarantee of attracting new members, or even of holding existing ones.’ A General Councillor was quoted as arguing ‘... it was on the wrong track in trying to direct the Association to become a service organisation rather than a lobbying force.’ (The Land 1994b, 102). A newspaper editorial argued that the key to arresting decline lay with ‘... convincing farmers that membership of the Association gives them an opportunity to help form policy, to be better informed about developments affecting their industry and to have at their back a strong and well-resourced organisation.’ (The Land 1994a, 12). In response to the Report’s focus on service provision a NSWFA branch secretary was reported as saying ‘... the organisation
already offered sufficient services to its members such as merchandise and financial and industrial relations advice; it now needed to redefine its role while rebuilding its membership base.’ (Dick 1994a, 9).

Amidst the ongoing public debate about why the Association was losing members and what action it should take, the Association started its formal response. The report was well received by the Association. The CEO was reported as saying most of the recommendations would be implemented (Austin 1994). Within months of its release it had precipitated the retirement of the long-standing CEO, John White, and the replacement of five long-serving membership officers (Dick, 1994b). Three management teams, comprising senior office bearers, were constituted to review the recommendations and formulate responses (Dick 1994a).

Initial Response to the Review: A problem of communications?

The initial response of the Association included measures consistent with the ‘communications gap’ diagnosis. The new CEO, Peter Comensoli, had developed a management plan to foster amongst staff the customer-service principles advocated in the review7. Within a year the Association adopted a new logo and the slogan ‘NSW Farmers Association for Growth’ (The Land 1994c, 16). It introduced a campaign to inform members about the role and decision-making process of the Association. According to the Membership Marketing Manager, ‘This was necessary to reinforce to members the role of their Association. It allowed greater understanding and ownership plus easier promotion to potential members.’ (Mason 1995, 21). However, the recommendations concerning the election of general councillors and the payment of branch office bearers were not implemented. No fundamental change had occurred to the structure of the Association and no concessions were made to facilitate the participation of women or youth in the ‘normal’ deliberations of the Association.

Reforms that at first appeared to be a response by the Association to the ‘communications gap’ diagnosis amounted to a more targeted promotion of the same organisational

structure that existed prior to the review. The Association did not undertake the reforms to its structure, procedures and political strategy necessary to facilitate the increased participation and ownership of the process by members — all reforms necessary to pursue option two. In line with the report, the NSWFA assumed its strategy and policies were appropriate but that it needed to ‘re-position’ itself with respect to members. It was assumed that members agreed with the NSWFA’s policy thrust and that, as a consequence, enhanced communications were necessary only in order to create an awareness of this agreement amongst members. In this way, the initial response correlated with option one under the ‘communications gap’ diagnosis. Yet, as was noted earlier, creating awareness amongst members of consistency between their own goals and those pursued by the NSWFA is also a pre-condition for option three.

As the initial flurry of activity aimed at responding to the ‘communications gap’ diagnosis subsided, activity consistent with the ‘free-rider’ diagnosis commenced. The membership manager boasted: ‘... commercial concessions has progressed to levels now where we can provide an income-positive result for nearly all members who participate.’ (Mason 1995, 21). This remark is important at two levels. Firstly, it indicates that the NSWFA had adopted the assumption that traditional attachments and the desire to contribute to policy change no longer attract or maintain membership. Secondly, and more importantly, by equating ‘participation’ with paying the subscription fee, the Association had clearly defined the limited extent to which its members were expected to be involved in its activities. What has unfolded over subsequent few years is a range of reforms that are entirely consistent with the ‘free-riding’ diagnosis.

The NSWFA’s Substantive Response: A problem of free riding!

Despite early indications to the contrary, the NSWFA came to interpret the problem of declining membership numbers in accordance with the assumptions implicit in the ‘free-riding’ diagnosis. Consequently, the substantive response made by the NSWFA was aimed at addressing the individualist and utility-maximising nature of current and potential members; conditions assumed under the ‘free-riding diagnosis’. In this context,
the initial response aimed at awareness raising, which appeared to be aimed at communications problems, finished up as a subset of a response aimed at ‘free-riding’.

The NSWFA has adopted a number of interrelated and complementary measures in order to respond to the ‘free-riding’ diagnosis. The strategy involves setting quantitative membership targets, the development of a product which can be marketed, the sophisticated and aggressive marketing of membership, broadening the membership base and the reallocation of significant levels of resources to support the recruitment of members.

Quantitative membership targets have been set by many SFOs. The NSWFA has set itself the target of 18,000 members by the year 2000 (Macaulay 1997, 16). However, there has been no equivalent focus on increasing the qualitative elements of membership such as the degree of participation. Indeed, participation has come to be equated with joining the Association.

The consistent position of the NSWFA is that they cannot sell membership based on lobbying. Therefore, they have proceeded to define a new product to market, a product that is available exclusively to members. This process has come to be encapsulated by the term ‘value-adding’ membership. The NSWFA has always provided buying, financial and industrial relations services. More recently, however, this has expanded to include discounts on interest rates, vehicles, holiday accommodation, fertiliser, phone rates and various other products or services. In some instances these services are more attune to reducing the cost of leisure activities rather than those associated with running a farm enterprise. Consistent with the redefinition of participation, the Association has emphasised that the cost of membership subscriptions can be recouped through member benefits. In this sense joining the Association is presented as a cost-neutral decision.

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8In interest group parlance these are referred to as ‘member services’. However it is acknowledged that they are financial bonuses accruing to members only, and used as a way to attract members who would not otherwise support the group’s activities.
An aggressive marketing approach is being applied to recruitment. Firstly, specific industries and areas are targeted so as to enhance membership densities (market share) and, consequently, buttress their claim to be the key representative in that area. For instance, recent emphasis has been on developing a critical mass of members in the horticultural and intensive industries. Secondly, communications media, such as farm organisation magazines, are being designed to assist efforts at recruitment. Consistent with the 'awareness' raising required under option three, lists of the NSWFA's 'achievements', which field officers can point to when convincing members of the organisation's worth, are often published in prominent places within their magazine. This publication also extensively advertises the various commercial benefits of membership along with a membership form. Finally, marketing principles and techniques are becoming prominent in the recruitment process. For instance, the NSWFA has recently commenced sending out renewal notices and notification of loss of membership on a tighter time frame in order to maximise early renewals. This measure was aimed at freeing up area managers from the task of pursuing renewals much earlier so they could progress on to other tasks.9

A related trend is that of broadening membership. This measure has taken two forms — promoting other smaller industries to become affiliates and promoting sections of the constituency to become individual members in their own right. The NSWFA has aggressively pursued affiliations with a range of industries. It has recently taken on the Oyster Industry as a full member and the Dairy Industry as an affiliated member (NSWFA 1997b, PR/039/97). Significantly, there seems to be no hesitancy at expanding the encompassingness of the organisation despite ongoing schisms between and within commodities.

The Association has taken some measures to address the issue of the membership of women and youth. This includes the 'Youthlink' scheme and the 'Rural Leadership Program'. The Association recently convened the 'Farmers Toward 2020' forum, funded

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by a grant from the federal ‘FarmBis’ scheme, as an initiative to develop future leaders (NSWFA 1998a, PR/200/98). Additionally, the Association has offered leadership training workshops for rural women. However, it is important to note that the membership categories created to facilitate the membership of groups in the community who are under represented in membership, such as youth and women, does not include the capacity to vote. Consequently, these initiatives have the effect of maximising the membership of these groups whilst not manifestly increasing their impact on the organisations’ political activities.

An injection of resources is being made into recruiting members. Since 1990, the number of area managers in the field has increased from six to 10. The NSWFA secretariat now employs a dedicated Membership Marketing Manager whose prime role it is to coordinate the recruitment of members. It also employs a Director of Commercial Services and Property who, amongst other things, negotiates commercial deals for membership. Additionally, a Cooperative Manager administers a buying service that provides discounted goods to members. The budget for Membership Recruitment and Field Service is now estimated at four times the 1985 figure of $220,000 (PA Management Consultants 1985)\(^\text{10}\).

5.6 The ‘Second Wave’ of Reform

The package of reforms implemented by the NSWFA is indicative of a ‘second wave’ of organisational reform entered into by the entire NFF family of organisations. It can be referred to as a ‘second wave’ because the responses are a significant departure from those that preceded them, yet they form a continuing strategy to achieve the same outcome — to create the necessary conditions for complementarity. In contrast to the ‘first wave’ of reforms, which concentrated on organisational level changes through amalgamation, the ‘second wave’ of reforms employed sub-organisational level reforms.

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\(^{10}\) 10 field staff at a cost of at least $80,000 per year is $800,000 per annum. This is without considering the salary of the Membership Manager or the costs of communicating with members and convening conferences (Based upon Macaulay, A. 1997, pers.comm., 5 August. NSWFA Membership Marketing Manager, Sydney).
The ‘second wave’ appears to incorporate elements of three different theoretical options. All of which have differing, and often contradictory, sets of assumptions. The NSWFA’s initial focus on creating awareness about the goals of the organisation reflected option one. However, the awareness approach ended up being part of attempts to establish the decision to join the Association as economically rational, as per option three. Ultimately, the Association further extended the range of selective incentives it offered in order to ensure the cost of membership could be fully recovered in benefits by most members. The implementation of option four prompted the President, Ian Donges, to boast ‘… it’s now possible for members to recoup far more money in commercial benefits from belonging to the Association than it costs to join.’ (NSWFA 1997a, PR/002/97). Similarly, in 1998 he argued that ‘… those members participating in the Member Services schemes are more than offsetting their Association annual membership subscription.’ (NSWFA 1998b, PR/039/98).

Initial figures illustrate that this ‘second wave’ of re-organisation has reversed the trend of decline in the NSWFA’s membership numbers. Regardless of whether these increases have come from full memberships amongst the intensive industries and from the ‘additional’ member category who do not vote but receive the services, the measures have stemmed the tide. Interestingly, the Association attributes the increase in membership of ‘11 per cent in three years’ to ‘member discount services and other inducements to farmers’ (The Land 1998c, 53). Whilst prima facie the Association can claim its reform process was a success, and as such it has achieved complementarity, it is unclear to what extent such a turnaround can be attributed to the measures labelled as ‘second wave’ reforms. The major concern is that the ‘second wave’ reforms do not establish how leaders have been able to effectively limit member support to that which is financial in nature without addressing the agreement deficit.

With respect to the model of interest-group behaviour developed in Chapter Four, the reforms are a clear example of how leaders shoulder the responsibility of managing a tension between internal and external imperatives and attempt to create complementarity between them. The ‘second wave’ of reform has been executed by SFOs, such as the
Chapter Five  The Logic and Assumptions of ‘Second Wave’ Reform

NSWFA, to create complementarity out of the emerging tension between the NFF family’s imperative to achieve influence and its imperative of maintaining member support. In this way the NSWFA have privileged the influence imperative and, therefore, become responsive primarily to its own political environment. Consequently, the relationship between the SFOs and members has become the dependent variable in undertaking reform.

The influence imperative was privileged in the review process through the application of a logic that bracketed off a range of possibilities for reform. As was explained earlier, it was assumed that the decline of traditional attachments inevitably meant that the only remaining point on which to sell Association membership was to offer individual financial inducements. The possibility of re-invigorating these traditional attachments, redefining what the Association expects from members and rebuilding the commitment to the organisation — described under option two — was not entertained. In fact, such possibilities could not be considered because the reforms necessary to pursue such a course of action would place in jeopardy the strategy the NFF family deemed necessary to maximise the imperative of influence. Instead, measures were devised to try and minimise the necessity to bridge the gap between members and leaders on a collective basis, that is, to foster agreement by appealing to an individual’s self-interested desire to utility maximise. For the NSWFA to create complementarity without changing its present policy role it needed to create a relationship between itself and its members that limited members’ support to that of a financial nature.

The evidence of member disillusionment in Chapter One, and the statements regarding ‘individualism’ (NFF 1996b) and declining levels of traditional attachments (Michels Warren Pty Ltd 1993) made in review reports, indicate the absence of a basic agreement between members and leaders. Ultimately, the NSWFA adopted measures that were consistent with its own concerns that the level of underlying agreement necessary to foster membership was not evident. Therefore, their final set of measures reflected option four. This option attempts to make the question about agreement irrelevant by installing self-interested economic gain as the overriding rationale for membership. However, the
second wave reforms documented to this point do not explain how this model was able to create complementarity whilst obviating the need to create ‘agreement’. For even if members were to join for the economic incentives, what would stop them from becoming enraged with the activities of the Association and mobilising resistance to the Association’s official view, hence, undermining its credibility? On a similar tangent, why is it assumed that the initial self-interested reason for membership will not develop into a different form of attachment?\(^\text{11}\) The ‘second wave’ reform measures, whilst appearing to try and install option four as a model for gaining membership support, do not explain how the need to obviate agreement was attained. Specifically, they do not establish how the Association intends on limiting the support of members to paying subscriptions and persuading them not to seek active participation and monitoring of its policy deliberations.

This leads one to conclude that the documented response of the NSWFA in its ‘second wave’ reforms has omitted important additional measures that assisted it to create complementarity without generating agreement. The framework in Chapter Four argues that leaders need to generate authentic representation in their activities in the external environment and that they exchange this with members for support. As such, the focus will be to look at how the NFF family leadership has generated authentic representation, or projected its generation, and then delivered it to their constituency for support. In the context of the increase in membership levels, the Association must have employed some type of communications strategy to address the issue of agreement. It implies that another set of reforms has been undertaken, but not documented, which can explain how the Association has persuaded its members to limit their expressions of support to that which is financial in nature.

### 5.7 Conclusion

In response to the challenges presented by the new demands of the political environment, most SFOs, even those organisations that appear financially secure, are pursuing a

\(^{11}\) The argument that the decision to join is a continual (Dunleavy 1988) or a developmental (Young and Forsyth 1991, 537) process rather than a one off decision suggest this.
strategy similar to that adopted by the NSWFA. It is argued that the approach constitutes a ‘second wave’ of organisational reform amongst Australian farm interest groups. Whilst this wave has gone undetected in the literature, due to its sub-organisational nature, it is as important for political representation as the amalgamation of farm organisations under the NFF in the late 1970s and early 1980s\textsuperscript{12}. The ‘second wave’ of reform, in a departure from the ‘first wave’, has focussed on internal changes to individual NFF family units. The claim that, collectively, these changes constitute a ‘second wave’ of reform is supported by the consistency with which organisational reform has been applied across all farm groups (See SAFF 1997a).

The ‘second wave’ of reform has been undertaken precisely because the SFOs wish to remain committed to their current mode of lobbying. The ‘second wave’ reforms are merely about farm interest groups securing the necessary resources from members in order to pursue lobbying more effectively. This highlights once again the inherent limitations of the ‘success’ framework that ascribes a one-dimensional imperative to interest groups. The reviews of the NFF and NSWFA both confirm that reform of both internal and external dimensions are considered together. Consequently, the biggest question to be answered is which imperative dominates reform? This lends further weight to the relevance of the new framework for examining interest-group behaviour developed in Chapter Four.

Indeed, the chapter demonstrates that the NFF family has significant challenges in terms of balancing their commitment to achieving policy influence and the need to maintain the support of their constituency. Commentators, utilising the conventional ‘success’ framework defining the NFF family as successful, have suggested its only challenges exist in its external political environment. However, this chapter illustrates that a broader range of imperatives drives its behaviour. The new framework developed in Chapter Four

\textsuperscript{12}The consistency is due in no small part to the dominance of a body of theory known as rational choice. I am not suggesting that all CEO’s have been familiarising themselves with the work of Mancur Olson and his successors. There is, however, evidence that a journal known as ‘The Presidents Brief’ has been instrumental in instilling the key assumption of this theory to the leaders of such organisations.
has prompted an analysis that reveals a significant deal of activity within the NFF family has been dedicated to resolving the tension between its activities aimed at being influential and activity aimed at securing the support of its members.

The problem that confronted SFOs was that the central strategy for increasing resources was through increasing membership. However, the increase in membership had to be achieved without altering political strategy which, the NFF itself identified, acted as a disincentive to membership. Consequently, that the ‘second wave’ reforms were able to increase membership without altering political tactics suggests that the NSWFA has been able to separate the contingent relationship between securing the support of its members and successfully influencing policy. That is, it has been able to reduce the tension and create complementarity. However, the inadequacy of rational choice to explain the means by which such a separation is achieved means that the NSWFA must have addressed the problem highlighted in the ‘communication gap’ diagnosis without formally acknowledging it.

With respect to reducing the contingent relationship between influence and support, a number of things are clear. It is clear that the NSWFA believes that all it requires from members to assist it maximise political influence is their financial contributions and their continuing membership. Further, it is clear that they have instigated organisational reforms to generate such support. However, it is still unclear how members will be encouraged to limit their support to these conditions. Therefore, one must be able to account for how it is the NSWFA is able to encourage certain aspects of support whilst simultaneously discouraging others. That is, how can it encourage membership and financial contributions whilst simultaneously discouraging active participation with its attendant demands for responsiveness and accountability? To answer these questions one needs examine the communications strategies employed by the NSWFA. It is here where they must overcome the need to foster ‘agreement’, which would threaten their strategy, and concentrate on awareness raising, which is complementary to their political strategy. This will be explored in the next chapter.
Chapter Seven

The ‘Reorganisational Paradigm’ in Practice

7.1 Introduction

The past three chapters, considered together, have provided a detailed account of how and why the ‘second wave’ reforms achieved complementarity. Complementarity was achieved through reconciling significant organisational tensions. The generation of political power by interest groups under the prevailing policy process required these groups to limit the support of members to a willingness to pay such that leaders could exercise significant levels of autonomy. The NSWFA leadership developed a range of incentives and frames which, coupled together, successfully enforced the required limitation. A complex ‘division of labour’ enabled leaders to direct the attention of members to firm level issues whilst advocating associational action on those issues that were crucial to setting the macro-economic environment.

The NFF family has celebrated this state of complementarity. Its ability to maintain membership numbers in the face of membership declines within other peak interest groups has been a source of significant pride and boasting. However, in achieving complementarity the representative paradox was not addressed by SFOs such as the NSWFA. The representative paradox signifies the absence of agreement between NSWFA members and their leadership about the goals of the Association. In the absence of agreement one can speculate that the leadership of the NSWFA would have difficulty in coordinating the activities of their members in a politically useful manner. Whilst this type of activity is unnecessary in the current political environment, should it become necessary the NSWFA would find agreement difficult to generate and hence influence difficult to exercise. This argument is contingent on the assumption that there are presently low levels of agreement and that farmers require deliberative forums to reach agreement.
Chapter Seven  The ‘Reorganisational Paradigm’ in Practice

In this chapter the stability of this complementarity will be examined using the case of native vegetation management in NSW. Section 7.2 will outline the issues of native vegetation in NSW. Particular attention will be focussed on ascertaining the level of agreement between members and leaders of the NSWFA over this issue. Further, attention will be directed on to how the level of agreement translates into the ability of leaders to coordinate the activities of their members in a politically useful manner. Based on evidence of an absence of agreement amongst farmers and leaders, it will be argued that the NSWFA was unable to exercise significant levels of influence over native vegetation management issues.

The significance of this conclusion is dependent on the relationship between forms of collective action, the generation of power by interest groups, the fostering of agreement and the nature of interests. This will be outlined in Section 7.3. The nature of farmers’ interests indicates a particular mode of collective action and a high degree of deliberation is required to establish agreement between NSWFA members and leaders. This conclusion sheds light on the NSWFA’s inability to exercise influence where this influence is itself contingent on the willingness of its members to act. Consequently, the ongoing representative paradox appears as a potential source of instability to the NSWFA’s state of complementarity.

7.2 Reorganising for Disfunction: The Native Vegetation Conservation Act

The ‘environment’ was a central plank of the Carr Labor Government’s 1995 NSW election campaign. Its first significant action in this area was to address native vegetation management\(^1\). Concerned about land degradation and loss of biodiversity due to widespread clearing throughout rural NSW, the government introduced SEPP-46: a state planning regulation.
Chapter Seven The 'Reorganisational Paradigm' in Practice

On August 10, 1995, the 'State Environmental Planning Policy No.46- Protection and Management of Native Vegetation (SEPP-46)' was gazetted in NSW. The introduction of SEPP-46 was the first phase of a four-phased approach to address the conservation of native vegetation in NSW. Phase Two was to consist of community consultation and a performance review. Phase Three would consider further amendment options or alternatives for SEPP-46 and Phase Four would use TCM as a cooperative basis for native vegetation management and would be ongoing (DLWC 1998). This measure was taken as a response to research indicating unacceptable levels of clearing on freehold land was responsible for the loss of native vegetation in rural NSW (DLWC 1998). The decision to impose controls through regulation rather than introducing legislation reflected concern that a significant level of pre-emptive clearing was likely (DLWC 1998).

Not surprisingly, the gazetting of such a regulation drew a swift response from the NSWFA. It attacked the government for implementing SEPP-46, claiming it was put in place without prior consultation and was placed in regulation to avoid parliamentary scrutiny (Comensoli 1995c, 2). The NSWFA’s substantive objections were fivefold (Gulson 1995, 8). On the basis of fairness and equity it argued that those who had conserved native vegetation would be hardest hit and that the general public would gain at the cost of the farming community. It demanded compensation for the loss of future earnings and the costs of managing the areas affected. It objected to the provision of third party rights, which would allow third parties to appeal against the granting of clearing applications even after departmental consent had been obtained. The Association claimed that the regulation ignored the significant vegetation increases that resulted from farmers’ voluntary involvement in ongoing Landcare activities. Finally, the Association argued that the regulations might prevent farmers moving from one enterprise to another; for example moving from extensive sheep production to intensive grape production.

Given these objections the NSWFA’s initial reaction was to call for the regulation to be repealed. Unable to secure this outcome the Association increased the political pressure. The Association first attacked the efficacy of the regulation. The NSWFA designed a
survey form for members to complete when submitting an application under SEPP-46. This enabled the Association to monitor both the number of applications for clearing that had been made and the results of those claims (NSW Farmers 1995e, 11). This more measured response was complemented by a number of small rallies conducted in various urban and rural locations (NSW Farmers 1995g, 3). These efforts culminated in the Association’s General Council demanding the Minister, Kim Yeadon, be sacked (NSW Farmers 1995f, 9). These activities precipitated two important events. Firstly, it established a need in the mind of government to proceed to a consultative phase. Secondly, it forced them to include the NSWFA in that formal consultative process.

**NSWFA Inclusion: Native Vegetation Forum**

With Phase One implemented, Phase Two was commenced. The Native Vegetation Forum was established in November 1995. The NSWFA were invited to participate and did so fully. In its submission to the NSW Vegetation Forum in April, 1996, (NSWFA 1996c), the NSWFA defended the past record of farmers with respect to land clearing. The submission claimed that up until 12 years ago government tax incentives had encouraged clearing activities. It argued that a ‘top down’ regulation like SEPP-46 was unacceptable because it was confrontational, negated Landcare activities, offered no motivation for landholders to adopt regeneration or protection activities, was hard to administer, was impossible to meet all compliance criteria, caused severe income loss, was not cost-effective, was inflexible and provided for third-party rights (McClintock 1996, 15). That these points largely reiterate the initial concerns expressed by the Association suggests that its participation in the forum had not catalysed any significant change in its position.

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2 A series of meetings/rallies were held in Trangie (attendance 1100), Kempsey and Cooma (attendance 250 at each) to voice concerns about the lack of consultation over SEPP-46 and other measures. At a rally in Macquarie Street Ian Donges attacked the minister, Kim Yeadon, for picking a fight with farmers and ignoring the work of the farming community in the environmental area.

3 This forum took over from the ‘State Tree Forum’ established in 1989 to coordinate the implementation of the State Tree Policy. The Minister reporting to parliament named the composition of the NSW Vegetation Forum as DLWC, NSW Agriculture, NPWS, State Forests, EPA, Dept. of Urban Affairs and Planning, Local Government and Shires Association, Total Environment Centre, NSWFA, Greening Australia, Nature Conservation Council and three representatives from Catchment Management Committees (Total of 18 individuals) The Cattlemen’s Union had observer status (NSW Parliamentary Debates- Assembly 1995, 5441).
Whilst the points of criticism remained unchanged the Association relaxed its initial outright opposition to the need for a set of measures to address native vegetation management. Importantly, the Association promoted an alternative. It advocated a ‘bottom up’ approach to replace SEPP-46. The Association suggested that the process used to develop Specified Native Grasslands Management Plans, at that point adopted in five areas of NSW, be extended as a model for all native vegetation management. It was further suggested that a range of incentives and education procedures accompany this to foster regeneration and protection of native vegetation. The Association gave this proposal some theoretical legitimacy by endorsing a concept of ‘distributed intelligence’ (McClintock 1996, 15). The concept refers to the situation where ‘... individuals at the “coalface” with specific problems, are able to understand and develop appropriate and practical solutions to suit their particular circumstances.’ The Association claimed that this type of approach will ‘... develop far more focussed, sophisticated and effective solutions than the top down alternative’ (McClintock 1996, 15). In promoting ‘distributed intelligence’, the Association was willing to concede the need for a set of management parameters enshrined in legislation. Yet it did so on the understanding that the legislation would establish space within which its members could outline local management parameters through regional plans devised by farmer-dominated committees. This understanding was well-placed given that ‘landholders and catchment management groups’ formulated the Native Grasslands Management Plans, on which this proposition was based (Dick 1996, 9). Farmers dominated these groups and environmentalists were not represented.

The recommendations of the NSW Vegetation Forum were released in May, 1996. They included the goal of increasing native vegetation cover in NSW and introduced legislation that took a ‘whole of government’ approach. It was recommended that the

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4 In January 1996, amendment (No.1) was made to SEPP-46 allowing regional plans to be drawn up for five specified areas of native grassland. The following month the plans from the five regions were presented to the NSW Native Vegetation Forum. The minister approved the Specified Native Grasslands Management Plans, removing the need for an application for clearing unless it breached the guidelines set down in the plans (Dick 1996, 9).
legislation incorporate a tiered approach consisting of statewide guidelines, regional management plans, local agreements and a permit system. Generic exemptions would operate statewide with specific ones to be specified in regional plans. An incentive package would accompany these measures. The regional management plans would be compiled by local landholders participating on committees with environmentalists and state officials. Agreement was reached that these plans would be drawn up and, when assented to by the Minister, would supersede existing regulation and any provision of the foreshadowed Act. These measures closely approximated the NSWFA's original position. After the Minister accepted the recommendations of the Vegetation Forum the NSWFA president, Ian Donges, claimed that the issue of SEPP-46 appeared to be resolved (NSW Farmers 1996, 7).

Despite a number of skirmishes between the NSWFA and environmental groups over the increased role for the NPWS in administering the foreshadowed Act, and the number of representatives on the regional committees, the Association deemed the subsequently released draft Native Vegetation Management Bill workable. For the second time the Association's president foreshadowed the imminent resolution of the issue (NSWFA 1997c, PR/058/97). On July 17, 1997, the White Paper outlining the proposed Native Vegetation Conservation Act was released. The NSWFA applauded the draft legislation and for the third time suggested the crisis was over (NSWFA 1997d, PR/359/97). The lingering concern was that the committees developing the regional plans had only two farmer representatives out of 11 committee members.

The final legislation was introduced to parliament on November 19, 1997. After passage through both houses of parliament the 'Native Vegetation Conservation Act, December, 1997' came into force in NSW on January 1, 1998. The legislation utilised the mechanisms of the Regional Vegetation Management Plans (RVMP) and Property Agreements (PA) to set the parameters for clearing. Consent for clearing would only be

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5 It appeared to give the Department of Land and Water exclusive control over its administration, incorporated a grassroots planning process and provided $15 million for the fencing off of native vegetation or regeneration activities.
Chapter Seven  The 'Reorganisational Paradigm' in Practice

necessary if an RVMP was not in place and other pre-existing exemptions did not apply. In this instance, consent would be required under the EP&A Act. If an RVMP was in place, consent would only be required if clearing activities were inconsistent with those outlined in the plan. Once approved by the Minister under the Native Vegetation Conservation Act (NVC Act) the RVMPs would comply under Part 3 of the existing Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (EP&A Act). They would become Regional Environmental Plans under that legislation. A Native Vegetation Advisory Committee (NVAC) replaced the NSW Vegetation Forum as an ongoing source of advice to the Minister on draft RVMPs, priorities for incentives from the Native Vegetation Management Fund, and reviewing and reporting on the status of native vegetation in NSW. The constitution of the NVAC was similar to that of the RVMP committees.

Before the release of the Bill, ‘Interim Amendment No.2’ was made to the SEPP-46 regulations allowing for the preparation and implementation of interim regional plans in lieu of the compatible legislation going to Parliament. In the intervening period between the white paper and the legislation, the first pilot RVMP was commenced. As the only tangible manifestation of the Bill, the committee became the focal point for the conflict over native vegetation management. It is, therefore, worth dwelling on how the Mid-Lachlan RVMP developed.

Devolution: Mid-Lachlan RVMP

The first pilot RVMP under ‘SEPP-46 Amendment No.2’ commenced in the Mid-Lachlan region. The Mid-Lachlan Regional Vegetation Management Committee formed in July, 1997. The constitution of the Mid-Lachlan Committee reflected what was ultimately embodied in the new legislation. The legislation required a committee to be approved by the Minister. It consisted of four representatives of rural interests (at least

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6 Two forms of action can be taken to enforce the RVMP. The first is a stop work notice that orders the landholder to halt work the DLWC believes will likely breach RVMP or NVC Act. The second is a remedial notice that involves the DLWC conducting remedial work if damage in contravention of the Act has occurred. The cost of remedial work is to be recovered from the landholder.

7 The Committee was initially formed as a pilot project under funding from the Land and Water Resources Research and Development Corporation (LWRRDC) until the amendment to the Regulation was gazetted (LWRRDC 1996).
two nominated by the NSWFA). There were required to be two representatives of conservation interests nominated by the Nature Conservation Council of NSW (NCC) and aboriginal interests nominated by the NSW Aboriginal Land Council. There was one representative for each of the following, CMC or CMT, a LC group, local government, DLWC, NPWS, Department of Agriculture and a scientific expert. All non-departmental representatives had to be from within the area to be covered by the plan (*NVC Act 1997* (No.133) (NSW), S.51(7)(1)).

After developing some draft aims, goals and objectives and subjecting these to a public consultation process the group proceeded to draw up the RVMP. By late 1998, the Mid-Lachlan Committee had produced a draft RVMP that included the following guidelines regarding land-management practices. Under the draft Mid-Lachlan RVMP, landholders required specific consent if clearing was within 20 metres of a river environment, in an area designated as containing endangered species or in soil types six and above (those that are easily erodible). Consent fell into three streams: ‘No Change’, ‘Rehabilitation and Preservation’, and ‘Development’. The first stream was for those who did not wish to change anything. These individuals did not require consent, although a property plan was recommended as a way of documenting normal farm practices. The second stream required no consent for ‘Rehabilitation and Preservation’ works but again suggested a property plan. The third stream had two sub-streams. Sub-stream ‘A’ stated that if work met the criteria of the RVMP then action could be taken without specific consent. Sub-stream ‘B’ stated that if work did not fit guidelines in RVMP then landholders needed to apply for consent. This streamlined approach was designed to prompt farmers to learn more about the flora and fauna that was on their land and, in doing so, would generate knowledge that ‘experts’ did not have. The plan was designed as a tool for learning as much as land management. The only significant issue of concern for the landholder members of the committee was the level of compensation for land that contained some protected species and hence was unable to be used for agricultural production (Committee Member Interviews 1998).
Participants in this committee saw the RVMP as a process to give some defensibility to farm practices should they be placed under public scrutiny. The plans have not been used as the basis for a defence by landholders in the Land and Environment Court hence their status is yet to be determined. However, it is anticipated that given the Plan displays farmers’ intent to preserve the environment, and the logic employed to achieve this end, they would withstand scrutiny (Committee Member Interview 1998). Apart from legal imperatives, the Act and the regional committees were viewed by the Mid-Lachlan Committee members as having the potential to catalyse farmers into gaining a better appreciation of their land. Rather than ignore larger societal values and adhering to instrumental ways of valuing land, the RVMP process was designed as a tool to prompt farmers to gain a richer experience from being land managers.

The experiences of committee members illustrated some interesting contrasts with that foreshadowed by the NSWFA. Whilst participants revealed it took a number of meetings for environmentalists to agree that farmers were capable of some form of self-regulation, they reported that it operated very amicably, with all parties working towards a balance between farm management issues and conservation imperatives. One member of the committee said he had some trouble with the regulations and guidelines set by the DLWC. However, there was a subsequent recognition that departmental knowledge needed to be complemented with local knowledge from the landholders themselves. He said that all agencies, including NPWS, were active and cooperative participants on the committee.

In contrast to the NSWFA’s central concern over the lack of a farmer majority on the committees, the experience of members of this committee suggests this was never an issue. Decisions of the Mid-Lachlan Committee were made on a consensus basis rather than by a majority vote. As such, the number of delegates from any one constituency did not change the outcome of the committee. The most important feature of delegates was a willingness to listen and to compromise over issues.
Despite the NSWFA’s ‘in principle’ support of this process, notwithstanding some ongoing reservations, there was evidence that they did not support it through their delegates on the committee. Surprisingly, one landholder representative reported that his fellow landholder representatives (a delegate of the NSWFA) had received no formal input or support from the Association. They received no briefing papers on what issues to raise in the committees and had not been asked by Association leadership for their comments regarding the progress made by the committee.

One NSWFA delegate to the committee asserted that all three Association representatives were opposed to the NSWFA’s position on the workability of the Native Vegetation Conservation Act. Whilst delegates had been nominated onto the committee by the Association there was evidence that some representatives were responding to local sentiment. One NSWFA representative set up his own consultative committee from which he gained advice and reported progress. It was this group he professed to be representing rather than the state’s farmers as a whole or the NSWFA in particular (Committee Member Interview 1998).

Risks and Ramifications

With the threat that SEPP-46 would remain in force until a suitable alternative had been found, the NSWFA was compelled to participate in a political process to come up with a more palatable alternative. The NSWFA’s initial response was to participate in the Vegetation Forum to reach a negotiated compromise, one which retained the integrity of the land resource whilst allowing for reasonable flexibility by farmers in the management of their farm resources. This forum delivered a discussion paper that received general acceptance (NSW Vegetation Forum 1995). The paper concluded that regional committees were in the best position to construct an effective regime of native vegetation management. This recommendation reflected the view that interest-group leaders and bureaucrats could not arrive at meaningful statewide prescriptions. This conclusion meant the NSWFA had avoided a unilateral regime of environmental regulation, which it was unable to influence or control.
For the NSWFA leadership, this meant devolving resolution of the issue to its ‘grassroots’ membership. This was consistent with the underlying logic of its ‘distributed intelligence’ model; a model that was clearly designed to move the resolution of the issue to an arena where it felt best able to control the outcome and that was beyond the reach of environmental interests. In devolving the issue to regional committees, such as that in the Mid-Lachlan, the NSWFA believed these forums would enable its members to *continue* pursuing its policy of opposing regulation, a goal that it was no longer able to productively pursue at the interest-group level. Initially, it anticipated a farmer majority on the committees that would allow it to set the guidelines independent of environmental and government interests. However, when this majority was not delivered, and the NSWFA again opposed the Act, it would appear the Association came to the view that, regardless of composition, any committee structure would provide ample evidence of the *unworkability and cumbersome* nature of the Act. Its lack of genuine support to its members on the Mid-Lachlan Committee confirms that the Association approached its participation in the committee with a view to illustrate the Act’s flawed nature. Presumably, the Association then would have ample evidence to call for the Act’s abandonment. At this point one could be fairly certain that the NSWFA would *withdraw* from the process including *pulling members out* of the committee process.

The NSWFA’s concurrence with a strategy of devolution brought with it significant risks. The obvious risk was that its delegates on regional committees would adopt positions that were inconsistent with those of the Association. Therefore, the *continuity* between the position of the Association’s leadership and members would be broken. Further, it ran the risk that its delegates to the committees would not experience the full range of frustrations foreshadowed by the Association. It would have difficulty, therefore, illustrating the Act as *unworkable* and *cumbersome*. Finally, having devolved the issue to its members on committees, the Association ran the risk that it would be unable to *pull out* their members and *withdraw* from the process should they deem the process to be unsatisfactory or flawed. In such an eventuation, it ran the risk of becoming beholden to the actions of the few members who were on committees. Given the assumptions made by, and the inherent risks for, the Association, the Mid-Lachlan RVMP amounted to a
test of its capacity to demonstrate to the state that it could foster member agreement and compliance.

As the Mid-Lachlan Committee was midway through its deliberations, the NVC Act was passed through parliament. According to the NSWFA, the legislation contained two important departures from the measures foreshadowed in the Vegetation Forum. Firstly, the original agreement to have only one consenting department, the DLWC, had been extended to include the NPWS. Given the NPWS’s poor profile with the farming community, concern was expressed that the consent criteria would not reflect farmers’ interests. Further, it was charged that the time delay in having two departments consenting on applications, and on the RVMPs themselves, would be significant. Secondly, the Act would be subordinate to the Environmental Protection Act, which amongst other things left farmers open to third-party litigation. The Association was concerned that environmental interests may commence actions in the Land and Environment Court objecting to the management decisions of farmers on private property (NSWFA 1998c, PR/061/98).

These concerns prompted the NSWFA Director of Conservation and Resource Management, Sue Salvin, to comment:

The NSW Vegetation Forum set up by the State Government and contributed to by all sides, including the NSW Farmers’ Association, undertook extensive public consultation and put forward a number of recommendations for the future management of native vegetation in the state. Despite this, the final legislation scarcely reflects either the consultation or the recommendations (NSWFA 1998c, PR/061/98).

She went on to say:

Certainly, the simple ‘one-stop shop’ for clearing approvals, envisaged by the Vegetation Forum, will not be a reality. Instead, farmers wishing to clear land can expect to be involved in a protracted and bureaucratic process involving at least two State Government Agencies (NSWFA 1998c, PR/061/98).

Given the legislation the NSWFA returned to the initial position it had adopted with respect to SEPP-46, one of intense opposition. Whilst opposition to the new legislation was again being mounted by interest-group leaders arguing about matters of political and legal principle, the only effective opposition to the new legislation had to be couched in
terms of evidence revealed under the regional committee process. The Association could not oppose legislation in which it was itself participating unless it could illustrate by virtue of that participation that the Act was unworkable. As such, the Association had to demonstrate through the experiences of its members that the regional committees themselves were proving unworkable.

The NSWFA emphasised how the development of RVMPs was proving to be too onerous a task for ordinary farmers. Sue Salvin claimed that ‘... the process for developing these plans will take at least 18 months and that following the input from the local community, the plan will have to negotiate a series of bureaucratic hurdles before receiving final approval from the Minister.’ (NSWFA 1998c, PR/061/98). In establishing this argument the experiences of the Mid-Lachlan Committee would become crucial.

The way the rest of the state’s farmers perceived the Act’s implementation would be central in determining its acceptance. Consequently, the Association had to ensure the reporting of the Mid-Lachlan Committee’s experiences reflected its concerns. A report of the Committee’s progress was made to the March, 1998, meeting of the NSWFA General Council. It was reported in the press as follows:

Moves to develop a pilot native vegetation management plan in the Mid-Lachlan region are being hindered by “professional obstructionists”, NSW Farmers’ Association president, Ian Donges, claims ... the Association might consider pulling farmer representatives out of the exercise. (Dick 1998b, 5).

Another general council member of the NSWFA described the Mid-Lachlan Committee as ‘a war of attrition’.

Noticeably absent was any direct reportage of the experiences of the Mid-Lachlan Committee members themselves. Instead, the Association put out press releases outlining direct experiences from other and, significantly, more formative groups. In a NSWFA press release, Neil Warden, a landholder representative on the Northern Floodplain Regional Planning Group, commented:

We have no idea where we stand, and how our plan will be dealt with under the new Native Vegetation Act. I believe the government is cynically proposing these plans be
developed by the community, but then putting endless convoluted processes on top of
them to ensure the plans never see the light of day. (NSWFA 1998d, PR/072/98).

Given the very early stage of the group’s development, these concerns appeared to be the
result of uncertainty rather than from any concrete evidence that the plans were not in
fact being accepted or were likely to be subjected to onerous bureaucratic revision. It is
this uncertainty which the Association capitalised on in its framing of the ‘environmental
threat’. Nowhere is this clearer that in the opening paragraph of the press release which
contained the landholder’s statement. The paragraph reads:

Farmers involved in preparing regional vegetation plans in the west of the state have
revealed a process of endless frustration, bureaucratic interference and blowouts in costs
amounting to hundreds of thousands of dollars. (NSWFA 1998d, PR/072/98).

Whilst the Association did not draw attention to it, other members were enunciating a
cautious yet less condemnatory experience with the Act. A member of the Walgett
Committee indicated to the General Council of the NSWFA that ‘... farmers in his
district were close to finalising their regional vegetation management plan and were
“treading carefully” to comply with the Act ... he believed the Minister was on the
farmers’ side to some degree’ (Dick 1998b, 5).

In stark contrast to his three earlier claims that the issue’s resolution was immanent, the
president of the NSWFA confidently announced that:

... the Native Vegetation Conservation Act is incapable of achieving this balance
[between production and conservation objectives] and as a result it will never gain the
cooperation of the farming community, which is essential for its successful
implementation. (NSWFA 1998e, PR/076/98).

The claim of the NSWFA president overlooked the way the farming community in the
Mid-Lachlan was cooperating with the Act. The same selectivity was evident in the
reporting of the Association to its own members. The lack of cooperation from the
balance of the farming community reflected the Association’s ability to create uncertainty

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8 Indeed, this feeling is consistent with the experiences of the Mid-Lachlan members. They indicated that
the early stages of the committee were dogged by a lack of information and unclear guidelines on how to
proceed. As such, it appears this group member is observing a normal part of the group building process
than a flawed piece of legislation.
and anxiety rather than any demonstrable and fundamental shortcoming in the operation of RVMP.

Despite the rhetoric, any demonstration by the Association of a fundamental malfunction in the operation of the Act would have to be through the experiences of the Mid-Lachlan committee participants. However, as established in the previous section, the feedback from participants on this committee had been positive. The task of demonstrating flaws in the committee was further damaged when, in response to the NSWFA’s reportage, the entire Mid-Lachlan Committee took the unprecedented step of writing a letter to *The Land* newspaper to set the record straight about its progress. It pointed out that the Committee was functioning well and that, despite the NSWFA’s claims that it would take more than 18 months for plans to be completed, it would deliver a plan within nine months of its commencement (*The Land* 1998a, 18).

The experiences and actions of those NSWFA delegates on the Mid-Lachlan Committee have, in effect, brought to fruition each of the inherent risks for the NSWFA associated with using devolution as a means of opposing the regulation of native vegetation management. The strategy had relied on the membership, pursuing the same position as the Association leadership (establishing *continuity and agreement*), having similar experiences to those foreshadowed by the Association (establishing the Act as *unworkable and cumbersome*) and complying with leaders’ requests to abandon participation should the need arise (establishing *compliance*). When each of these was not realised the inherent risks in the strategy materialised.

The letter publicly confirmed the realisation of the first risk: that the experiences of the delegates on the committee were different to those foreshadowed by the Association. It also confirmed the second risk: that a gap would emerge between the position of the Association and its delegates on local committees. Environment lobby groups, through the NSW Nature Conservation Council (NCC), exploited this gap. The NCC tried to reposition itself with the farming community by asserting that:
Chapter Seven

The 'Reorganisational Paradigm' in Practice

Our problem is not with farmers, but with the NSW Farmers’ Association ... conservationists and farmers are already working together despite NSW Farmers’.
(Wright 1998, 20).

The third risk, that members of the RVMP would not comply with leadership directions to withdraw from the process, was also realised. The threat by the Association to ‘pull farmer representatives out’ of the RVMP process proved to be a hollow one (Dick 1998b, 5). As was observed earlier, one NSWFA delegate on the Mid-Lachlan Committee maintained that his real constituency was the landholders of the region to which the RVMP applied. As such, he indicated he would not ‘pull out’ unless his local members requested that he do so (Committee Member Interview 1998). Having lost the compliance of its members, the NSWFA leadership has been unable to exercise the option of withdrawing support for the implementation of the Act as a way of expressing its opposition.

The realisation of these risks left the NSWFA occupying a contradictory and ambiguous position. On the one hand it was still putting forward members to sit on committees as they were formed under the Act, whilst on the other it had refused to take up its seats on the Native Vegetation Advisory Committee (The Land 1998b, 6). This contradictory approach, cooperation on regional committees but lack of cooperation at the interest-groups level, prompted some members to claim that ‘A total policy of non-participation by the NSW Farmers’ to the Native Vegetation Conservation Act may not be in the best interests of its membership.’ (Pfeiffer 1998, 16). Given the evidence that the Association could not compel its delegates on committees to act in the way they were instructed or to withdraw their involvement, the Association adopted a strategy of taking back control of the issue from the membership.

NSWFA 'Regaining Control'

The NSWFA’s initial support for the RVMP process turned to outright opposition. It claimed that the new Act, which replaces the regulation SEPP-46, is both inconsistent with the principles agreed to by the NSW Vegetation Forum and unworkable. This position was at odds with the experiences of those NSWFA representatives on the RVMP committees. Many representatives reported that the plans were almost finished and they
were confident they would be accepted. The only concern expressed was regarding uncertainty about where the plans would go once they were put forward for ministerial approval, the length of time until consent would be given and the issue of compensation. Consequently, members of the Mid-Lachlan pilot committee were not willing to comply with directions from the Association that they withdraw from the process altogether.

Confronted with a non-compliant membership and evidence that the Act was indeed workable, the Association had the option of suspending its public opposition against the measures and genuinely participating in the regional planning process. If the applicability of the Act varied across regions, as the pursuance of a regional planning process generally presupposes, then this would be borne out only through further piloting and a genuine evaluation process. Instead, given it could not reverse the regional committee process, it chose to try and negate its risks. This strategy was about the leadership trying to regain control over the prosecution of the issue. Instead of investing power in the direct participation of members in committees it wanted to transfer that back to the leadership. Whilst reversing devolution could not be achieved by removing their delegates, the Association effectively neutralised the non-compliance of members participating in the committees by refocusing activities opposing the legislation back into the interest-group and political arena.

The strategy for regaining control depended on discrediting the achievements of the Mid-Lachlan Committee whilst simultaneously arguing that the issue required more decisive and dramatic action at the interest-group level. The first goal of discrediting Committee outcomes was largely achieved by giving scant reporting of the views of Committee participants. In many instances they appeared to be insisting that participants had been misled and that their experience of success was merely a foil for increased regulation. Whilst the NSWFA passed a motion at its March, 1998, General Council meeting to direct greater support to the Association’s representatives on the Committee, it has not genuinely pursued the possibilities these forums present. In fact, that original motion which named the current representatives on the Committee was amended to omit them, leaving the Association with the option of replacing its delegates on the Committee at a
later date should they prove too troublesome (NSW Farmers 1998, General Council Meeting Insert).

In appearances at public forums the leadership of the Association continued to mount arguments about the unworkability of the Act. At a meeting of the Australian Institute of Agricultural Science and Technology, Ian McClintock, of the NSWFA, claimed: ‘The present NVCA approach is flawed and is creating conflict which can only lead to sub-optimal outcomes, increasing resentment and non-compliance’ (AIAST 1998, 13). In an information vacuum where no members of the Mid-Lachlan Committee were available to comment on their experiences, McClintock was able to use the Mid-Lachlan plan to make his point.

The second component of its strategy was to mount an information campaign targeting landholders who had no direct experience with the RVMP process in those areas that were not significantly affected by the legislation. The Association has always conceded that only 40% of members would be directly affected by SEPP. It legitimated its intense opposition by suggesting the other 60% wanted to see it turned around (NSW Farmers 1995). Its strategy to regain control has been to invest time in mobilising opposition amongst the 60% of unaffected members.

The NSWFA organised a rally on Tuesday, April 28, 1998, to highlight its objections to the legislation. Busloads of members came from all over the state to march from The Domain through Sydney to State Parliament House. The final turnout was reported to be between three and four thousand. A briefing note from the NSWFA’s CEO to office bearers included details of the Association’s publicity strategy (NSWFA 1998h). The fact that the NSWFA placed an open letter to the Premier outlining their concerns in the largest rural newspaper, The Land, as opposed to any urban media, indicated the action was for the consumption of members rather than the urban public. That is, it was about galvanising internal support rather than contributing to the issue’s resolution. To this end leaders have emphasised the need for unity in an effort to imbue some legitimacy into their activities. The NSWFA President, John Cobb, commented: ‘Anybody who missed
this event missed something I believe was felt by everybody to be very special; a sense of unity and purpose not seen for a long time.’ (Cobb 1998, 19).

The leadership linked the rally with the waterfront dispute between the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) and the NFF supported Patricks Stevedores in order to bolster the turnout. In respect of the NVC Act, the rally gave no space for those NSWFA delegates on the committees that had so far been working. Instead, it promoted the negative experiences of members participating in committees that had yet to form or that had only just formed. Speakers emphasised the ‘anti-farmer’ agenda of the Carr Government and the fact that the Association had been marginalised in deliberations over the Act. The confrontational approach was carried over to the subsequent Annual Conference. The Premier’s invitation to address the conference was withdrawn (NSWFA 1998f, PR/209/98). Further, a motion was passed proposing that members ‘close the gate’ on government officers, refusing permission for them to enter their properties until the Act was repealed (NSWFA 1998g, PR/210/98).

The strategy of ‘regaining control’ appears to have been moderately successful. The sentiment in the general farm community seems to be that the government is trying to lay siege to the farming community through onerous and bureaucratic measures such as the NVC Act. For instance, in response to an inquiry about whether the native vegetation management issue was a concern in his region one farmer remarked:

Yes. This is the government being pushed by the environmentalists to sort of set up guidelines as to how you can use your country, what you can do to it! Nobody sort of lent on us around here ... but in places they apparently have ... up in the Monero and out west. (Farmer Interview-Tarcutta 1997)

This comment at the height of the public campaign by the NSWFA reflects the views expressed by an overwhelming majority of NSWFA members who have not been directly affected by the legislation. As such, it indicates the extent to which the Association has been able to create widespread anxiety about the impact of environmental issues on their ‘property rights’.
Chapter Seven  The ‘Reorganisational Paradigm’ in Practice

Missed Opportunities

The actions of the NSWFA in addressing the issue of native vegetation management in NSW have been described in terms of three phases: inclusion, devolution and regaining control. The movement to inclusion was achieved by the Association’s public reaction to the absence of consultation by government prior to enactment of the regulation. The movement from inclusion to devolution was catalysed by the Vegetation Forum conclusion that the issue required a regional, rather than an interest-group, approach. The Association concurred with this strategy because it could not secure the removal of SEPP-46 without some form of replacement legislation. Further, the Association came to believe the proposed legislation was unworkable and its members would reveal this through their participation in regional committees. The final move by the NSWFA to regain control signified its recognition that evidence of the Act’s unworkable nature was not going to emanate from its members’ participation in regional committees as was expected. Consequently, the leadership needed to regain control over the issue and attempt a more confrontational approach at the interest-group level to remove the Act.

Despite the machinations described in this section, the NSWFA seemed unable to understand why it failed to influence this issue. A general councillor of the NSWFA commented: ‘Considering farmers are by far the largest owners and managers of land in NSW, I find it difficult to understand why our opinions and reactions to the government’s approach to land-clearing reform have been so quickly and easily dismissed …’ (Campbell 1998, 15). To understand why influence was not forthcoming one needs to first probe why the risks to the NSWFA were realised. The next section will argue that the reason for these risks becoming reality can be found in the relationship the Association leadership constructed with its members in order to reach complementarity. That is, the division of labour created as a plank of its ‘second wave’ reforms and its emphasis on reducing the willingness to act.

7.3 Explaining the Absence of Agreement within the NSWFA

In devolving responsibility for the prosecution of the native vegetation management issue, the Association assumed that its members would pursue its official position and
Chapter Seven  The 'Reorganisational Paradigm' in Practice

would comply with its directives. The risk in adopting a devolutionary strategy was that these assumptions would prove incorrect. In both instances, the assumptions proved to be incorrect. The materialisation of these risks reflects the Association's inability to foster agreement with its membership. It was the absence of agreement that left the Association unable to coordinate their members' activities in a politically meaningful way and which in turn reduced its capacity to influence the outcome of the issue. This raises the question as to why agreement was not generated in this instance and how agreement could have been generated.

Interest Commensurability, Collective Action and the Nature of Interests

Agreement between members and leaders of an interest group is not automatic. Typically, some type of consultation must occur between members and leaders in order to determine the goals of the group. Clearly, the degree of deliberation these consultations incorporate varies considerably. The extent to which deliberative forums are necessary to engender agreement between leaders and members around group goals is, according to Offé and Wiesenthal (1980), contingent on the nature of the constituencies' interests. The nature of interests has to this point been expressed as either heterogeneous or homogeneous. Where heterogeneous interests are inputs into an interest group, deliberative mechanisms and a dialogical mode of collective action are necessary to reach a collective position. Conversely, where homogenous interests are inputs into an interest group, no such deliberation is necessary and a monological mode of collective action is appropriate.

The factor that determines whether the interests of a constituency are homogeneous or heterogeneous at the commencement of collective action and, as such, whether a monological or dialogical mode of collective action is appropriate, is the commensurability of interests. Offé and Wiesenthal give commensurability a class dimension. They distinguish between the interest commensurability of business and labour. Given the imperative of capital to accumulate, they argue that business interests are commensurable via cost/benefit calculus. Given that this calculus can be applied by professional secretariats with little consultation, no formal deliberative mechanism need exist within the association to create commensurability. At the opposing end of the
spectrum, the interests of labour are broad and diverse. Indeed, they often encapsulate issues that are far removed from the place of work. As such, labour interests are not commensurable by the leaders applying an objective calculus independent of interaction with members. Instead, individual interests are not commensurable without the development of a collective identity that provides an interpretive framework.

It is for reasons of interest commensurability that Offe and Wiesenthal argue a dialogical logic of collective action is a model that reflects the organisational needs of unions, whilst a monological logic of collective action is a model that reflects the organisational needs of business associations. Whilst Offe and Wiesenthal’s essay refers to union organisations, its principle argument is that ‘... the position of a group in the class structure (we consider here only the classes of labour and capital)’ (1980, 76) has a significant bearing on the internal and external behaviour of the organisation. This reference does not limit the underlying argument to understanding unions and business organisations. Rather, it invites the implications of this asymmetry to be explored more broadly for other groups.

Theoretical Definition of the Nature of Farmers’ Interests

Offe and Wiesenthal’s linking of interest commensurability with class position has clear implications for considering the activities of the NSWFA. As has been previously suggested, the NSWFA have employed a ‘division of labour’ akin to that utilised by business associations. Consistent with the model proposed by Offe and Wiesenthal (1980), this ‘division of labour’ will produce agreement with members if farmers have interests that can be made commensurable with reference to an objective calculus, that is, interests like business. There has, however, been significant debate regarding the position of farmers within capitalist relations and the apparent persistence and/or transformations of farming within capitalist economies. The resistance of the farm sector to the penetration of capital and its reliance on family labour renders its class characteristics quite different to that of business (Marsden, Lowe and Whatmore 1990, 3). As such, one is clearly justified in considering the definition of a class interest for farmers as being indeterminate. This in turn throws doubt on the accuracy of the assumptions guiding the
NSWFA's 'division of labour'. If, in terms of ease of commensurability, farmers' interests are not akin to those of business then the current 'division of labour' adopted by the NSWFA is unlikely to produce agreement.

For the purpose of this thesis, it is enough to highlight the 'dual' nature of family farms in relation to non-commodified and commodified relations of production. Whilst farmers are propertied and have to engage in capitalist relations external to the farm, their internal relations are often structured along kinship lines. The family farm requires a balancing of goals of the enterprise and the household whilst significant levels of inter-family farm social activity also occurs in relation to enterprise management.

This intertwining of familial, community and economic interests implies that farmers' interests cannot be considered as narrowly based on instrumental achievements and hence easily mediated with reference to profit maximisation as is implicit in the 'farm as a business' frame. This is borne out by a number of factors relating to farm production. Farmers' interests can be both sectoral (to do with their role as a farm manager) and spatial (to do with their location in rural areas) in nature. Issues like the provision of government social services including educational and health facilities are of just as much import as issues such as 'terms of trade' and wages policy. As mentioned above, farm labour is often of a family nature and unpaid which has placed the tension between lifestyle and profit at the centre of farmers' concerns. More recently, the issue of family farm labour has led to growing recognition of the gendered nature of farming and has brought issues such as succession planning and family law (as it relates to divorce property settlements) to the fore (Voyce 1996, 101). These are life chance issues, combinations of which lead to a diverse range of particular interests amongst farmers.

Contemporary events in rural Australia are further fragmenting the interests of farmers. The uneven economic impact of changes in the policy environment indicates the existence of further differences that may divide agricultural producers at the structural

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6Graham (1966, 15) suggests that farmers organise on two basis, one regional (country versus the city) and the other sectional (farmers versus business, unions and banks).
level. The primary producers exacting the greatest economic returns tend to be vertically integrated, employing non-family labour, and utilising their own technical experts. They tend to be larger farms (Martin 1996) and typically do not correlate with one commodity group such as ‘graziers’ or ‘farmers’.

The rise of economic rationalism has developed another cleavage. Some producers, regardless of commodity, support government protection until overseas governments meet GATT targets, whilst others call for increased pace of protection reform and the fostering of competitiveness. Some argue for the maintenance of the small rural town, whilst others see the development of large rural centres as the best and most efficient way for the government to provide services. For some, the farm is a business, conducted if it is efficient or left if not. To others, it is, above all, a way of life to be fostered regardless of financial hardship.

The issues normally associated with ‘new politics’ have made an impact on farmers. Environmental concerns create cleavages between farmers who believe they have the ‘right to farm’ and those who adopt a stewardship approach. The place of women on farms is an issue creating tensions in rural society. The recognition of women as partners in a farm business is disconcerting to some, whilst to others it is due confirmation that the burden has always been shared.

The waves of change over farming society seem to have hit with more frequency and ferocity in the past decade. Each has rendered this constituency more fragmented. Whilst farmers have organised under a single interest-group organisation, this discussion suggests that under the umbrella exists a range of heterogeneous interests. Farmers have become more fragmented regarding what they consider as a promising future model of agriculture.

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10 For instance, cotton versus wheat and beef producers over the extent of chemical use. This came to a head Gunnedah (North West NSW) in 1996 after escalating over a number of previous years.
The Erosion of Agreement Under the ‘Second Wave’ Reforms

According to Offe and Wiesenthal’s argument, leaders who wish to create agreement between members and themselves need to design their structured interactions with members according to the nature of the interests they represent. Where members are assumed to have homogeneous interests prior to joining in collective action, leadership need only couch the interests of members in objective terms and articulate them. At the most, leaders may have to conduct an awareness-raising exercise to re-acquaint members with the group’s goals, hence formalising agreement. Where members are assumed to have heterogeneous interests prior to participating in collective action, leaders must generate interests through deliberative, discursive and participative forums. Confronted with the need to create agreement and awareness amongst their membership, leaders can adopt one of these two approaches.

In seeking to explain why it is that agreement between leaders and members was absent during the prosecution of the NVC Act, one is drawn back to the discussions in Chapter Five and Six about the way the NSWFA has structured interactions with its members. An achievement of the ‘second wave’ reforms was the erosion of the deliberative forums within its structure. The ‘second wave’ reforms emphasised individual rewards for membership and the contribution of financial rather than participative or emotive support. Consequently, the branches and district councils that drew grassroots members into deliberations on issues of significance and allowed collective positions to be reached have been largely reduced to meetings about applying for capitations and confirming leadership positions. Even the Annual Conference amounts to ratifying positions that have been largely predetermined by the Association leadership which has the technical skills and knowledge of the political system to make rational determinations.

The lack of commitment to determining a collective interest through discursive governance structures is clearly founded on the belief that farmers’ interests can be defined in objective terms. It would appear that the NSWFA, in implementing its reforms, took the view that members did not require deliberative forums to form collective interests. It assumed, perhaps implicitly, that farmers as a distinctive social
grouping had a particular, even essentialist, set of experiences which, in turn, enabled an objective set of interests to be accorded to them. This position is reflected in the ‘division of labour’ promoted by the Association. The leadership’s framing of farmers’ interests as akin to those of business reflects their attempt to create a mechanism to make the various interests of their members commensurable via an economic rationality which can be applied objectively by leaders.

However, the previous section displays ample reasons to support the proposition that farmers’ interests are far from homogenous and are not readily amenable to objective calculation. Given the nexus between heterogenous interests and deliberative decision-making, this conclusion suggests farmers require strong deliberative structures to reach agreement. It is on this basis that this chapter concludes the problems the NSWFA confronted in coordinating the activities of members in a politically useful manner over the NVC Act issue originated from the absence of an underlying agreement between members and leaders. It is further concluded that the absence of agreement has arisen due to the lack of deliberative forums within the NSWFA and the application of a representative ‘division of labour’ that promotes a passive membership. In sum, the Association’s achievement of complementarity has come at the cost of reducing the background levels of agreement between leaders and members and the erosion of deliberative forums that could generate such agreement if it were to prove necessary. The absence of background agreement is, therefore, the major source of instability in the state of complementarity.

In adopting this argument one is implicitly claiming that the absence of agreement between members and leaders over the NVC Act extends across all other issues the Association pursues. Indeed, if it is the nature of farmers’ interests that demands deliberative forums for agreement to be fostered, then the absence of these forums within the NSWFA should mean agreement is absent across the full range of issue areas. Whilst this argument has theoretical cogency the empirical evidence suggests that the type of public exhibition of disagreement evident in the NVC Act issue has rarely been exhibited in other issues. One could argue that this in itself suggests the disagreement between
members and leaders is limited to this one issue. This would, however, be to ignore the theme of this thesis which maintains that the explanation of the lack of agreement lies in a systemic flaw in the Association's internal structures introduced through the 'second wave' reforms. If one follows this latter line of thinking, the most useful explanation is that some intrinsic property of the NVC Act issue itself drew out these risks and exposed them whilst other issues act to obscure and bury them. Having resolved that the NSWFA is likely to have low levels of agreement with members on most issues it is important to identify under what conditions these risks materialise and hence limit the exercise of influence.

7.4 Conclusion

The NSWFA's attempt to exercise influence over the issue of Native Vegetation Management in NSW further supports the argument that the Association's assumptions regarding the interests of its members have been inaccurate. The incapacity of the NSWFA to gain compliance of its members is testament to a lack of agreement. Further, that one committee member in the Mid-Lachlan had to set up his own forum to gather agreement from local landholders suggests that the NSWFA's forums are not able to foster agreement. This has significant repercussions for the stability of NSWFA's state of complementarity.

Both the theory and the issue of native vegetation management suggest that farmers' interests are not amenable to definition by the objective application of an economic calculus, but require a discursive moment to develop commensurability (Offe and Wiesenthal 1980, 75). This commensurability is, therefore, an output of, rather than input into, the interest-group system. If one adopts this position then a different significance to that proffered by the NFF family would be ascribed to members' disillusionment and criticism of the NFF and, subsequently, a different response would be required from the Association. In this instance, the criticisms of members would reflect the diversity in interests amongst the farming constituency. Therefore, rather than enhancing communication of their objectively calculated interests, the Association would have to look at provisions for the enhanced involvement and participation by members in the
policy affairs and decision-making of the NSWFA. Given that farmers have a broad range of utilitarian and non-utilitarian interests to be represented, the central task of their representational organisation must be to develop commensurability between particular interests through the formation of a collective identity. The commensurability of these interests cannot be secured merely by reference to objectively calculable cost/benefit analysis, conducted by the administrative hub of the farmer-representative organisation, with little genuine consultation or identity-building. As such, the NSWFA has erred by failing to address the representative paradox.

In this context, the response by the NSWFA to this paradox has been self-defeating. The NSWFA has ‘re-positioned itself’ with regards to its members by settling on a ‘division of labour’ in which members are only required to exhibit a willingness to pay. This has created an internal relationship between the Association and its members that assumes the interests of members are homogenous, the issues require expert opinion, and can ultimately be resolved with reference to objective facts. It has been argued that the assumptions underpinning the NSWFA’s reform process are incorrect. Farmers’ interests are becoming more heterogeneous. They are far from naturally individualistic and they show a capacity to undertake collective action.

The NSWFA has created a situation where it has low underlying levels of agreement with members over the goals it should pursue yet it has no readily accessible mechanisms to create this level of agreement should it prove necessary. In the case of the NVC Act, the need for agreement became necessary and the Association was unable to respond in a constructive manner. One must, however, acknowledge that whilst the Association was unable to coordinate the activities of members in the committees it was able to coordinate the activities of members in the ‘regaining control’ phase. The rallies and public demonstrations testify to this fact. Yet one must delineate between actions aimed at securing agreement and those that are aimed at obscuring the absence of agreement. In the lead-up to the rally, communication by the Association leaders targeting those members unaffected by the legislation, was not emphasising the need to pursue unity through member participation in discursive forums where any contradictions or
heterogeneity in their positions could be resolved. Rather, it was effectively enforcing unity by promoting the view that the NVC Act was the first element of a wave of anti-farmer legislation. Consequently, members' interests were imposed and manufactured rather than debated and owned.

Significantly, the monological nature of this communication acted to reinforce the leadership's perception regarding both the needs and constitution of the organisation membership. By its very nature, information disseminated in a monological manner draws attention away from divergences in material conditions and interests within the Association's membership, ensuring that no critical mass of discontent within the organisation can develop. The lack of critical internal dialogue limits the potential for an awareness and appreciation of the heterogeneity of membership to emerge. In this respect the contrast between the NSWFA president's comment that the rally fostered a sense of unity and the significant level of ongoing disagreement over the Act at the local level is insightful. It seems to support the argument that the actions taken to regain control were designed to create a sense of unity rather than express a newly established level of agreement amongst members.

Whilst the NCC indicated its view that there was an absence of agreement between the NSWFA leadership and their members, the state and other political interlocutors have yet to make such a connection. This is largely because the NSWFA has yet to experience this type of fragmentation within its constituency over the production and economic issues that still make up a majority of its lobbying work. The next chapter will attempt to identify the conditions under which the absence of agreement is exposed. This will provide some idea as to how the Association may respond and the risks of not responding. The central issue is to what extent the NVC Act issue is different to other issues that the Association seems to exercise influence over unproblematically. Is there agreement on these issues but not on the NVC Act issue? Alternatively, is agreement equally absent across all issues but only revealed in certain instances?
Chapter Eight

Prospects for the Future: Learning from the NVC Act

8.1 Introduction

The way in which the NVC Act issue evolved marked a significant departure from the pattern of interaction that had previously prevailed between the state and the NSWFA. This new pattern of interaction has rendered the NSWFA’s typical policy response ineffectual. Consequently, it has been left in the embarrassing and contradictory position of its leaders ‘sitting out’ of the state-sponsored consultative process whilst its members continue to participate in the regional process. Further, its constituency and the state are receiving mixed signals about the position of farmers on the issue of native vegetation management. The absence of agreement was identified as the reason why the NSWFA leadership was unable to coordinate the actions of its members in a politically useful manner and, hence, unable to influence the NVC Act. The absence of agreement within the NSWFA has been attributed to the disjuncture between the internal forms of member consultation created under the ‘second wave’ reforms and the heterogeneous nature of farmers’ interests. Further, a connection has also been made between the absence of coordinative capacity by the NSWFA leadership and the fragmenting nature of a farming identity. This chapter will discuss the extent to which the problems the NSWFA experienced over the NVC Act issue are likely to be repeated. Further, it is intended to explore the consequences of this scenario for the representation of farmers’ interests and the steering capacity of the state.

Section 8.2 will commence with recapping the basis on which the NFF family’s corporatist arrangements with the state were entered into. These arrangements will be expounded in terms of the exchange of guarantees of organisational survival between the state and the NFF and the NFF and its members. The risks of such an exchange are discussed. Section 8.3 will identify the features of ‘new’ issues, such as the NVC Act, that prompt the state to abandon a resolution through corporatist arrangements. Section 8.4 will argue that to exercise influence over these ‘new’ issues interest groups require
specific organisational capacities. Consequently, it is argued that the NFF family's inability to exercise influence over such issues will continue unless it develops such capacities. However, before one can speculate about the degree of urgency with which the Association should develop these organisational capacities it is necessary to document whether 'new' issues are likely to become more prevalent. Section 8.5 argues that not only are new issues proliferating, but also issues previously governed by corporatist arrangements are slowly developing features alike those evident in 'new' issues. As such, the NFF family faces significant pressure to develop relevant organisational and representational capacity. Given that these issues are likely to increase in prevalence, Section 8.6 focuses on some of the repercussions for the state, the representation of farmers' interests and the NFF family. Section 8.7 speculates as to the way the political system, interconnected as it is, will attempt to correct these repercussions.

8.2 The Pattern of Interaction between the NFF family and the State

The corporatist relationship established between successive governments and the NFF family has secured a monumental change in the paradigm underpinning agricultural policy (see Chapter One, Section 1.5). In embarking upon this corporatist arrangement, the state granted the NFF a virtual monopoly over representing farmers' interests on all manners of policy committees and also granted access to its bureaucracy and agencies. In exchange, the NFF had to ensure that its members would not put into question the established political processes or question its long-term motivations, that is, they would not question the pursuance of a trade-liberal paradigm. However, this had to be achieved in a way that did not threaten the NFF family's financial support from members. For the NFF family to achieve these dual imperatives it had to create, through its SFOs, a passive membership. This was achieved through the 'second wave' reforms that created a state of complementarity (see Chapter Six, Section 6.8).

This arrangement opened the way for both the NFF family and the state to realise their agendas with a minimum of resistance. The corporatist arrangements provided a means of allowing inconsistent interests to be filtered from policy debates and the farming
constituency to be disciplined. By granting the NFF family monopoly representation the state ensured that any concerns by farmers had to be channelled through the NFF leadership. This in turn allowed the leadership to filter out any interests that ran counter to the prevailing policy agenda prior to them entering the public arena. To further assist the NFF family’s activities the state did not place any pressure on it to demonstrate that members were in full agreement with leaders. At no stage was it a requirement of the state that members be directly involved in bringing these reforms into play. The combination of the state’s ambivalence in monitoring the NFF’s relationship with its members and the NFF’s pursuance of a passive constituency allowed leaders to exercise the degree of autonomy necessary to participate fully in a corporatist arrangement with the state.

The decision by the state to enter into a corporatist arrangement with the NFF family and, hence, grant these external guarantees to the NFF family, was predicated on two identifiable considerations. The first was a substantial intersection between the particular agendas of the state and the NFF family. There was a clear consensus within the epistemic communities of both the NFF family and the state that a fundamental change in agricultural policy paradigm was required in order to position Australian agriculture for the post-GATT world. As the liberalisation of world trade continued, the NFF family argued that the only remaining barrier to Australian farmers remaining competitive were inefficiencies in the domestic economy which were inflating their cost structures. Consequently, they advocated both economic and labour-market deregulation. These measures were consistent with the agenda of the state, which at the time was considering deregulation of the currency and the financial sector, and was embarking on the Accord process to control wages growth and, hence, inflation.

The second consideration was the NFF family’s capacity as a policy partner. The NFF family had to demonstrate it could effectively ensure the compliance and discipline of its members, that it was professional in its approach to policy advocacy and that it brought to the table well-researched economic arguments. The NFF family had used the militancy of its membership in the early to mid-1980s to back up its claims for inclusion in the
political process. It was the NFF family’s capacity to control this militancy that demonstrated its ability to enhance the state’s steering capacity. Further, the NFF family signified an historic organisational amalgamation of a plethora of diverse farmer and grazier organisations. In so doing, it had the necessary level of organisational resources to replace parochial and emotive arguments with those based on well-researched economic arguments. Of course, these capacities were particular to exercising the role of policy partner within a corporatist mode of policy development.

In organisational terms, the NFF family’s decision to pursue a corporatist arrangement amounted to an exchange of internal for external guarantees of organisational survival. Significantly, the leadership relied on the granting of external guarantees by the state for its organisational survival. The Federation’s decision needs to be viewed in the context of its conclusion that members could not be convinced to maintain membership out of identification with group goals or with reference to shared perceptions of traditions or values. As such, it replaced its previous reliance on internal guarantees as provided by members with external guarantees from the state. The NFF family leadership’s decision created a significant degree of dissatisfaction amongst members who asserted the leadership was detached from their concerns and increasingly resembled part of the state. Indeed, the loss of members and the increase in criticism of the early 1990s testifies to this reaction. Disillusionment, itself, was not addressed. Rather, members were convinced to exchange the manner in which they expressed support from a willingness to act to a willingness to pay. The success of this exchange is evident in the recent increase in membership numbers of the NSWFA. This increase in membership also gave the NFF family the necessary resources it needed to continue with its corporatist role.

Risks of Exchanging Guarantees of Security

Despite the objective success of the exchange there are significant risks for the NFF family. Just as the intersection between the particular agendas of the state and the NFF and the NFF’s capacity as a policy partner are reasons for the state to grant guarantees of support, so, too, may their absence be reasons for its removal. These two points are the major source of risk to the NFF family’s security.
Chapter Eight  Prospects for the Future: Learning from the NVC Act

The actions taken by the NFF family amount to making the security of the organisation contingent on the continuity of the state’s support. The central concern is reflected in Offe and Wiesenthal’s (1980, 218) warning that by substituting ‘external support’ and ‘institutional recognition’ for the internal guarantees of support that the organisation was founded upon, the interest group exposes itself to the ‘... political “business cycle” that affects its status and thereby its chances of survival’. Having made such an exchange, the residual problem for the NFF is how to secure the continuity of external support. This equates with the intersection of the policy trajectories of the state and the interest group.

Offe and Wiesenthal appear to interpret the political ‘business cycle’ as a zero sum game in which an interest group’s status rises and falls according to the political currency of the issue areas within which it works. However, many groups encompass an increasingly broad range of issue areas and, as such, there is also a possibility that the political ‘business cycle’ may render only a portion of the issue areas covered by a group politically unfashionable. In this instance, a group may continue to receive guarantees of survival around one set of issues yet on another have this guarantee withdrawn or weakened.

The additional risk is that the organisational capacity necessary to assist the state in generating steering capacity, in the context of corporatist arrangements, may not correlate with that required under different arrangements. In this scenario, if external guarantees of survival are lost, the leadership may be unable to quickly generate the relevant organisational capacities. Where external guarantees are no longer forthcoming, the leadership must return to members for guarantees of survival. This typically means broadening out support from a willingness to pay to include a willingness to act. This transition may be difficult to deliver, particularly if the withdrawal of external guarantees is only partial and, as such, a group must develop dual capacities.
8.3 New Set of Risks: The Characteristics of New Issues

The NFF family has over the past 20 years reorganised itself in such a way as to maximise its chances of maintaining influence in the prevailing political environment. This ‘modus operandi’ has remained static over the past decade and has facilitated the resolution of mainly economic and agricultural/production-related issues. The NFF family’s continued success in pursuing trade-liberal reform through corporatist-style policy bargaining suggests that the conditions that predicated the state’s decision to enter into such an arrangement still prevail. Further, the stability of the NSWFA’s state of complementarity reflects the continuation of external guarantees of survival from the state. Over recent years, however, the NFF family has been confronted with a range of issues outside of the economic issue arena. The manner in which the NFF family and the state has approached these issues, of which the NVC Act can be viewed as an example, signals a distinct departure from the orthodox political arrangements. If one shifts attention away from the arena of economic policy the well-documented pattern of corporatist policy-making, de-politicising interest-group tactics and internal-group stability seems to be on the wane. This suggests some characteristics inherent to the NVC Act issue, and common in other like issues, require the withdrawal or significant weakening of state guarantees to the NFF family. This further suggests that a new set of risks, not countenanced in Offe’s summation, exist around exchanging external guarantees of survival for internal ones.

On this basis, it is both possible and useful to distinguish between two sets of issues that correlate with a distinctive set of relations between the NFF family and the state. One can identify a set of ‘traditional’ issues and a set of ‘new’ issues. ‘Traditional’ issues include those most closely associated with the trade-liberal agenda such as economic and labour-market deregulation, and also encompass issues around research and development and commodity marketing. These ‘traditional’ issues have been dealt with through the orthodox corporatist-policy process previously described. The ‘new’ issues refer principally to social and environmental issues that threaten to introduce increased levels of state regulation into areas considered guarded from such intrusion by the granting of individual rights to farmers. Based on evidence from the NVC Act issue, it is possible to
identify, in general terms, some factors that preclude issues from being addressed by the NFF and the state in the ‘orthodox’ corporatist manner. These characteristics demarcate what has been referred to as ‘new’ issues from ‘traditional’ issues.

‘New’ issues are those that are propelled into the public arena by agents from outside of existing policy communities. In the case of the NVC Act, the state confronted an issue that was politicised with reference to social values outside of an existing policy community. Whilst, in a legal sense, most farmers own the land on which they farm, the way in which they manage the land has implications for the integrity of riverine environments and native fauna and flora habitat — all facets of rural environments which urban dwellers have come to value above ‘farmscapes’. It is the externalities of farming, the imposition of ‘farmscapes’ on ‘natural landscapes’, that has directed public scrutiny onto farming practices. This has the effect of forcing the creation of a new policy community with a large number of stakeholders. The new policy community includes a mix of sectoral and non-sectoral groups, which in turn introduces inherent problems for consensus building and for leaders demonstrating their capacity to deliver member compliance.

Urban society has a strong interest in these ‘new’ issues. As such, the state cannot ignore, for instance, the calls for environmental controls or native title on pastoral leases. This initial interest by the broader public often translates into an expectation that the state will represent a particular set of values on its behalf. In turn, the public at large continues monitoring the state’s response through the media or single-issue groups and movements.

Elements within the specially constituted policy communities formed to address ‘new’ issues typically challenge economic definitions of problems and economic approaches to bargaining resolutions. Referring to abstract principles, either couched in economic or scientific arguments, often fails to act as a useful basis for bargaining or compromise. This reflects the difficulty in reconciling productivist and post-materialist interests. It also reflects the spatial specificity with which resolutions to these issues often need to be found.
Chapter Eight    Prospects for the Future: Learning from the NVC Act

There is no correlation between those driving the entry of ‘new’ issues into the public domain and any distinct vocational grouping. As such, within the farming constituency a diverse range of views on all of these issues will exist. A social change, associated with the rise of new social movements, which has swept through urban society has also impacted on the Australian farming community. Changing values with respect to the environment, gender equality, racial equality and concepts of land ownership have all issued specific challenges to the farming community. The response of farmers themselves to these ‘new’ issues is, therefore, somewhat unpredictable and often inconsistent.

Often the space over which ‘new’ issues manifest themselves transverse the existing spheres of concern of key political agents. Solutions may be required on a land-system by land-system basis as opposed to a state-wide basis, for example, yet the key agents involved in the policy community may be organised on a state basis and have poor links and coordinative capacities below this level. As such, the coordinative capacity of interest groups and government organisations need to be further complemented by intermediate institutions that engage with more ‘grassroots’ formations.

Presented with the factors evident within ‘new’ issue contexts, the state typically responds by attempting to develop compromises. In the case of the NVC Act issue, these compromises were engineered through new routines and processes of policy development. These new routines and processes for policy development necessarily cast aside pre-existing patterns of corporatist state/interest-group relations. As such, they tend to weaken the external guarantees of survival for those interest groups already involved in corporatist arrangements in existing policy communities.

These new routines and processes take on various forms. As was reflected in the NVC Act issue, in addressing ‘new’ issues, both state and federal governments are opting for consultative approaches to policy development and implementation, such as public inquiries, consultative phases within policy implementation processes, and regional rather than state-based approaches. Whilst these routines and processes often involve interest
groups in the planning stages, they all provide sufficient scope for farmers to have input and influence policy quite independent of the message from their institutionalised farmer representatives.

The conditions associated with ‘new’ issues have in many respects catalysed the realisation of the two risks associated with the NFF family’s exchange of internal for external guarantees of survival. The degree of risk inherent to the NFF family is contingent on the frequency with which the conditions created by ‘new’ issues are likely to be experienced. In this respect the evidence is very clear: the number of ‘new’ issues is increasing and the number of ‘traditional’ issues is contracting. The main reason for this contraction is the state’s withdrawal of responsibility for production and marketing-related areas of agriculture and its less interventionist role in economic and industry policy. In some senses, this reflects the natural end of a cycle of policy negotiations, which had as its aim the removal of government from the affairs of agricultural industry.

With the movement of the state’s attention, it is likely that the Association, too, will move its focus. Indeed, the NSWFA CEO has stated that the major task of the Association lies in ensuring farmers are valued as environmental land managers, hence ensuring their political importance\(^1\). This view is reflected in the President’s floating of a ‘broader lobbying role’ for the Association (Dick and Trainor 1996). On this basis, the risks realised in the NVC Act issue, for the reasons outlined in this section, are likely to be continually repeated. As such, the NSWFA’s absence of the organisational capacity desired by the state in ‘new’ issue areas, and required by members so that their interests can be effectively represented, should be of significant concern to the NFF family.

Prior to this point, whether an interest group and the state formed corporatist relations around addressing a policy issue has been predicated on two factors. The first factor is whether there is convergence between the agendas of interest groups and the state, and the second is whether the interest group has the necessary organisational capacities to

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\(^1\) Comensoli, P., 1997, pers.comm, 16 May. NSWFA CEO, Sydney.
assist the state in exercising steering capacity over the issue areas in question. In extrapolating out from the NVC Act issue, one discovers that the characteristics of ‘new’ issues also render corporatism unsuitable as a profitable path for issue resolution. The external guarantees of survival to the NFF family are withdrawn or weakened in these issue contexts, not simply because the state alone identifies an absence of transecting interest-group and state agendas, but because the nature of these ‘new’ issues demand a more thorough approach to integrating interests and coordinating activity beyond that which depoliticised consultation with functional interest groups can achieve. In sum, these ‘new’ issues seriously challenge the capacity of interest-group organisations to act as a useful policy partner for the state. Clearly, the ‘new’ness of an issue places different demands on the organisational capacity of interest groups. As such, the NSWFA’s inability to work with the state on the NVC Act, suggests it does not have the requisite capacities to assist the state in addressing ‘new’ issues.

8.4 ‘New’ Problems, ‘New’ Organisational Capacities

The inherent properties of ‘new’ issues, and those ‘traditional’ issues undergoing transformation, hold specific ramifications with respect to how farmer interest groups and the state form relationships. Just as corporatist negotiations required the NFF family to develop particular organisational and representational capacities in order to exercise influence over traditional issues, the political process catalysed by these issues makes a different set of capacities desirable. These are worth identifying in a little more detail.

In the policy environment created by ‘new’ issues, the responsibility for determining particular policy prescriptions and for implementing them lies with selected inhabitants of those regions or localities deemed to fit the scale appropriate for the issue. This creates quite a different ‘division of labour’ between leaders and members of the NFF family to that required under corporatism. There is a greater role for members in directly shaping policy prescriptions. In turn, the role of interest-group leadership is one of coordinating the actions of members, furnishing members with information, organising access to the
state and its agencies, and ensuring the state and other interlocutors direct the resources and attention necessary for the members to resolve the issue at hand.

The inadequacy of objective forms of knowledge to provide, in and of itself, resolutions to ‘new’ issues also suggests the ‘research’ capacity of the secretariat will become a less direct contributor to the policy success of the interest group. In relation to interests, it is less likely that the professionals in the secretariats of the NFF family can objectively derive a collective interest position without consulting heavily with members. Rather, these ‘experts’ need to become a source of information to members who, in turn, derive for themselves an interest position. This requires suitable forums for agreement between members and leaders to be quickly generated. Further, it requires these forums to be devolved to a level that is sufficient to furnish a set of interests that are meaningful for the issue at hand.

The intrusion of other organisations representing different sets of interests means that the farm interest group will again have to demonstrate its capacity in assisting the state to enhance its steering over an issue. Further, it will have to demonstrate its capacity to deliver members compliance. Again, this requires leaders to have the capacity to quickly reach some agreement with members as to how they wish to proceed with an issue and to ensure that members act in a coordinated manner with their leaders.

Significantly, the capacity of the NFF family is further stretched by the observation that within the farming constituency a diverse range of views on all of these ‘new’ issues will exist. In representing farmers’ interests on these issues the NFF has typically counterpoised farmers against those people who it maintains hold ‘opposing’ values. This approach appears somewhat counterproductive when many farmers may also hold the values that the NFF condemns. When one considers issues such as native flora and fauna management, water rights, farm chemical use and land-management practices, farmers can regularly be seen to offer competing sets of interests. Further, these types of issues often see unpredictable sets of allegiances form between sets of interests. Some of the most observable instances include coalitions between graziers and environmentalists.
against irrigators, and freehold landholders and aboriginals versus pastoralists. This suggests the NFF family may not be in a position, in fact, to provide a coherent farmers’ position on ‘new’ issues, that is, when divorced from direct consultation with their members who reside in a particular context where an issue manifests itself. In terms of organisational capacity, this indicates that the NFF family would be best to sponsor local or regional processes aimed at brokering resolutions of conflict within its constituency. This is opposed to its typical response of attempting to articulate a set of encompassing farmers’ interests on a state or national basis.

The organisational capacities required to pursue new issues have, as a central feature, the ability to be able to quickly generate agreement between members and leaders and, as a consequence, be able to coordinate their actions. This is consistent with the conclusion of Chapter Seven that the NSWFA could not exercise influence over the NVC Act as it could not find agreement. As such, one can now conclude more precisely that the NSWFA did not have the necessary organisational capacity to assist the state in steering resolution of the NVC Act issue. Consequently, it could not take advantage of the access it was granted and, hence, lacked influence.

Whilst these ‘new’ issues require the state to weaken or dismantle the guarantees of survival to the NFF family, the corporatist arrangements around ‘traditional’ issues remain. In this issue area, the NFF family seems to be under no pressure from the state to rethink its representative strategy. The state may not, as yet, be forced to open up the corporatist arrangement that has allowed it to pursue trade-liberal policy goals through ‘traditional’ issues. However, the trade-liberal paradigm has catalysed changes in the environment of farmers that have led to significant disparities in economic opportunities. There are signs that this disparity has, in turn, changed the complexion of what are considered ‘traditional’ issues. As such, the stock of traditional issues is slowly being transformed into a set of ‘new’ issues.
8.5 The Transformation of 'Traditional' Issues

The economic forces associated with global food production are penetrating the structure of Australian agriculture under the trade-liberal paradigm of agricultural policy. These forces are catalysing social and structural change which, in turn, is introducing characteristics of 'new' issues into what were otherwise 'traditional' issues. Issues are metamorphosing and, in so doing, break open the corporatist arrangement, exposing it to a range of new interests. As such, there is pressure on the state to address these issues in a similar manner to 'new' issues, with all the attendant implications for the guarantees of survival it can grant the NFF family.

The NFF's corporatist approach to 'traditional' issues has allowed trade-liberal-inspired policies to proceed. However, this policy approach has created losers. To attempt to prevent these losers from seeking recourse in the political sphere the NFF family promoted the view that on-farm management activities were the most efficacious way for farmers to respond to any 'economic' repercussions of trade liberalism. However, the unevenness with which structural adjustment pressures, and its attendant social and economic disadvantage, are being felt in the farming community is drawing attention to the inadequacy of this approach.

This unevenness has resulted in large producers and corporate agriculture being responsible for the bulk of Australian agricultural production. These farmers typically support the NFF's focus on economic issues and the status quo of trade-liberal-inspired policy. If anything, these producers are looking for the adjustment process to be hastened. The small to medium-sized farm is attracting a disproportionate burden of adjustment pressures. As the poor economic circumstance of the average farm family intensifies, decisions such as pulling children out of boarding schools, gaining off-farm employment and accessing government assistance are brought to the fore. In making these responses, access to quality public education in rural areas, the health of the local economy and the provision of government services become top priorities. In this instance, the balancing of world trade and macro-economic fine-tuning are secondary issues compared to those issues that relate directly to farmers' quality of life.

254
Chapter Eight  Prospects for the Future: Learning from the NVC Act

The fragmentation within the NFF’s constituency gives many members reason to reflect on the inaction of the NFF on these ‘quality of life’ issues. In particular, it draws attention to the selective politicisation of issues by the NFF family. The NFF family’s extreme public stance on Wik, native vegetation and the waterfront dispute, stand in contrast to their orthodox de-politicised approach to the decline in regional funding, privatisation of public assets (such as electricity distribution and Telstra) and the absence of sufficient support to address poverty and welfare issues. This is not to say that the NFF family does not pursue any of these ‘quality of life’ measures. Indeed, the NFF family has been advocating in various forums for more attractive incentives to hasten the removal of ‘unproductive’ producers out of the industry. However, their approach has been out of the public gaze and aimed at quickly addressing the fallout of the trade-liberal agenda. In essence, the NFF family wants the loss of farm numbers to be viewed by farmers as a series of one off decisions by individual farmers based largely on personal circumstances. This is in opposition to the notion that these decisions are, in fact, largely a response to a range of structural forces that are impacting on a large section of the farm community and, consequently, deserve a collective political response.

The corporatist system of policy development has so far contained many of the issues that are of a ‘traditional’ nature. Central to locking out farmers has been the filtering role of the NFF leadership. Therefore, for those who cannot successfully respond and who are suffering the vast share of economic hardship the process of addressing these issues must be launched from outside of the NFF family. What then is causing these underlying social and economic tensions to direct the state to adopt a different approach to their resolution?

The central reason for these ‘traditional’ issues being converted to ‘new’ issues is that agents outside the corporatist arrangement are politicising them. The Human Rights and

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2 Whilst structural change acts to add heterogeneity to the social base of farm organisations, the rapidity of this change and the associated fear this engenders amongst farmers that their social status is declining is also a factor that sometimes assists farm organisations in maintaining cohesion (Heinze and Voelzkow 1993, 27).
Chapter Eight  

Prospects for the Future: Learning from the NVC Act

Equal Opportunities Commission (HREOC) has put out a series of reports on human rights in rural Australia. Various local governments are pursuing their own responses to the decline of rural towns, rural-based independent members of parliament are directing attention to the absence of services outside urban areas, the AWiA is pursuing telecommunications issues and organisations such as the Rural Women’s Alliance are advocating a change to the trade-liberal paradigm underpinning agricultural policy. As policy ‘outsiders’, these formations are focussing demands directly to the state quite separate from the NFF family. In so doing, the public gaze is focussed on the issue and the state’s response and, as a consequence, the corporatist containment is challenged.

The ‘new’ness of previously ‘traditional’ issue areas has not only arisen because the policy losers are having their previously marginalised interests transmitted by new agents in the form of demands on the state. The state does not sever the external guarantees of survival to interest groups solely on the basis that external agents of change demand some access on the back of drawing public attention to an issue. Whether the state broadens the scope of interests it includes in political bargaining and policy implementation will also reflect the capacity of the NFF family to raise the state’s steering capacity over these issues.

As with ‘new’ issues, these changing ‘traditional’ issues have, in effect, challenged what it means to be a farmer. The diversity in economic circumstance and the avenues open for individuals to adjust leaves the question as to what the typical farmer experiences in their day-to-day lives highly contested. The capacity of the NFF family to actually represent, in an authentic sense, the farming constituency is placed in doubt. Even the way the Federation constructs farmers’ identity acts to fragment their constituency. Those who can thrive under the prevailing environment are effectively endorsed by the NFF family as ‘farmers’ and those who cannot are marginalised as ‘part-time’ or ‘non-viable’ farmers. As such, it is tending to demand the same organisational capacities of the NFF family as the ‘new’ issues have done. This has ramifications in terms of the state’s capacity to integrate farmers’ interests and the capacity of farmers to organise in such a
way as to realise and articulate a set of interests to the state. For the NSWFA itself, it raises significant doubts about its future viability.

8.6 Exploring the Ramifications

Given the NFF family’s present organisational capacities, the proliferation of new issues and the transformation of ‘traditional’ issues does not auger well for the NFF family’s capacity to maintain complementarity and survive. In turn, this negatively affects the state’s capacity to integrate interests and resolve such issues, as well as farmers’ chances of having their concerns represented. As such, one may conclude that the NFF family’s future is limited, the state cannot satisfactorily resolve such issues and farmers’ interests are not being authentically represented. Whilst these may well be rational conclusions one can draw from this thesis, the realpolitik dictates that, in fact, all of these potentialities cannot be allowed to continue indefinitely. Before speculating about the likelihood of how these potentialities manifest themselves it is important to briefly sketch their dimensions.

Problems for the NFF family

The problem for the NFF family is twofold. Firstly, its attempts to project compliance have been largely undone by the nature of ‘new’ issues that demand it demonstrate compliance. Secondly, the uneveness with which structural adjustment pressures are being felt has drawn the attention of farmers to the NFF leadership’s tendency to limit its opposition to the forces that have caused these hardships. In so doing, the members are more closely monitoring the representation they are receiving from their leaders rather than accepting the projections. In sum, these two trends threaten the state of complementarity of SFOs such as the NSWFA.

For the NFF family, engaging in these changing ‘traditional’ issues places in jeopardy its approach to trade-liberal reform. The NFF, in pursuing trade-liberal reform, is in essence arguing for a form of agriculture that has yet to come. As such, it is representing the interests of this form of agriculture rather than the interests of members currently holding a proprietary interest in a farming enterprise. In doing so, leaders have constructed farmers’ interests as consistent to such a model of agriculture based on the premise that
Chapter Eight  Prospects for the Future: Learning from the NVC Act

farmers are indeed economically rational business people. These accounts have been overtaken by the uneven pattern of structural change highlighted by the impact of broader social values and focussed upon by ‘external’ formations. In turn, this will mean increasing pressure for the NFF family to renounce the trade-liberal vision of agriculture.

The state has had to step away from providing external guarantees of survival under ‘new’ and changing ‘traditional’ issues. The NFF family has been left in a position of having to develop the organisational capacities it had reduced under the ‘second wave’ reforms in order to be effective in pursuing policy goals. The NVC Act issue clearly exhibited the NSWFA’s inability to coordinate its members’ activities. Whilst unable to coordinate the activities of members in the committees, one may make the keen observation that the NSWFA was able to coordinate the activities of its broader membership in the ‘regaining control’ phase. The rallies and public demonstrations evidence this. Whilst this strategy could not actually influence the issue as such — as the NSWFA did not have the capacity to take up a useful role as policy partner to the state — it was able to cohere most of its membership solidly behind it.

In the lead up to the rally, communication by Association leaders was targeted principally at those members unaffected by the legislation. In this communication the leadership did not emphasise the need to foster unity through discursive forums where members could resolve any contradictions or heterogeneity in their interest positions. Rather, leaders were, in effect, enforcing unity by promoting the view that the NVC Act was the first element of a wave of anti-farmer legislation. In this manner, a willingness to act was created through the leadership’s construction of an external threat rather than a need to pursue a set of collective interests. Australian farm interest-group leaders have been reinforcing a rural-urban dichotomy in order to reinforce a ‘siege mentality’ amongst some farmers. Despite a few conspicuous protestations that the rural-urban dichotomy has been manufactured in order to serve political purposes,³ it continues to enhance the

³ At the first Country Summit the Local Government Association president warned, ‘Don’t be conned in the country by politicians who say the reason you have been getting nothing is because these greedy buggers in the city are getting everything’ (Woods 1996, 11). Fran Rowe, a founder of the rural counselling
cohesiveness of what is, in the absence of a dialogical mode of collective action, a heterogeneous group.

This suggests that whilst ‘new’ issues may, in fact, reveal the NSWFA’s absence of relevant organisational capacities, it is still able to keep its constituency together and negate the fragmentary effect that these issues have on its constituency. This capacity does not mean that the NSWFA leadership found a reservoir of agreement between itself and its members. Rather, it is argued that action was coordinated with reference to unmediated identity. Therefore, the NFF family’s incapacity to develop agreement and exhibit the organisational capacities necessary to act as a policy partner to the state under ‘new’ issues has placed it in a position where it cannot make a contribution to the resolution of such issues. Importantly, what it can do is to politicise ‘new’ issue contexts in such a manner as to weaken the capacity of the state, yet not actually contribute to any long-lasting resolution of the issue.

Problems for the State

The state’s primary concern in relations with interest groups is the extent to which their leaders can ensure their members comply with agreed-upon courses of action. Under corporatist arrangements evidence of compliance is largely obviated and, as such, objective projections of this capacity are largely accepted by the state. These ‘new’ issues change the evidence required for demonstrating compliance. The need to actually coordinate the actions of members to achieve influence fully exposes the degree of compliance between members and leaders. In the case of the NSWFA, it is unable to coordinate the actions of members in any other way than to construct the state and other interested parties as protagonists to be actively resisted. This does not create steering capacity for the state over such issue areas. Further, it makes the state’s job of integrating interests into the policy system more difficult, hence, risking the legitimacy of the outcomes.

service in NSW, commented, ‘Farmers are not a homogenous group. This divergence of views cannot be simply defined in terms of primary producers versus ‘significant’ others.’ (Rowe 1997, 10).
Chapter Eight  Prospects for the Future: Learning from the NVC Act

The problems for the state are easily demonstrated through the case of the NVC Act. The Act has not had the participation of a peak farmer representative. With the exception of the appointment of local representatives on committees, the resources of the NSWFA in terms of providing information, expertise and coordinative assistance have been withdrawn. For the state, the response of the committees and the participation of farmer members on them have become unpredictable. As such, its capacity to develop policy prescriptions based on rational formulations of a likely response is ineffective. This state of affairs largely explains the ongoing turbulence with which the issue of native vegetation management in NSW is being pursued, and the ongoing crisis of legitimacy for the state in this area.

The problems for the state are even more severe in those ‘traditional’ issues that are taking on characteristics of ‘new’ issues. The NFF family presently does not have the organisational capacity to actively engage its constituency on these issues and articulate a coherent set of demands. However, to this point, the state has taken at face value that the NFF family can, in fact, articulate such a set of interests. Indeed, its account of a rational farm manager deploying economic-based decision-making models has assisted the state to develop rural policy for two decades. However, it is increasingly apparent, both to commentators and the state, that these policy formulations, and the assumptions underpinning them, are inappropriate. The state has, in trusting the NFF family with integrating farmers’ interest in to the policy process, left itself in a position of being open to an escalating array of disparate demands made in the name of the farming community. Whilst one cannot sheet home blame for the rise of the One Nation Party and rural-based populism to the NFF family’s incapacity to aggregate its constituencies demands, its failure to do so has left the state open to an escalating legitimacy deficit with respect to a great deal of its trade-liberal policy agenda.

Problems of Representation for Farmers

The unchanged nature of the corporatist policy process, invoked to implement trade-liberal policy reforms, means that the outstanding concern regarding the representation of farmers’ interests has not been addressed by the NFF family (see Chapter One, Section

260
1.8). The NFF family has failed to ensure a pathway for those farmers experiencing significant economic and social hardship to seek recourse and have their views seriously discussed. Instead, the NFF family have been able to continue filtering their demands and operating within a policy frame that assumes farm numbers must decline and that adjustment and ‘pain’ is necessary for the collective ‘gain’. Whilst this short-term pain for long-term gain argument sounds like the NFF is exercising responsible leadership, it does not, in practice, give those farmers who constitute the ‘collateral damage’ of trade-liberal reform an effective voice to deliberate over possible alternatives. Their interests are not represented.

The situation with respect to ‘new’ issues is no better. The NFF family’s lack of organisational capacity has left many farmers with no effective representation on a range of ‘new’ issues. This risks farmers coming under forms of regulation that they have had no involvement in developing. The NFF’s unwillingness to approach the changing ‘traditional’ issues, lest they interfere with the trade-liberal agenda, further limits the possibility that those ‘losers’ of the policy paradigm shift will have their interests represented. The status quo will remain and policy will be drafted that does not entertain any other possibility than their removal from agriculture.

8.7 Speculating about Responses

The dynamics and interconnectedness of the political system is such that these potentialities cannot go on indefinitely without substantive response. The state cannot continue with poor steering capacity, the NFF family cannot survive without addressing its organisational capacity and farmers cannot go on without representation. Therefore, one can identify how these foreshadowed potentialities are being resolved by the political system.

For the state, the manner in which the NFF family continues to operate aloof from the changes amongst its membership risks the ongoing legitimacy of the policy produced with its involvement. In persisting to support the NFF family, the political system more broadly risks lacking the capacity to effectively integrate the interests of the farming
community and, hence, risks a volatile relationship with this part of the community. Clearly, the state does not want to dispense with the NFF family entirely as they are able to usefully assist the state in exercising steering capacity over a range of what will remain ‘traditional’ issue areas. In this sense, there are sound functional reasons for the state to continue supporting the NFF family. Indeed, the evidence to date suggests that the state recognises the functional need for the NFF family and, as such, shows no signs of abandoning corporatist arrangements around ‘traditional’ issues. The Federal Minister for Agriculture has of recent times defended the primacy of the NFF structure in the face of mounting criticism from ‘rebel’ commodity groups that the Federation needed ‘democratising’. On these agricultural production and trade issues the state shows no signs of withdrawing its external guarantees of survival. The NFF’s capacity to assist the state effectively control the management of commodity-related issues is still high. This stands in strong contrast to the state’s position on the NVC Act.

Whilst arrangements may be particularly stable around traditional issues, in the absence of political representation from the NFF family on ‘new’ and changing ‘traditional’ issues, farmers have become involved in a range of other formations. One can consider the emergence of rural independents in NSW, reviving the days when some constituencies dictated the platform of their Member of Parliament, as a reaction to the growing feeling of marginalisation in rural Australia (Martin and Lee forthcoming). As one such independent, the NSW Member for Tamworth, Tony Windsor, observed, this development was prompted by the recognition that rural people in NSW are ‘searching’ and ‘wondering where the hell they can go’ for representation (Radio National September 22, 1996). In convening a ‘NSW Country Summit’ in 1996 and 1998, Tony Windsor placed the issue areas of rural health, transport and communications, location of government agencies and services, land use and environment, costs of business and law and order onto the political agenda (NSW Country Summit 1996, 2). Despite the involvement of many established interest groups, the summit process acted as a magnet for views that challenged the rural policy orthodoxy.
Chapter Eight    Prospects for the Future: Learning from the NVC Act

Other groups, such as the Rural Women’s Alliance (RWA), have formed to articulate opposition to the underpinning ideology of trade liberalism: economic rationalism. The Alliance’s sustained attack on economic rationalism led to more obtuse criticism of the NFF family. The covenor, Betsy Fysh, commented:

I think the bush has suffered from bad leadership or inadequate leadership in the past. And I think a lot of our farm organisations have been too willing to embrace economic rationalism because they believed that it would be short-term pain for long-term gain. But this has been going on for a very long time now and we don’t see much of this long-term gain (Betsy Fysh, Life Matters ABC Radio National, 23/3/99).

Governments programs and grassroots, apparently non-political, organisations are increasingly absorbing the time and energies of farmers. Of late, the Landcare program has taken on somewhat of a political character. Networks of groups, such as the Murrumbidgee Regional Landcare Network in NSW and the Tasmanian Landcare Association, have emerged to lobby for increased state funding, accountability of public funds and increased self-coordination (Martin and Halpin 1998). The NSW Rural Women’s Network, another government program, and the Australian Women in Agriculture (AWiA), both foster the aspirations of farm women. This is a group that has traditionally been under-represented in the membership of established farm interest groups (Haslam McKenzie 1998). These progressive types of groups promote high levels of participation, bring members in contact with government at various levels and draw together diverse groups (in respect to gender, age and occupation). As a result, they represent a strong base for movement politics. These groups are strong at precisely the time, and exactly the level, where established farm groups appear weakest: the coordination of members’ activities in a politically useful manner.

Increasing pressure has recently been mounting for reform of the Commodity Councils of the NFF. The Australian Woolgrowers’ Association (AWGA) was established in early 1997 to push for reform of the Wool Council of Australia (WCA). A similar pattern of events has also occurred in the beef industry. Disgruntled with the reform of red meat industry SMA, beef specialists, primarily the corporate and larger family entities, formed an organisation called the Australian Beef Association (ABA). Both the AWGA and ABA are advocating the return to each commodity having its own organisation. The
Chapter Eight  Prospects for the Future: Learning from the NVC Act

commodity councils would be totally levy-payer funded and the board directly elected by levy payers. Hence, they would not be affiliated with any existing farm interest group. The state farm organisations and the NFF would only deal with the general issues such as industrial relations, the environment, social infrastructure and services, and economics. If these new organisations do prevail there is also an implication in terms of NFF funding. Whilst the NFF would continue with its broad economic agenda, the state organisations would be stripped of the majority of their current roles and, hence, economic support. Whilst not altering the policy focus it currently pursues, the NFF would suffer a near fatal loss of income.

The NSWFA’s reaction to these new formations, whilst varied, can be usefully described in one of two ways: forming alliances or outright opposition. The reaction tends to correlate with whether these formations are taking on ‘new’ issues or ‘traditional’ issues. Alliances were formed with those groups that were addressing ‘new’ and changing ‘traditional’ issues as these formations could be used by the Association to further its own political agenda, or at least the Association was able to negate any possibility of negative implications. For instance, the Association participated in the two Country Summit meetings and it became a useful vehicle to further its existing policies. They used it as a vehicle to pursue their opposition to the NVC Act discussed in Chapter Seven. The Association has also publicly supported both Landcare and the AWiA movement. As the environmental credentials of the farming community have been placed under scrutiny, the widespread participation of farmers in Landcare serves as a powerful retort. Despite some scepticism about how much the movement can achieve and the constant claim that it is under-funded, the Association supports the organisation and the participation of its members in it. In the context of both the NFF and the NSWFA having acknowledged the lack of representation, and in order to maintain some semblance of uniformity and encompassingness in their lobbying activities, the farm organisations have made introductory efforts to attach themselves to the AWiA. The group has responded positively, perhaps in order to earn a higher profile with government and to increase their resource base.
Predictably, the ‘rebel’ commodity organisations were bitterly opposed by the Association. The intensity of the opposition reflects the success with which they have raised farm interest-group governance as an issue in its own right. Further, it reflects the importance the NSWFA places on defending its monopoly on the representation of farmers’ interests and the confidence that the state’s guarantees of survival are likely to remain. The AWGA’s campaign was centred on exploiting the high level of dissatisfaction with the NFF amongst the farming community. It has attempted to discredit the representative process of the Association. The AWGA Chairman argued:

Before any unified approach can be made to address issues such as increased market share, increased sustainable prices, reforms to marketing and promotional processes, the simple issue of industry representation and management must first be addressed by all woolgrowers ... (Laird 1997, 18).

The NSWFA’s response was largely to defend its own representative credentials. At the May 1997 General Council meeting Mr Comensoli intimated: ‘We need to preserve the primacy of individual farmers, by payment of fees, being able to determine policy through the annual conference process.’ (Austin 1997a, 18). To successfully preserve this process the Association had to be able to establish that it was a conduit for the demands of members. One NSWFA Wool Committee member argued:

It does not cost much to join (in fact the commercial benefits of NSW Farmers probably pay for membership) and you can have your say and cast your vote. If there is dissatisfaction among our members, we expect to be told or voted out. That is a member’s democratic right (Croft 1997, 14).

The NSWFA’s strategy in opposing the ABA, as with the AWGA, has been to re-emphasise that ‘the best way to change it [the CCA] is through the NSW Farmers’ Association which sends delegates to the Cattle Council.’ (Wright 1997, 16). With respect to its strategy to unseat the CCA, the ABA has drawn one significant concession. To address the criticism of their ‘representative credentials’, the Cattle Council of Australia recently incorporated two non-SFO members on its board. This reaction is, however, more likely a token gesture aimed at reducing the financial burden of contributing state farm organisations, rather than democratising the organisation.

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4If the two seats were filled based on a vote by levy payers, then it can be assumed that the levy payers would fund the bill for the two seats. This would relieve pressure from the state farm organisations with minimal likelihood of altering the voting balance in the organisation.
Ultimately, the commodity-based issues remain ‘traditional’ issues that can still be contained within traditional corporatist policy arrangements. As such, the state is in no way compelled to dismantle these arrangements. The concern expressed over the NFF’s structure would have been better articulated by focussing on the changing ‘traditional’ issues such as the social costs of adjustment pressure. These are areas where the NFF family is vulnerable and where the state is amenable to an alternative policy partner with more suitable organisational capacities. The political system seems to be resolving the problems of representation, legitimacy and steering capacity by breaking off new issues and dealing with them under new arrangements. These arrangements take advantage of the new formations developing to assist farmers articulate previously marginalised views. The NFF, whilst not able to assist the state directly in this endeavour, has managed to create alliances with such formations such that it can use them to try and influence the direction of the policy outcomes. In relation to ‘traditional’ issues, the state continues to foster corporatist-style arrangements. However, the parallel nature of these policy arrangements and modes of representation create some ambiguity in the eyes of farmers as to how they should pursue representation.

8.8 Conclusion

From both the theoretical and empirical perspective presented in Chapter Seven, it is evident that farmers’ interests are not amenable to definition by the objective application of an economic calculus, but require a discursive moment to develop commensurability (Offe and Wiesenthal 1980, 75). This commensurability is, therefore, an output of rather than input into the interest-group system. The NFF family, in conducting its reforms, failed to adopt this assumption.

Whilst the NSWFA leadership may choose to adopt one set of assumptions over another, the repercussions for adopting assumptions that do not reflect the nature of the interests of the constituency they represent are severe. The current political environment, with the dominance of a corporatist relationship between the NFF family and the state, has largely hidden these repercussions. It has provided external guarantees of survival to the NFF
family and, in turn, the NFF family has reduced its reliance on internal guarantees of survival. Whilst not presently compelled on most issues to address the issue of securing agreement (and, as such, to address the representative paradox) it represents a potential source of instability for the present state of complementarity. As such, it has the potential to threaten the capacity of the NSWFA to remain influential and gather support in the future.

The stability of the state of complementarity is contingent on the ongoing nature of this exchange of guarantees. Without it the lack of agreement with its members will be exposed. A change in the political environment, catalysed by ‘new’ issue contexts, challenged the NSWFA’s complementarity. This is because it required the state to weaken the granting of external guarantees of survival to the NFF family and, in turn, required the NSWFA leadership to renew efforts to generate organisational capacities it had largely diminished under the ‘second wave’ of reforms.

This chapter established that the change in the organisational diet of the NFF family is immanent. The issues that progressively take up the majority of its time will have similar properties to the ‘new’ issues and, hence, demand similar types of responses by interest groups involved in their resolution. That is, they will require high degrees of coordination between the actions of members and leadership. The NFF family’s lack of organisational capacity has created problems for the state and farmers. The state is facing problems of limited steering capacity over ‘new’ issues, whilst farmers are having a range of their interests left under-represented. The need to address this issue is a matter of urgency for the NFF family, the state and farmers.
Chapter Nine

Reconsidering the Representative Paradox

9.1 Introduction

At the conclusion of Chapter Six, the two focal points of this thesis — explaining the representative paradox and identifying the assumptions of the orthodox theoretical framework used to examine interest-group behaviour — were largely resolved. The apparently benign effect of the representative paradox on the NFF family was explored through the concept of complementarity. Whilst the NFF family has been able to create complementarity without resolving the representative paradox, the ongoing nature of the representative paradox indicates a continuing lack of agreement between members and leaders over what interests should be represented. The absence of agreement, whilst not initially impinging on the ‘success’ of the NFF family, has more recently become a limiting factor in its capacity to influence some ‘new’ issues. As such, this signifies a point of instability in the state of complementarity.

The problem confronting the NSWFA and, hence, the NFF family, with respect to exercising influence over ‘new’ issues, has its origin in an absence of agreement amongst members. Without agreement, leaders appear largely unable to coordinate the actions of their members in a politically useful manner. This presents a problem when confronted with ‘new’ issues, specifically because their resolution requires the direct involvement of members. Ironically, the nature of these new issues further complicates the securing of agreement as they cause the state to weaken external guarantees of survival to the NFF family. These issues typically require local responses, hence emphasising spatially based differences within the farming constituency. Further, these issues typically eschew traditional patterns of economic interests. In relation to the farming constituency, they often create an uneasy tension between economic interests and post-material interests. Some farmers may adopt a clear set of interest positions, however typically such issues prompt farmers to adopt an unpredictable mix of interest positions.
Chapter Nine  Reconsidering the Representative Paradox

Until this point in the thesis, it has been argued that the absence of agreement was a consequence of the heterogeneous nature of farmers’ interests that had not been made commensurable due to the absence of functional deliberative forums in the NSWFA. The remedy, following this logic, would simply be for the NSWFA to rebuild this deliberative infrastructure such as to allow interest commensurability to occur. In sum, the NSWFA needs to undergo a specific set of ‘third wave’ reforms. This proposition has been bounded by the assumption that a central imperative for an interest group is authentically representing a set of interests attached to a functional group. However, both the ‘new’ and changing ‘traditional’ issues suggest this set of assumptions does not reflect the organisational task confronting the NFF family.

Whilst the emergence of ‘new’ issues can be explained by the importation of ‘urban’ or ‘modern’ concerns onto the stable set of ‘traditional’ concerns, the transmutation of ‘traditional’ issues, themselves, into ‘new’ types of issues is suggestive of a thoroughgoing change in the structure of the farming constituency. Indeed, it is suggestive of the weaving of these ‘urban’ or ‘modern’ concerns into the fabric of ‘traditional’ concerns. As such, it points to the blurring of a clear boundary distinguishing the farming constituency from others, which in turn suggests the fragmentation of a farming identity.

This brings the discussion full circle and back to the central issue considered in the first chapter of the thesis: trying to explain the representative paradox. The previous chapter suggests the paradox is not merely about agreement, something that can be remedied by the NFF through the reinvigoration of deliberative forums. Instead, it reflects a more thoroughgoing fragmentation of the focal point for the farming community’s collective action — a collective identity. This in turn relates to the broader theme of authentic representation. In remedying the representative paradox by addressing the above agreement, one is again advocating the identification of group goals or, more broadly, a sense of affinity with other individuals as the basis for membership. In so doing, the membership can be said to have a renewed interest in the deliverance of authentic representation. That is, if the actions of members were again important to influence, the
authenticity of representation that is exchanged for member compliance would become a central focus for leaders.

Section 9.2 will focus briefly on the NFF family’s approach to the representative paradox. Despite the inherent challenges it faces, the leadership persists with the notion that their policy prescriptions must remain, as they are in the long-term interests of farmers. The NFF family’s view that the paradox is not a problem that needs to be addressed is supported by recent academic literature (Section 9.3). However, this literature focuses on the influence imperative, which relates in turn to measuring success of the organisation as the efficiency of the leadership in pursuing goals. Given the representative paradox is an important question to be explained, Section 9.4 will reflect on the assumptions underpinning the way this thesis has approached the paradox. Subsequently, it will be asserted that the paradox is not only about the lack of agreement over interests, but also indicates the blurring of the identity and constituency boundary. Section 9.5 will propose the deployment of post-modernist treatments of political representation as a way to address the nexus between identity and interests. In order to demonstrate the source of the representative paradox in the NFF family’s current approach to farmer representation, Section 9.6 will examine the way the current policy process constructs a link between groups and interests. The implication of these ideas will be explored in Section 9.7 through imagining what authentic representation may in fact look like. This exercise will be assisted by using the NVC Act issue as a focus for how these arrangements may manifest themselves in practice.

9.2 The NFF Family’s Response

When the NFF family commenced its review process it had a problem with ensuring access to financial resources, escalating levels of disillusionment amongst members, and a decline in membership numbers (see Chapter One, Section 1.7). It has addressed all but the disillusionment; yet it is this ongoing disillusionment that has recently sparked concern about the NFF family’s future. David Trebeck, former policy director of the NFF, suggests that ‘the NFF “family” of organisations is facing substantial challenges to its traditional authority and reputation’ (Trebeck 1997, 13). The emergence of ‘rebel
commodity groups’, the poor financial conditions of some state organisations, various ‘splinter groups’ fragmenting the NFF’s message to farmers and the emergence of ‘shallow populism’, which targets the shortcomings of economic rationalism, are all identified as points of concern for the NFF family. One commentator was driven to state:

... the question remains as to whether the NFF — and its State members — have outgrown their usefulness or are just having a bad decade (Lee 1998, 14).

Surprisingly, Trebeck is urging the NFF family not to change its policy line, and to stare down those who would oppose them. He concludes:

The task for mainstream organisations in such circumstances is to remain constructive, not reactive, to strike the right balance between policies which are right — essential for long-term credibility — and public utterances which reflect the legitimate grievances of members. After all, if individual members cease to see value for money, the organisations have no future.

These comments largely reflect the NFF family’s own reaction to these challenges. It maintains that the disillusionment merely indicates the challenge that lies ahead of them in terms of further explaining what is in the best interests of their constituency, to their constituency. Recent comments by the NFF reflect this position:

In Australia, the NFF has been one of our country’s most vocal and active proponents of reduced protection — it’s sometimes made us unpopular with other industries and even a few of our members, but we can wear that (McGauchie 1998).

As the representative paradox continues unabated, the evidence suggests that the NFF family cannot ‘wear that’. Whilst the assumptions of the NFF family would lead it to believe it can, the evidence presented in this thesis places serious doubts over this policy of toughing out the criticism. The state is increasingly being confronted with issues over which it cannot exercise requisite levels of steering capacity, as it does not have a policy partner with the necessary organisational capacities. Farmers, themselves, are testing other forms of organisation in order to address their perception that the NFF family is not articulating many of their interests nor reflecting a coherent identity they can relate to.

Despite the evidence suggesting it take action to the contrary, the NFF family has persisted with representational arrangements, through its representative ‘division of labour’, that do not address the representative paradox. Just as in Chapter One, they
appear to deny a paradox exists. Instead, the paradox is explained away as merely a consequence of the NFF exercising good leadership in the long-term interests of farmers.

9.3 What Paradox?

The NFF and some researchers have found unproblematic what, at the start of this thesis, was a source of some concern; indeed, what was considered a paradox. Interestingly, the mainstream literature appears to suggest that the paradox, based as it is on the premise that one should expect purposive and financial support to correlate, is not a paradox at all. Instead, they argue that it is the norm. Richardson (1995) is indicative of this normative reformulation of the behaviour one should expect of interest groups. He attempts to conceptualise the relationship between representative formations and their members in terms of a market metaphor. He has suggested that a ‘market’ for representation may be said to exist in which ‘citizens are consumers of political participation and representation’ (Richardson 1995, 61). Consequently, the recruitment activity of political formations amounts to a push for ‘market share’. In order to maximise ‘market share’, some formations may seek to ‘differentiate’ themselves from one another.

The use of modern marketing techniques and selective incentives to attract new members and financial support has resulted in many interest groups operating on the direct participation of a small number of members. Richardson (1995, 77) observes that ‘... many organisations survive — indeed thrive — on either a very small membership base or with “members” who are little more than a financial resource. Entrepreneurial leaders of their organisations are then free to set agendas, formulate policies and influence the policy process, subject to the ultimate sanction of the withdrawal of members’ support’ (Richardson 1995, 77). This characterisation of group life has spawned terms such as ‘credit-card participation’ to describe the relationship between members and leaders (Richardson 1995, 76). Given that levels of active participation are generally low, Richardson concludes, ‘... both parties and interest groups may be part of the sub-contracting industry in the process of representation. The majority of “members” have subcontracted their “right” to representation in the public policy-making process to these organisations’ (Richardson 1995, 77).
The assertion that interest-group members do not expect to have substantive engagement with their representatives has come to characterise the positions of those who have sought to explain the lack of participation and involvement of rank and file members in terms that do not diminish their ongoing importance and legitimacy in the context of public policy-making. They have attempted to argue that modern interest groups do not require membership participation and that membership really is about contributing economic support such that the best people can be employed to pursue predetermined interests in the most professional and efficient manner. Whilst this may be the observed behaviour of many interest-group organisations, including the NSWFA, there is a sense in which this type of argument tends to sidestep the question of what drives such a scenario to prevail and the impact on both the state’s steering capacity and the political representation of citizens.

The market metaphor is extremely helpful in understanding the reform underway within interest groups. However, like all metaphors, it has its limitations. For whilst citizens are like consumers in a political marketplace, they are ultimately citizens and, hence, in some crucial ways, unlike consumers. Specifically, citizens have a different relationship with their representatives to that of a consumer and service provider. Whilst customers purchase based on price, service and quality, their choice need not be legitimated subsequent to the decision to purchase. Citizens may choose an avenue for their political representation on whatever basis, including access to selective incentives, however, citizens may require the decision to be legitimated in an ongoing fashion — even on an issue-by-issue basis — lest they reverse their decision and withdraw support.

The suggestion made by Richardson (1995), that interest groups are simply vehicles to optimise influence, is consistent with the approach adopted by the NFF family. However, as with the NFF family, this approach says nothing about how interest groups go about determining the set of interests that they are expected to prosecute with such efficiency. If the interests of a constituency were easy to determine in an objective manner then the real decision in supporting a group would be ‘is it the most efficient means of pursuing that
interest?’ However, where interests are heterogeneous, the real decision may be ‘is this the most efficient means of developing a collective position and then pursuing that interest?’ It is the last consideration that is implicit in the framework this thesis has advocated to understand interest-group behaviour (see Chapter Four). The questions of efficient pursuance of an interest and the development of a collective interest cannot be reasonably divorced from one another, especially where heterogeneous interests are concerned. When confronted with heterogeneous nature of farmers’ interests, ignoring the representative paradox is perilous.

One must also recognise that the impact of interest groups operating in the manner indicated by Richardson is broader than the survival of the interest group itself. The existence of ‘... a robust associative substructure is decisive for the success and structural durability of the state’s interventionary competence’ (Offe 1996, 113). Without interest groups that reflect the pattern of interests resident in society, the state is without steering capacity and risks a reduction in the legitimacy around its interventions. Whilst it may resuscitate interest groups through external guarantees of survival, these guarantees risk promoting populist responses from disenfranchised members who see the interest group as merely an extension of the state. For these members, the absence of effective methods to aggregate and articulate interests leads to their exclusion from the political system.

There is a clear need to persist with further clarification of the basis of this paradox beyond assurances that it is merely a tension between leaders and members brought on by poor communication. Discussion needs to move from notions of the absence of agreement about interests to questions of identity and shared experiences. The importance of this being resolved extends beyond the NFF family itself, to encompass the state’s steering capacity and the chances of farmers having their interests authentically represented. To commence such a discussion, it is useful to place the malaise that the NFF family finds itself in within the broader context of trends that affect the ease with which any intermediate association, such as an interest group, continues to foster collective action. This will assist in better discerning the basis of the representative paradox and how it may be addressed.
9.4 Constituency, Interests and Identity

In classic conceptions of political representation, representative groups are considered to have authority to the extent they have mobilised the consent of the constituency they represent. The constituency has generally accorded with a social or functional category. For instance, a farmer interest group is said to represent those individuals falling within the category of ‘farmer’. It exercises authority because it has mobilised the consent of individuals within the group for it to act on their behalf on specific matters. For this conception of authority to remain tenable, one must be able to illustrate that the group being represented constitutes a coherent group with a collective interest capable of being represented.

Although rarely acknowledged, the existence and significance of interest groups is largely explained by an assumption that all individuals are members of a broader social group. Society, then, is the sum of these social groupings. It is assumed that each individual defines their interests via the social category they belong to. As a consequence of this reciprocity, it is proposed that each social group has an attached set of collective unorganised interests to which each individual loosely identifies. These remain ‘unorganised interests’ until such time as the individuals ‘somehow work together’ in the ‘cooperative promotion of an interest’ (Yoho 1998, 232). Constituencies, which are ‘... social categories (such as demographic, racial ethnic, or occupational) that have a common or shared interest ...’ (Etzioni 1985, 179) are organised and represented by interest groups. It is this group of assumptions which render the equation of groups, and the social category they represent, unproblematic.

There are, however, significant questions over the veracity of some of these assumptions. Ultimately, these assumptions turn on objective definitions of social groups and interests which do not reflect instances where a group’s apparent common or shared interest exists ‘... in the eyes of observers, but not necessarily of the members’ (Etzioni 1985, 179). This raises a degree of doubt over what constitutes a group:

... the ‘identity’ that makes up a ‘group’ is not just ‘structural’ (in the sense that it is typically not easily acquired or abandoned), but also to varying degrees ‘voluntaristic’, individually chosen as a focus of identification and emphasis for self-presentation. This
voluntaristic element of 'belonging' to a group sheds further light on the complexities of
the practice of looking at societies as being composed of 'groups', and of coding
individuals as unequivocally 'belonging' to groups (Offe 1998, 127).

The 'voluntaristic' dimension of group identification is further enhanced by the now
well-accepted argument that the 'structural presuppositions' of social groups are eroding
(Offe 1996, 115). As Offe observes, '... the capacity for organisation and conflict of
collective actors ... depends for its part on social-structural changes in the division of
social labour and in social stratification, on processes of cultural change
("individualisation"), and on divisions occasioned by particular types of political issues'
(1996, 113). According to Offe, '... "modern" social structures tend toward the
dissolution of large-scale uniformities of social position and social milieu, and the
replacement of these by atomised, pluralised, and rapidly changing social and cultural
formations ill-suited to association' (Offe 1996, 114). The erosion of social and cultural
precursors to cohesive identities, and the ease with which collective action can be
catalysed, reflects the argument in Chapter Seven connecting the shift in farmers'
interests and identity to changes in the experiences of farmers. Further, Offe's reference
to '... particular types of political issues' reflects the argument of Chapter Eight, that
certain issue types also contribute to the fragmentation of farmers' interests and identity.

Erosion of the structural presuppositions of social groups place those organisations
charged with facilitating collective action and political representation in a predicament.
If, to the citizenry, the boundaries of traditional sectoral groupings are becoming blurred,
then sectoral action, itself, may prove difficult to facilitate. In such a situation,
organisations whose reason for existence is to act as a vehicle for sectoral-based
collective action may be faced with significant organisational problems. As a
consequence, the political authority of the organisation and, hence, its efficacy in
influencing policy may be diminished. In turn, caution must be exercised by the state and
analysts in conflating the social base of a group with the constituency of an interest group
(Etzioni 1985, 179). This caution extends to the usage of the terms 'interest
representation' and 'farming constituency' as applied in this thesis.

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1 See discussion in Chapter Three, Section 3.5.
Identity is central to a ‘voluntaristic’ understanding of defining representable social groups. For it is collective identity that facilitates individuals privileging those aspects of their interests that they share with a collective and marginalising those aspects which are particular to themselves. If such a collective identity were to fragment, then individuals may privilege new sub-sets of their interests, thus compromising the cohesiveness of the group. The representative paradox then relates to the absence of a collective identity that farmers believe they fall within. It is the absence of an encompassing identity that leads farmers to believe their interests have subsequently not been represented. What does this mean for authentic representation?

In the context of discussing the ‘group rights’ debate, Offe (1998, 130) suggests that a group could be considered ‘authentic’ if there are ‘... clear indications of a distinctive life form and the serious and lasting allegiance of most nominal members to it, without an excessive measure of fragmentation of the group into sub-groups and sub-sub-groups’. Authentic representation, therefore, can be said to refer to the extent to which the boundary of a constituency correlates with a ‘distinctive form of life’ recognised ‘voluntaristically’ by a sufficiently large number of the members of that social base.

Whilst indications are that the traditional social bases are increasingly less able to reflect ‘distinctive forms of life’, the importance of creating a link between a ‘distinctive form of life’ and the social base an interest group purports to represent, is crucial to that group’s capacity to reflect ‘authentic’ sets of interests. In turn, this is necessary for the state to enhance steering capacity and for individuals to be politically represented. If one adopts the view that ‘distinctive forms of life’ are ephemeral, and representable groups are defined voluntaristically, it is perhaps more productive to view constituencies as ‘temporary’ constituencies. An interest-group constituency is temporary in the sense that the group leadership is conscious of the need to reflect, at the level of identity, the changes in the experiences of their members such that at all times the organisation can actually reflect a ‘distinctive form of life’. As the demarcations between ‘groups’ change within society, then the interest group changes its ‘constituency’ boundary in a similar
Chapter Nine  Reconsidering the Representative Paradox

fashion. In turn, the state is assured of a policy partner able to enhance its steering capacity and ensure its interventions have the requisite levels of legitimacy.

The notion of authenticity relayed by Offe suggests that distinctive forms of life are, in a sense, *found* rather than *arrived at*. Indeed, this would appear to be the only sensible approach to arguing that the NFF family, for instance, does not authentically represent farmers’ interests. This approach is rooted in a claim that there is such a thing as an essentialist farming experience. As such, the path implicitly advocated in this thesis has been that the NFF family should attempt to identify the ‘voluntaristically’ defined experience such that this experience becomes the inspiration for their activities. However, Offe warns that groups do ‘not lend themselves to easy and unobtrusive measurement’ and, as such, identifying groups ‘tend to give rise to the dynamics of proliferation and escalation’ (1998, 139). Therefore, pursuing a path of defining and recognising ‘voluntaristically’ formed groups may only facilitate the further fragmentation of the farming constituency. The approach adopted in post-modernist discussions of political representation may, in fact, be useful in determining an alternative way to reconstitute, that is *arrive at*, an account of who is included in a farming constituency and subsequently defining representable identities.

9.5 **Representative Paradox or Paradox of Representation?**

To this point in the thesis, it has been argued that the representative paradox cannot merely be attributed to a lack of communication, as asserted by the NFF family. Nor can it be attributed directly to a lack of agreement over interests. Ultimately, the conclusion of this thesis is that what underpins the ‘representative paradox’ is a result of the ‘paradox of representation’ which in turn has left the activities of the NSWFA lacking authenticity. The paradox of representation lies in its recognition of ‘that which is what it is not’ and ‘the presence of that which is absent’ (Norton 1988, 15). That representative institutions rely on ‘the acceptance of the practice of taking one thing for another’ (Norton 1988, 5) means that the interests of a constituency are, by the mere act of being represented, separated from those who hold them.
Chapter Nine  Reconsidering the Representative Paradox

The separation of distinctive forms of life from the interests the group purports to hold has the potential to render the actions of the representative at odds with the interests of the represented. In such a scenario, the role of leaders is to ‘project’ to members the representation of their ideas in order to gather support (see Chapter Four, Section 4.3). The concept of symbolic representation is typically used to explain this scenario. Used in the pejorative, it is suggested that symbolic representation is often deployed at the expense of the more substantive representation of a group’s interests. Political scientists tend to refer to leaders who invoke populist or mythical ideas, such as nationalism, as practising symbolic representation. In this way, leaders undertaking symbolic representation are ‘seen to represent’, rather than to ‘actually represent’, and the represented ‘feel represented’ without ‘being represented’ (Skogan 1985). The framework developed in Chapter Four made this distinction between actual and symbolic representation by distinguishing between ‘producing’ versus ‘projecting’ authentic representation.

Whilst most authors, such as Pitkin, argue that symbolic representation is about the pragmatics of legitimating representative institutions and avoiding alienation of the masses from politics, Phillips argues that it serves a more productive purpose in addressing the fragmentation of identity as remarked upon by Offe.

Because the modern age makes identity more problematic (much less taken for granted), it also makes recognition far more important to people’s well-being; and if your way of life is not recognised as of equal value with others, this will be experienced as a form of oppression. The required recognition has been widely interpreted as including a more public presence in political life: a public acknowledgement of equal value (Phillips 1994, 40).

However, this approach, as Offe warned in the previous section, can be problematic. It is easy to say, as has been the case with farmers, that the level of disillusionment amongst the represented indicates incongruence between their interests and those being articulated by representatives. One could suggest where this occurs a constituency is being symbolically represented. However, how does one offer a remedy to this symbolic representation and how does one know when a remedy has been achieved? For instance, when does one know that what should have been represented has been represented, and when the feeling of being represented is authentic? However, without knowing what
Chapter Nine  Reconsidering the Representative Paradox

'should' have been represented, how can one say it has not been represented? The standard response has been to look towards the satisfaction of members with the organisation (Ryden 1996, 16-17). However, the NSWFA's representative paradox is testament to the fact that membership numbers are no guarantee of satisfaction. Consequently, a different approach needs to be adopted to reconciling the paradox of representation and, as such, the authenticity deficit.

The distinction made by Phillips (1995, 25) between a 'politics of ideas' and 'politics of presence' is useful in further exploring this deficit. If one considers that the difference between groups is in relation to ideas, then it is the message rather than the messenger that is the most important question for representative institutions. 'Politics of presence' takes the opposite view; it rests on the concept of an essentialist group experience. That is, any member of a group, by virtue of that membership, shares a basic set of experiences that shape their interests. As such, any member can speak on behalf of the rest of the group. In this way it is the characteristic of the messenger rather than the message that is important. Neither is advocated as a solution in itself, rather 'it is in the relationship between ideas and presence that we can best hope to find a fairer system of representation, not in false opposition between one or the other' (Phillips 1995, 25). However, in each, a different component of representation is 'substituted' for the other. 'Politics of ideas' substitutes interests for experience and, as such, asks its members to accept that a collective interest reflects experience. 'Politics of presence' substitutes experience for interests, and asks its members to accept that the experiences of the representatives will ensure the interests they articulate are the same as their interests.

In an important way, the work of Phillips (1995) builds on the work of Offe and Wiesenthal (1980). They suggest that interest groups and their task of political representation varies significantly depending on whether the interests being represented are homogenous prior to becoming 'inputs' into the organisation. Having argued in Chapter Seven that this suggestion is significant, not in its class dimensions, but in that it challenges researchers to critically examine each constituency in these terms, one can say
that each grouping varies in degrees of heterogeneity. This theme is picked up by Phillips (1995, 173) who goes a step further:

Ref: Group interests, needs, preferences, or perspectives do not come to us ready-made by material conditions, and their representation is never absolved from processes of internal contestation and debate ... This undermines suspect notions of 'authentic' or 'organic' representation ...

This makes authenticity, itself, an emergent property of a process of representation rather than something that a set of objective interests holds. According to Offe and Wiesenthal, authenticity is not an input to an organisation, and to Phillips it does not automatically flow from material conditions or experiences. Importantly, both authors provide a more procedural dimension to discerning what may be considered 'authentic'. Offe and Wiesenthal rest on the notion of a dialogical logic of collective action, with its emphasis on discursive forums for debate. Phillips, too, emphasises internal democratic procedures as checks to ensure that the input to the organisation is indeed converted into something more 'authentic'. The deliberative nature of the forum is important as it makes any changes to who is present and participating in the forums significant. The combination of a deliberative forum with a diverse group of participants means that the outcome has authenticity in the sense of being representative of both ideas and experiences, that is, interests and identity.

This approach to the representative paradox reflects the juncture of post-modern with modern concerns around representation. ‘The hallmark of a post-modern emancipatory politics is taken to be its insistence that meaning, truth, identity, right and community are all values that lie within a politics of representation. Thus, these values do not precede representation — as classical theorists of representation would have it — but are constituted within the domain of representational practice’ (Yeatman 1994, x).

9.6 **Current Role of Identity in Farmer Representation**

In a policy system in which government actively seeks representation of economic ‘sectors’ or ‘producers’, and recognises peak groups who speak on behalf of those ‘sectors’ or ‘producers’, the boundaries of economic or vocational constituencies are
reinforced and constructed from above. By its very existence, the NFF family signifies a claim that farmers’ interests can be determined and articulated. Commentators on farm interest groups largely seem to affirm this claim about the NFF family’s constituency. In pre-NFF literature, the division between graziers and farmers was typically identified as the factor inhibiting the realisation of a single interest group (Harman, 1968, 167; Smith and Harman 1981, 217; Connors 1996). As such, organisational boundaries were presented as directly correlating with discrete identities and interests. Likewise, Connors (1996) appears to argue that the NFF formation signalled the inter-sectional divisions between farmers and graziers had been resolved. In the light of the NFF formation, commentators attribute the high membership density of the NFF family to farmers’ ‘heightened sense of separate identity’ (Matthews 1991, 201). Whilst arguing that ‘there is considerable diversity between constituent interests that make up the agricultural community’, Abbott (1996, 40) concludes that the reason for this unified structure is a shared belief system.

The NFF family is not so optimistic. Its review documents talk openly about the failure of such ‘shared perceptions’ to foster collective action. However, they persist with a form of representation that assumes leaders are able to define a set of farmers’ interests in an objective fashion. As such, they attempt to reproduce the assumption that a set of farmers’ interests can be defined and are attached to a cohesive farming constituency. This approach has had serious repercussions. Chapter Seven demonstrated that in the absence of a previously agreed upon interpretive framework, or a set of functional deliberative forums, through which to coordinate a collective response from members, the NSWFA was unable to mount an effective opposition to the NVC Act issue. Caught in a position of not having the infrastructure or functional deliberative forums to coordinate action and ensure members acted as leaders wished, they instead obstructed the actions of those members who were willing to participate in the implementation of the Act.

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2 This is analogous to the way in which parliament, in principal anyway, reinforces a geographical boundary to constituency.
Chapter Nine  Reconsidering the Representative Paradox

The previous chapter illustrated that the absence of the capacity to influence the NVC Act issue goes far beyond the NSWFA’s inability to provide necessary deliberative forums to foster interest homogeneity. The absence of agreement is itself founded on the blurring of the boundaries of the farming constituency. It is also accompanied by moves in the political environment that provide more opportunities for this blurring to express itself. The ‘new’ routines and process that require new organisational capacities amongst interest groups have largely removed the enforcement of constituency boundaries from above. Interest groups must, therefore, establish the logic of their sectoral boundaries with their attached constituency, that is, from below. They must be able to establish that a farming constituency is a natural one and, hence, that farmers have a range of interests particular to those within the constituency boundary.

Clearly, the fragmentation of identity has precluded the leadership of the NSWFA being able to easily project a set of interests to the state that would conform with the views of the entire constituency. Indeed, the NVC Act issue acted to accentuate those lines of fragmentation already extant in the farming constituency. The post-modernist perspective has highlighted ways in which the representation of farmers, through the NFF family, has lacked authenticity: not only substantively (in terms of interests), but symbolically (in terms of identity and experiences) (see Section 9.5). However, one finds some contradictory evidence with respect to whether farmers are able to respond to the fragmentation of their identity.

Whilst there is evidence (see Chapter Seven, Section 7.3) that farmers on many issues have become divided, compartmentalised and parochial, and evidence piles up that the vocational category of ‘farmer’ is less tenable as a focus for political representation, activities and pronouncements of some sections of the farming community reflect a reformulation of a collective identity. Some farmers are finding a new unity in a rediscovered set of ‘rural’ values, largely in response to what they see as the disregard of many urban dwellers for their social and economic welfare. Formations such as the ‘NSW Country Summit’ and Pauline Hanson’s One Nation seem to be able to trade on
the existence of a particular set of rural identities. For the most part, these identities reflect an anti-identity, prompting farmers to identify as the 'other' to an uncaring urban community. Farmers' self-identifying as the 'marginalised' is significant in that it is a discourse that challenges the economic rationalist one promoted by the NFF family. The defence of local 'rural communities' can, in many ways, be seen to have encapsulated the concerns of the farming community. The resistance of many small communities to the reduction in their economic and social infrastructure has provided a platform for farmers to articulate their concern over what many see as the gradual removal of their livelihood. Further, that many of these rural communities also consider their future to rest on the viability of local agricultural activities and family farming, means these communities become advocates for what the farmers' own representatives have failed to articulate.

This is suggestive of a search by a section of the farming community for an identity beyond that articulated by their current representatives. This reaction provides the state with difficulties in the sense that they come from formations who are not 'responsive to the specific means of intervention employed by public policy — money, law, information' (Offe 1996, 113); all of which makes the state's role of responding more difficult. In turn, it still leaves the farming community without a clear mode of representing its specific interests, or more accurately, determining what these interests may be, with respect to 'new' issues. For farmers, that these expressions of identity are not founded on any stable organisational basis or have any connection with a logical constituency or a set of attached interests means that the state and other interlocutors have no basis on which to address these interests. The diverse range of views being presented as the interests of farmers and the unpredictability of these interests means that the state is in a weak position to productively intervene\(^3\). In sum, this scenario is likely to further compound the feeling amongst the farming community that the mainstream political process marginalises them.

\(^3\) The contrast between the expenditure of the current Federal Government on programs aimed at rural Australia and their poor electoral performance in rural-based electorates suggests that, even with a willing government, there is an absence of an understanding by the state of what needs to be done.
9.7 Imagining ‘Authenticity’

In imagining an ‘authentically representative’ future for Australian farmers, one cannot merely argue that because of the difficulties outlined in this thesis no representation will be conducted on their behalf. Indeed, the state requires such an avenue, as do farmers themselves. Further, in ‘traditional’ issue areas, the constituency has an authentic basis on which to cohere itself: the production and marketing of a particular commodity. In imagining such a future, the task then is to examine how the authentic representation of farmers may be achieved on ‘new’ issues, such as the NVC Act. This is best achieved by examining alternative ways in which one could imagine the representation of farmers on the NVC Act issue. This entails exploring the practice of the NSWFA in light of what has just been posited with respect to representation. Whilst one cannot suggest what should have been the outcome with respect to native vegetation management in NSW, one can comment on a better process for the representation of farmers in such an issue. Prior to this it would be productive to highlight the contribution the post-modernist-inspired research on political representation has made to discussing authentic representation.

Considering Authentic Representation

The central position, advocated in Sections 9.4 and 9.5 of this chapter, is that notions of authentic representation, which emerge from references to an essentialist experience of a group, should be treated with suspicion. As such, the first component of any authentic representation is to remove the basic assumptions that on all issues farmers will either already have, or will be able to generate, a farmers’ interest. This is particularly the case in ‘new’ issue contexts. If leaders and members of the secretariat cannot discern such an interest, then how is representation to be carried out? The action suggested by post-modern accounts of representation is twofold: a) the granting of presence in the decision-making forums to those ‘excluded’ groupings, and b) the reform of the decision-making forums such that they are deliberative in nature. Without b) presence is only symbolic. With only a) the forum is unlikely to develop policies that take account of the experiences of those ‘excluded’ groups. Therefore, the next phase of reform is to ensure the presence of representatives of those excluded groups and their inclusion in deliberative forums. This addresses the concern that inclusion is important to validate
Chapter Nine  Reconsidering the Representative Paradox

those who feel increasingly that they are not present in the political system due to the forces identified by Offe (1996). Through deliberative forums, this symbolic representation is converted to substantive representation by ensuring that essentialist notions of a nexus between experience and identity are avoided.

Given that groups are ephemeral and defined ‘voluntaristically’, the next issue to confront is the identification of a relevant basis on which to construct a temporary constituency. Given there is no assumption that a collective farmers’ interest will actually be evident, the specific nature of the issue at hand should be the criterion used to work out the basis on which a constituency boundary is defined. The nature of the issue will clarify the correlation between a social base for group activity and a distinctive form of life. Once this has been resolved the residual concern is to put in place a deliberative forum which will enable members of this temporary constituency to create a set of attached interests. Having settled upon this, all members are then provided with access to the deliberative forum. Where the issue requires sustained involvement of the constituency, representatives may need to be chosen. They are then accountable to that local constituency. The ‘localness’ of the constituency should mean that the experiences of those representing members would likely be closer to that of the members. Further, the deliberative nature of the forum itself will allow the range of experiences to counter any ‘suspect’ assumptions that authenticity will tumble out of an essentialist farming experience. This addresses both Phillips’s concerns of a ‘politics of presence’ and ‘politics of ideas’ (identity and interests).

These ideas do not negate the need for an encompassing interest group. The central role played by an organisation, such as an encompassing interest group, could be threefold. The first is to assist the larger constituency, as defined in modernist terms and correlating with a functional social base, form temporary constituencies in a manner that best reflects the pattern of identities and experiences an issue context reveals. The second is to allocate human and financial resources to that temporary constituency and assist them to set up the deliberative forum necessary to resolve the issue at hand. The third is to direct state and public attention to those aspects of the issue that require coordination and
linkages beyond the local or regional basis of the temporary constituency. The existence of such an organisation creates the sense of stability sufficient to ensure that there is no proliferation of constituencies and that there is some sense of accountability to the demands of constituencies. Also, it ensures that there is, where possible, engagement between temporary constituencies that may be advocating quite different agendas. This can be achieved through a mechanism such as annual conferences where a small number of contemporary policy issues are discussed and the experiences of farmers are canvassed. The encompassing group provides the function required by the state to ensure ongoing steering capacity and enforces some self-limitation on the proliferation of groups and demands.

**Generalising from the NVC Act**

Imagining how authentic representation may actually manifest itself is perhaps best articulated through a revision of the NVC Act. The NSWFA approached the issue by outlining a number of objections to the Act based on a unitary set of farmers’ interests relating to native vegetation management. The question as to whether the Act was or was not workable was decided by the leadership of the organisation with little or no consultation with those members willing to work within it. This approach reflects the NSWFA’s view that it represents a broad farming constituency with a single objectively determinable interest and that once this interest is identified by the secretariat it is the organisation’s role to represent it. This is clearly a defensible position based on what one typically expects of interest groups and industry advocates. However, the model of representation forwarded in this thesis challenges the broad-based application of such a rationale.

The concept of a ‘temporary constituency’ suggests that when approaching an issue, the leadership examines the nature of the issue and at what scale a temporary constituency is best formed. Given the ‘new’ness of the issue, one is automatically assuming that there will be diverse interests and, as such, identifying a single set of farmers’ interests may actually not be a productive way to proceed. It would be preferable for the leadership to assist the definition of a boundary for a sub-group within the broader constituency that in
turn could pursue resolution of the issue. The resolution of the issue would be to the satisfaction of the sub-constituency of the membership rather than the NSWFA leadership.

In the case of the NVC Act, the biggest problem to emerge for the Association was the discrepancy between the actions of members on the Mid-Lachlan Committee and the leadership. The insistence by members of the Mid-Lachlan Committee that they had a mandate from their local NSWFA colleagues and not the state-based leadership indicated two things. Firstly, those statewide prescriptions of policy on the issue were inappropriate and appeared unauthentic to members. Secondly, that the members viewed themselves on such an issue as part of a more significant local constituency rather than a representative of a broader statewide constituency. Both these observations reflect the theoretical concerns made in the previous section about authentic representation.

If statewide prescriptions are inappropriate then what could be done in their place? In the case of the NVC Act, the approach may have been to identify a land-system basis upon which it was productive for farmers to respond⁴. Given the nature of the issue, a constituency based on a regional or district foundation may have been the most appropriate. The Association could have then supported, with financial and human resources, the leadership at this level of the organisation to develop a position with the membership at this level. The value of the state-based Association is still clear, and if any local endeavours seem to be suffering common problems then these can be pursued by the NSWFA leadership who can lobby government for whatever remedies seem necessary.

Secondly, if members see themselves as not being part of a statewide ‘farming constituency’ then how can they be authentically represented? The members of the Mid-

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⁴ There is some precedence for this in the NSWFA currently. There are a number of intensive commodity groups that have their own annual conference as part of the Association and generate their own policies. This reflects the view that the identities of these groups are not acceptable to the mainstream membership and, as such, not able to function as a way to attract and cohere membership.
Chapter Nine  Reconsidering the Representative Paradox

Lachlan Committee already viewed themselves as part of a temporary constituency. This needed to be respected and fostered. The temporary constituency and its representatives restricted their activities to the NVC Act issue and on other issues they deferred to the Association. As such, this type of arrangement can clearly be made on an issue-by-issue basis.

9.8 Conclusion

This chapter has revised earlier views on the significance of the representative paradox. Rather than indicating only the absence of agreement, it signifies the fragmentation of a coherent identity, which, in turn, has left farmers wondering to what extent they actually share the same experiences. The multitude of overlapping experiences to which farmers equate with the 'farming experience' leads one to speculate that a different type of activity is required to generate authentic representation. The definition in Chapter Four had authenticity hinging on whether the rationale for representation, as proposed by the leadership, matched the expectations of members as to how representation should be experienced. This account referred to the interaction between members and leaders over defining interests. This chapter has argued that representation and authenticity do not only revolve around the articulation of a set of interests. Rather, it also relates to whether the basis on which farmers are organised on an issue reflects the voluntaristic organisation of farmers around a given identity.

This has a flow-on effect to the way in which one then understands complementarity. Clearly, the model of interest-group behaviour, developed in Chapter Four, characterised interest-group leaders as having to satisfy three imperatives to create complementarity. This model still stands. However, the engagement with post-modern conceptions of political representation focuses more importance on the difference between 'projecting' and 'delivering' the commodities that interest-group leaders can exchange to reach complementarity. The imagined path to authentic representation in the last section of this conclusion suggests that leaders may, in fact, achieve complementarity without eschewing grassroots debates about the authenticity of identity and interests. Instead, it may be a function of creating organisational capacities that harness these debates, assist
the state to appreciate the preferences of its membership and allow its members to feel integrated into rather than ‘marginalised’ from the political process.

The contradictory evidence of the fragmentation of farmers’ interests illustrated the dual potentialities of the problems encountered by the NSWFA and the NFF family. Their willingness to move away from authentic representation, as presently understood, risked disenfranchising farmers’ interests. Yet, at the same time, their lack of integration has yielded waves of populism that have, in many senses, strengthened their position for government assistance and support. However, the challenge appears to be whether the state can respond in any substantive manner when the chorus of demands is unmediated, is inconsistent, contradictory and uneven. What the state lacks and, hence, the farming sector suffers under, is the absence of an organisation with the capacity to address the current raft of problematic issues in such a way as to guarantee farmers authentic representation.
Chapter Ten

Concluding Remarks

10.1 Introduction
Two focal points of the thesis have been identified. The first was to explain how the NFF family has been able to continue its role in policy change in the context of a loss of members and increasing member disillusionment — this was called the ‘representative paradox’. Given this apparent paradox, the second focus of the thesis was to examine the framework used by researchers to evaluate farm interest groups. These two focal points were connected by the major theme of the thesis: the authentic representation of farmers’ interests. The theme reflected the need to understand the significance of this ‘representative paradox’ and its impact on the provision of farmers’ representation.

10.2 Thesis Findings
The thesis commenced with Chapter One identifying two interrelated focal points. The first was to understand how the NFF family was able to enjoy apparently high levels of political influence at the same time that SFOs were losing members and were being increasingly criticised for a lack of representation. This was labelled the ‘representative paradox’. Given that only SFOs have direct members, the issue was explored through the NSWFA. That this issue had not, in fact, been identified or addressed by the available academic literature suggested that some work needed to be done to develop a more suitable framework to examine this particular interest-group behaviour. Whilst the focus was on farm interest groups, this existed within an overarching concern about the political representation of farmers’ interests. As such, the outcome of the two focal points was always explored in relation to how it affected the provision of ‘authentic’ representation. The term ‘authentic’ was deployed to address the apparent difference between the NFF’s provision of representation and the opinion of many farmers that this did not amount to representation at all.
Chapter Ten  Concluding Remarks

Given the broad focus on political representation, Chapter Two provided a potted history of the representation of farmers in Australia. It concentrated on identifying the formations that fulfilled a representative function for farmers. Particular attention was paid to identifying the reason why these formations commenced and what led to their demise or their subordination to another more dominant formation. The conclusion was that there had been a steady progression in formations; from local voluntary associations to rural independents, to parliamentary parties to disorganised interest groups and finally to a peak interest group organisation. If for nothing else, this lineage was important as it indicated the temporary nature of many representative formations. More importantly, it exemplified how these formations were in many respects a manifestation of a temporally contingent resolution of a complex relationship between the formation, its external environment and the cleavages (both material and social) within the farming community. It was also interesting to note that many of these formations became part of an ‘organisational’ repertoire to which farmer’s resort when questioning the relevance of the current dominant form of representation. As such, this history was quite important to understanding the more contemporary debates amongst farmers about representation and organisation.

Chapters One and Two set out the focal points of the thesis and provided an historical perspective on their development. Chapters Three and Four focussed on the theoretical framework for examining interest-group behaviour. This thesis is offered as a further development of a literature aimed at understanding the development of farm interest groups in Australia. This literature, which had its high point in a flurry of activity in the late 1960s and 1970s, has been aimed at explaining the nature of these groups and the manner in which they have changed in response to the political environment in which they operate. This work is both an inspiration and a foundation from which this thesis was launched. Since the last significant research effort into farm interest groups, the NFF family of interest groups, incorporating the NSW Farmers’ Association (NSWFA), has been created. As such, in building on this literature, these empirical changes and their implications needed to be addressed. Chapter Three identified a tendency in the Australian literature to adopt pluralist-based assumptions about interest-group behaviour.
Chapter Ten

Concluding Remarks

These assumptions meant that the success of a group tended to be understood in relation to the exercise of influence. Whilst this was a useful tool in explaining public policy outcomes, it was not helpful when examining the operation of a group itself. Further, it tended to downplay the importance of both internal group dynamics and the role of leaders in creating relations between membership and leadership. This in turn rendered ‘representation’ a secondary issue.

The developments at a theoretical level also needed to be considered. Chapter Four provided a new framework from which to make sense of those observable elements of interest-group activity that could not be understood under existing frameworks. The framework explored the relationship between the internal and external dimensions of group activity. Based on the assumption that there are two dimensions to group activity, the framework asserted that leaders managed a range of imperatives, often in tension with one another, in order to achieve complementarity. Complementarity in turn equates with organisational survival. This framework was significant in that it enabled external group activities to be explained with reference to the seemingly distant consideration of organising members. Vice versa, internal relations between members and leaders could be explained with reference to imperatives of political influence. In relation to the ‘representative paradox’, which eschewed pluralist notions of a positive link between support and influence, this framework suggested the leadership had separated off internal support for external influence. This thesis used the framework to confront the empirical issue of how the NSWFA managed to simultaneously meet the needs of its members and that of the policy process. This framed the search in Chapters Five and Six for an explanation as to how this had occurred.

Chapters Five and Six took up the task of explaining how the ‘representative paradox’ was achieved. Given that the SFOs were the only organisations to have direct members, the NSWFA was examined. The fall in membership caused significant consternation amongst the NFF family and, in particular, the SFOs. Whilst the significance of such a decline was largely articulated by the NFF family as a financial challenge, there was undoubtedly a concern that a drop off in members may have also led to a diminution of
Chapter Ten  Concluding Remarks

the Federation’s political credibility. Faced with the prospect of an extended period of decline, the Federation and the NSWFA responded by deploying a range of reforms to both maintain their capacity to exercise political influence and increase membership levels. Given that a changing political environment demanded more financial resources be applied to achieve influence, increasing membership numbers signified an increase in the level of organisational resources. However, that same political environment demanded professional representation, not emotive arguments by the rank and file of interest groups. To gain members, but ensure they contributed only financial support, the Association advocated a ‘division of labour’. This division promoted the view that the role of leadership was to create a healthy business environment within which a farmer’s level of business acumen would determine their success. This model of representation was akin to that typically employed by business interest groups and associations. Further, it reflected the expectations and needs of the policy process and the state. This mode of representation was portrayed as authentic through various framing efforts by the NFF family leadership.

These reforms have been claimed a success by the Association. The trend of declining membership numbers was turned around by the NSWFA. In turn, this provided the NSWFA with more financial resources and, therefore, according to its logic, placed it in a better position to influence policy debates. However, the rise in membership levels did not reduce the level of member disillusionment. That the ‘second wave’ reforms had addressed the decline in members, but had not addressed the increasing level of disillusionment with the NFF family’s policies, placed questions over the accuracy of the assumptions underpinning these reforms. The most crucial assumption was that farmers had homogeneous interests and, as such, did not require a dialogical form of collective action in order to be represented. Consistent with this assumption, the Association further assumed that if membership represented increased value for money, members would be prepared to join the Association, provide it with resources and let the leadership pursue their interests for them. That is, the ‘division of labour’ would match the expectations of their membership. Given this assumption, the NFF family did not specifically address the issue of disillusionment in its reforms. Beyond participation at the Annual Conference,
membership of the Association did not provide farmers with a greater opportunity to resolve any divergent policy positions they held.

The assumption that members’ interests were homogeneous meant that farmers’ interests could be reduced to an economic calculus that the leadership could determine objectively. As such, more consultation with members was deemed unnecessary to foster agreement. The Association leadership had clearly adopted policy positions on the basis that it had determined they were consistent in providing members with a positive business environment. It assumed, therefore, that any disillusionment was either resistance from members who had become the ‘collateral damage’ of the policy reform process or members who had lost sight of their interests.

Chapter Seven examined the NSWFA’s approach to the NVC Act issue. It provided evidence of the ramifications the ‘second wave’ of reforms had on the NSWFA’s ability to coordinate the actions of its members. The persistence of the ‘representative paradox’ underscored the inaccurate nature of the assumptions adopted by the NFF family. As such, the success of the reforms was very one-sided in nature. The enforcement of a ‘division of labour’, with its emphasis on passive membership of the Association, acted to erode the deliberative capacity of the organisation. The pattern of interaction between members and leadership further disconnected the membership from the leadership of the Association. Consequently, the present Association governance structure was inadequate to foster the interaction between members necessary to enable the heterogeneous interests of members to be made commensurable for the purpose of representation.

The mismatch between the logic of collective action applied by the Association, and that required by the membership to foster interest commensurability and agreement, was borne out in the instability that reforms had introduced into the Association’s state of complementarity. Without being able to coordinate the actions of members, the Association was limited in the scope of issues over which it could attempt to exercise influence. It could not conduct political campaigns that required the participation and coordination of their members without risking that the Association’s position would be
undermined by individual members articulating a divergent set of interests. This was revealed when ‘new’ issues increased and traditional issues started to develop characteristics similar to those that were described as ‘new’.

The significance of the paradox rested on establishing whether the disillusionment was, in fact, a consequence of a misunderstanding between members and leaders or a more thoroughgoing disagreement about what the policy direction should be. Whilst the NFF assumed the former, this thesis argued that the latter was, in fact, the case. Given that disillusionment was the manifestation of disagreement over the interests of members, the paradox took on new significance. It signified that the NSWFA’s reforms failed to create the necessary procedural and organisational changes to enable heterogeneous interests to be made commensurable. Further, it reflected how the parameters for the NFF family’s reforms were set by the demands of the organisational political environment which determined the way the Federation must cooperate to attain political influence. The absence of a clear understanding and commitment to the needs of the constituency with respect to representation clearly underwrote the ongoing nature of the paradox.

Chapter Eight pursued the significance of the NVC Act for the practice of the NSWFA beyond that particular issue context. It illustrated that the NVC Act issue was indicative of a set of ‘new’ issues that were likely to proliferate into the future. Without being able to exhibit the necessary organisational capacities to assist the state in resolving these issues, the NSWFA was unable to gain significant levels of influence over them. The changing nature of traditional issues had added extra weight to the argument that the NSWFA could not ignore the ‘representative paradox’. Further, that these ‘traditional’ issues had become alike ‘new’ issues, and that these ‘traditional’ issues typically did not involve other constituencies, suggested that the paradox had another dimension to it — a fragmentation of farming identity. In terms of the NFF family, this observation led to the conclusion that not only was reform of the decision making forums that made interests commensurable necessary — the implicit argument in Chapters Six and Seven — but the capacity of a farmers’ interest group to define such a collective interest was itself becoming more questionable.
Chapter Nine took a speculative look at what this final understanding of the 'representative paradox' meant for the political representation of farmers. The concept of authenticity was again raised in order to explore what the absence of a cohesive identity meant for representation. Post-modernist literature on representation provided a promising way of thinking about the scenario that confronted farmers in terms of representation. The thesis adopted the argument that what was necessary was the coexistence of a symbolic and substantive element to representation. This would do away with the modernist approach that equated authenticity with the substantive and used symbolic as a pejorative. Based on this new understanding it was possible to speculate as to what the NSWFA and, therefore, the NFF family, would do to address the lack of authenticity. It was concluded that representatives should view their role as creating temporary constituencies through which interest could be determined deliberatively, with due consideration given to ensuring the constitution of the deliberative forum in some way reflected the full diversity of the temporary constituency at the level of identity. To ground these ideas in terms of representative practice, they were explored in terms of what the NSWFA could have done if confronted again with the NVC Act. The thesis concluded that, from a theoretical standpoint, to address interest-group analysis one needed to consider complementarity as a central focus. In turn, this framework allowed the issue of authentic representation to be given a much higher profile in interest-group studies. Finally, this focused further attention on the problem of the erosion of the social base, making it a significant problem for authentic representation.

10.3 Future Work

As with any thesis, this endeavour has created nearly as many questions as it has answered. A thesis has to end at some point and the end to this thesis leaves some small threads that deserve further work. These can be said to fall into either theoretical or empirical opportunities for research.

Undertaking a study of the internal as well as the external dimension of the NSWFA's behaviour would have profited by some earlier attempts at understanding the internal
Chapter Ten  Concluding Remarks

dimension of farm interest-group behaviour. Even some attempts to collect branch attendance data and the congruence between leader and member beliefs would have assisted the task. In the absence of some longitudinal data, the author conducted several small case studies based around NSWFA branch or district councils\(^1\). Whilst this data was not collected to draw causal relationships between membership and socio-economic characteristics and, as such, was a support rather than a feature of the thesis, some analysis had been conducted (Halpin and Martin 1996). However, it did give a basis from which to point to associations that were advantageous in mounting the thesis arguments. Clearly, this data provided the base-line measurement for future work in this area. The methodology developed in this work would be a good starting point for the design of such an empirical study. There is also room for a community-studies type of research project into the involvement of farmers in local political organisations. This was attempted in the survey process conducted for this research. Again, this had to be set aside in favour of other questions. However, it would be a very promising point of research indeed\(^2\).

Another more empirical thread is to more closely pursue the rise of populism in rural Australia. Not much work has been done on the cultural changes brought about by the changing structural and material nature of agriculture. This could be more productively discussed in a political context given the rise of populism, which seems to have a ready resonance with the Australian farming community. This thesis drew some rudimentary conclusions in this regard. However, there is much more to be done. This issue warrants immediate attention given the rising feelings of marginalisation and the prospect that populism may, in fact, drive a negative political agenda.

There remain even more promising theoretical threads to follow from this thesis. This thesis established a substantive critique of the political science orthodoxy with respect to studying interest-group behaviour. Three main points were made. The first that interest-

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\(^1\) This comprised of a mail-out survey to members and non-members in three locations in NSW. These surveys were followed up with selected semi-structured interviews (see Appendix Two, Three and Four).

\(^2\) The survey form asked for data on the participation habits of individuals in various local organisations (see Appendix Four).
Chapter Ten  Concluding Remarks

group behaviour could not be explained with respect to a single imperative of influence. Instead, it had been argued that the actions of interest groups were the result of creating complementarity between influence and support such that leadership autonomy was maintained. Secondly, it was argued that the way leaders created complementarity differed according to who was being represented. Specifically, it was the degree of interest heterogeneity that members exhibited which was important. It had been argued that the more heterogeneous the interests the greater the lengths leaders had to go to make the members' interests commensurable. Further, it was argued that identity, and a link with an 'authentic' social base, underpinned the generation of authentic representation.

Representation was a concept that seemed to force a dialogue between modernist and post-modernist conceptions of politics. This framework developed in Chapter Four, whilst generated from modernist considerations, was not undermined by post-modernist concepts. In fact, concepts such as 'projecting' or 'framing', and the notions implicit in complementarity that leaders 'manage' tensions, provided an important entry point for post-modernist considerations. In creating this framework, this thesis had gone part way to create a bridge between these two paradigms. Clearly, there was an exciting opportunity to develop a more substantive dialogue between post-modernist and modernist accounts of political representation. This thesis concluded that this dialogue was important for guiding political institutions as to how they would conceive of generating representation and, hence, how one would, as a researcher, more fully evaluate the representative role of such institutions.

Another interesting path to pursue is the role of interest groups in compensating for the decline of parties. A range of commentators have entertained the decline of the party (Lawson and Merkl 1988: Marsh 1995). This argument has been largely prompted by the notion that the social base in society, upon which system of orderly interest representation have been founded, are eroding. The absence of the class-based party system has prompted the debate about the role associations or interest groups can play in interest representation. Attention has shifted to the role associations or interest groups may play in transmitting interests. However, the extension of the role of interest groups
Chapter Ten  Concluding Remarks

from transmitting to ensuring the legitimacy of the political process raises concerns. What has yet to be demonstrated is whether interest groups, themselves, suffer from the same erosion of the social bases in society. The erosion of 'traditional' attachments must make the effort of organising and sustaining interest groups a difficult task. Further, the assumption that they are participative and, hence, draw citizens into the flux of policy-making and the democratic tradition are also dubious. The residual question, therefore, is to what extent the interest groups fit their internal environment. To address this question, one is by necessity drawn into the issue of the manner in which leaders manage the affairs of interest groups.

The debate about the import of interest groups in terms of responding to the legitimation deficit left in the wake of the decline of parties lends weight to the view that a better understanding of the workings of the modern interest group is important. As this thesis has contributed to this better understanding, so it contributed to resolving the debate about the role interest groups could play in integrating the interests of citizens into the political process. However, the opportunity exists for someone to pick up this theme and pursue it in more detail.

10.4 A Final Word from the NFF Family

The NFF family clearly believe they have a future. As the final text of this thesis is written, the NSWFA and the NFF have celebrated their 20-year anniversaries. Understandably, these occasions provide some cause for reflection amongst those concerned. The NFF president reflected:

The last 20 years have seen some real highs and lows for NFF and the farming community, but those years have seen our organisation develop into one of the most credible industry bodies in the country. (Donges 1999, NR 36/99).

This is undoubtedly true given the access it achieves with its small resource base. The president claims that the 'NFF has only ever been as strong as its members, who have supported us over the past 20 years'. This thesis has documented how the NFF's political strength has not come from its members' purposive support for the best part of these two decades. Yet, as the new millennium draws near, the signs are that to be relevant and to successfully address the 'new' range of issues confronting the farming community the
Chapter Ten  Concluding Remarks

NFF family will increasingly have to rely on the direct participation of members. The answer to the question of ongoing relevance depends on whether the NFF family realise their situation and look more broadly at what actions they can take to ensure their relevance.

There is evidence that, at the grassroots, members are starting to question the efficacy of the 'division of labour' and the measures in the 'second wave' reforms. As such, the need to address the paradox is becoming more urgent. A motion at the 1997 Annual Conference requested 'that the Association undertake an urgent review of its relationship with commercial interests to establish whether it is compromising its role as a political lobby group' (NSWFA 1997f, 88). Further, comments from a senior NSWFA office bearer indicate that whilst membership has increased, participation in Association activities has decreased\(^3\). Whilst the NSWFA's reforms have resulted in the attainment of complementarity, they have identifiable repercussions that challenge the long-term stability of this arrangement.

The conclusion of this thesis is that farmers are not presently being authentically represented through the NFF family of organisations. The NFF family has created complementarity through ensuring its internal dimension fits the demands of the external environment. Whilst this has worked under corporatist-style arrangements, as they are withdrawn, the NFF family finds that its internal relations with members is insufficient to coordinate their activities. Further, changes in the internal environment have overtaken the external activities of the group. As such, the NFF faces the prospect that a large proportion of the farming community will not be able to identify with the social base it purports to represent. This is certainly the case on 'new' issues, and appears to be increasingly the case as 'traditional' issues change in nature over time.

Whilst the NFF family may persist in claiming to represent farmers' interests, its assertions will be come increasingly transparent to both the public and the state. This will

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\(^3\) Anonymous 1999, pers.comm. Phone Conversation with senior NSWFA office bearer.
be facilitated by the demands of the policy process for interest groups to develop new organisational capacities necessary for the resolution of ‘new’ and changing ‘traditional’ issues. The question remains as to whether the NFF family can gain these organisational capacities or whether the systemic imperatives it operates under preclude these being developed. In the meantime, farmers illustrate a capacity to reorganise around new motifs and identities. Unfortunately, for the state, these identities seem not to be articulated by any observable organisation able to be addressed in a systematic manner. Further, the emerging identity seems to be founded on a feeling of marginalisation from the rest of society rather than on any common interests or experiences of farming people. This self-identification as the ‘other’ risks an escalation of demands for special economic and political rights which, in turn, makes the state’s aim of integrating interest particularly complicated. In this sense, there is an imperative for the state to support, where possible, the NFF family to develop the requisite capacities and to head off the rise of rural populism. In sum, this augurs for a very interesting tussle over the issue of authentic representation.
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Appendices
State Farm Organisations

In this section SFO’s will be explored by describing a number of characteristics. They are alike in structure, goals/charters/mission statements, external linkages and organisational activities. Given this thesis focus on the representation of farmers in NSW, details will pertain to the NSW Farmers’ Association (NSWFA). General comments will be made about any major variations between SFO’s where they are considered important to the argument.

New South Wales Farmers’ Association

The NSWFA is a state organisation that was realised in 1986 after a vote to change its name from the NSW Livestock and Grain Producers’ Association (LGPA). The LGPA was formed from the merger between the United Farmers and Woolgrowers’ Association of NSW (UFWA) and the Graziers’ Association of New South Wales in 1978.

Structure

The structure of the NSWFA in 1999 reflects the same structure laid down in its constitution twenty years earlier. It has 361 branches, which sit under 120 district councils (DC’s), that sit under 12 regions. The LGPA at formation had 101 DC’s (called branches at that time) and today it has 120. As farm numbers and membership numbers have fallen, the number of DC’s has remained constant hence the number of potential members per DC is substantially smaller than at formation. The NSWFA branches are all general branches with no specific focus on commodities. However under the constitution, fruit, vegetable, oyster and poultry producers have been allocated commodity specific branches. This provision reflects the geographical concentration of these industries¹.

These hierarchical structures develop a form of procedural power that helps to discipline the membership. Once a member’s motion is raised at one tier, it is the responsibility of the next tier of the organisation to act on it. The potential for a

¹In Queensland both the UGA and the QFF have a significantly different structure. They are both federations of constituent organisations. In the case of the QFF it has nine member organisations. (NFF Mail Survey (1995) conducted by Darren Halpin.)
member to act legitimately on behalf of the organisation is extinguished upon the 
procedural mechanism of the organisation being triggered. If a branch member cannot 
gain district council support then the member has no legitimate right to act on the 
organisation’s behalf on that issue. Such democratic processes maintain the 
legitimacy of the outcomes emerging from internal procedures. However, the purpose 
of some of these tiers, in a policy sense, is questionable. As a result some SFO’s have 
removed one tier in order to streamline the policy process and attempt to enhance 
communications with their constituency.

In the case of NSWFA, some branches operate as District Councils. Whilst not 
sanctioned by the Associations constitution, this is often a local effort to minimise the 
number of meetings, and hence the time commitment necessary for members to be 
active. In general the Regional Conferences have no real policy development role in 
the NSWFA and have become more of a venue for social interaction and information 
dissemination.

Like most SFO’s, the NSWFA has a related Industrial or Employers’ Association\(^2\). 
For legal reasons these sections have a separate constitution and board however are 
integrrally linked to the general association. This function reflects the initial purpose of 
many farm organisations in opposing the early labour movement at the turn of the 
century and the subsequent role in making submissions on wage cases to the 
Arbitration and Conciliation Commission, particularly in reference to pastoral awards.

The secretariat of the NSWFA has a number of policy sections that report to the 
Policy Director. These have always included variations on Wool and Livestock, Grain 
Industries, Economics and Industrial Relations. However, over time Horticulture, 
Intensive Industries, Rural Affairs, and Conservation and Resource Management 
sections have been added. The expansion of the secretariat into these areas reflects the 
broad range of issues over which farmers are involved. It can be viewed as a 
movement from core commodity based to broader economic, social and 
environmental issues. The Association also has a Public Relations section, a 
Membership section, and a Commercial Services and Property section.

\(^2\)The only exception known to the author is The Cattlemen’s Union of Australia.
Appendix 1  Description of the NSWFA

Mission Statement and Goals

The mission statements of these organisations, as with most corporate equivalents, are typically general and phrased in a way which leaves meaning open to free interpretation (Swales and Rogers 1995). This generalisability enables its meaning to be adapted to suit the historical moment. It also allows as broad a cross section of members as possible to relate to them, whilst fundamental divisions in members views on specific policies may remain blurred.

The NSWFA has an elaborate ‘Statement of Corporate Philosophy’ (See Figure 1). Of particular note is the way these objectives focus on the maintenance of unity within, and identity of, the Association. One could argue this merely reflects the organisation’s desire to rid itself of the historical divisions that have occurred in NSW. The final point in the NSW Farmers’ Corporate Values is of note, particularly references to the words ‘responsible’ and ‘constructive’. The significance of these words is the implication that the Association leadership must exercise some control over policy content, and as such, this value could be used to legitimate policy generated at a distance from membership.

Whilst mission statements appear in the printed material of the Associations, it is their slogans and promotional mottoes that are of even more import. They initially enter the discourse at both a policy and promotional level, but these slogans also enter the discourse of farmers as ideological and rhetorical devices that can be grafted onto a diverse range of arguments regarding a broad range of issues. At the most instrumental level, they give a range of somewhat inconsistent arguments a degree of coherence and consistency in the eyes of the average disinterested member of the farming constituency. Examining changes in these slogans over time tells the story of how these SFO’s have reoriented their approach to helping their members interpret change in the external environment.
Organisational Activities

The activities a representative organisation, such as the NSWFA, needs to conduct in many cases define the pattern of interaction between the NSWFA and their members. Regular activities include, determining policy, choosing leaders, communicating association policy positions, providing services and recruiting members.

Developing Policy

Annual Conference, convening once a year, is the forum that sets the policy platform for the following year. It is through this mechanism that consent is mobilised. General Council, which meet four times a year, and an Executive Committee, which meets as required, run the organisation in the intervening period. A committee system at the General Council level provides room for policy deliberations and the elaboration of the Associations formal policy positions on specific issue areas.

Members submit motions from branches up through the hierarchy to the executive. Between annual meetings, branches can send motions to the General Council of the organisation. Once elected, office bearers are bound to operate within the confines of the policy platform set at Annual Conference. Yet they exhibit a high degree of
autonomy\textsuperscript{3}. The General Council and the Executive Committee are able to act on issues of importance that have not been addressed by a motion at Annual Conference. Often issues are set aside from Annual Conference, either due to complexity or a lack of information or lack of time, to be considered by the next General Council. At Annual Conference issues are resolved via a simple majority process (50 per cent plus one).

Some tension exists around who should vote on commodity issues. This has been generally resolved by the unwritten convention that individuals should vote on issues relevant to that commodity which they produce\textsuperscript{4}. However a complication arises when individuals may not grow grain, yet represent a DC which has a significant number of grain growers in it. This remains a point of ongoing tension, and reveals the ambiguous nature of the representation provided by the NSWFA. That is, is it representing the interests of agricultural industries or farmers?

The manner in which motions are decided upon at the branch and DC level is not prescribed in the constitution. Consequently, the motions that make it to the Annual Conference may have been decided upon through measures ranging from a formal majority vote at a meeting to the formulation of motions amongst a few office bearers over the phone.

From time to time office bearers adopt a position on particular issues, which is obviously counter to the popular tide. In 1998, for example, amidst a wave of sentiment opposing economic rationalism, senior office bearers were reiterating an economic rationalist discourse. In these instances, the tension between ‘acting on behalf of’ and ‘acting for’ the constituency reveals itself publicly. The dissonance between grass roots members and leaders may in some part be due to the increased professionalisation of the group secretariats. Where a professional secretariat is employed to provide expert advice on such matters as environment, commodity trade

\textsuperscript{3} See Appendix Six for analysis of Annual Conference Motions. This demonstrates the power Committees have on shaping motions considered at the Annual Conference.

\textsuperscript{4} Whilst this convention is unwritten, the Chairmen of the 1996 Annual Conference when to the length of stating that the norm should prevail. He argued however that if members did not abide by it this could not be stopped.
and economics, the process of policy formation is heavily influenced by their opinion. For the most part, leaders make policy deliberations, draw up policy detail and make submissions to government based on expert opinion with the aim of serving what they determine to be the best interests of their membership.

If grass roots anger builds up over particular policy position adopted by the NFF, SFO leaders will allow motions of no confidence in the NFF to go to their Annual Conference, and use the opportunity to publicly ameliorate concerns. However on occasion leaders may support such motions to displace blame for crisis onto the NFF (Fray 1989, 7; Jones 1993, 11). This activity is a consistent feature of NFF activity and as such provides both the federated structure with the requisite stability to be able to bargain effectively on their behalf and the SFO’s with a path to displace any criticism they themselves may attract.

**Electing Leadership**

The leaders of the Association are elected through a number of separate processes. The delegates to the Annual Conference are chosen via the District Councils. Once at the Annual Conference these delegates elect the President, three Vice-Presidents and the Treasurer; all of who become members of the General Council and Executive Committee. Delegates from each of the twelve regions elect four General Councillors, making a total of 48 General Councillors. Within the General Council committees are formed and councillors elect their membership from amongst their peers. The Executive Committee is also elected from amongst the General Councillors. It is through the election of all office bearers on an annual basis that accountability is exercised.

A number of informal conventions provide some consistency to the ideological and policy position of the organisation. For instance, it is convention that the President is

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5 For instance, at the 1995 NSWFA Annual Conference, the executive supported the motion ‘That the Association support a review of the activities, representation and policies of the National Farmers’ Federation’ which was carried. However it spoke against a motion ‘That the Association discontinue financial support to the NFF’ which was ‘Ruled covered in the first motion’ (NSWFA 1995). These motions were quite insignificant in terms of the NFF’s future, as the NFF had been under review for 12 months, and at the May 1995 NFF General Council meeting the NSWFA president had committed the association to an ongoing review (NFF 1995a). Yet the symbolic importance of this interplay cannot be
elected from amongst the Vice-Presidents. The stability in leadership of the NSWFA is best evidenced by the length of time members remain in the General Council. In 1996, 21% of the incumbent General Council had been in the position concurrently for all of the years, since 1981, for which material was available. Of the 1996 Executive Committee, the Treasurer and two Committee members had been on General Council since 1985, whilst the President, one Vice President and five of the Executive Committee had been on Council since 1991.

**Communicating Association policy**

As with most of the SFO’s, members and other interested parties are kept informed regarding the operation of the NSWFA via a magazine— the ‘NSW Farmer’. The Association also has a section within The Land—the leading NSW rural newspaper (circulation 57,391), operates a web site, and runs a weekly program on regional radio which enables it to present activities, achievements and views of the organisation. Any discursive interaction between membership occurs at forums such as Annual Conference or Branch and District council meetings.

All organisations have field officers who undertake a range of publicity, recruitment, marketing and organising roles. These individuals also act as a focal point for communication between the hierarchy of the organisation and the rank and file. As such they undertake an integral role in the internal relations between organisation and constituency. It is the role of the office bearers of the SFO’s to facilitate a two-way flow of information between the executive and the membership. However in the NSWFA, little evidence exists that general councillors actively facilitate substantive policy debate. The Association’s various policy sections intermittently put out policy discussion documents to inform members of the organisation’s position on matters of importance.

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underestimated. It was quite effective at placating the members’ sense of disillusionment and building space for the NFF to exercise further autonomy.

6 This was broken for the first time when, in 1992, John Crawford was elected President from the floor of the Annual Conference.

7 See Appendix Five.

8 *The Land* newspaper was first published in 1911. It was produced by The Land Newspaper Co., which was established and majority owned by the FSA (Bayley 1957, 85). Today, the NSWFA holds a significant share in the small company, now known as Rural Press.
Generally, however, the policy section of the organisation works through the Public Relations section. This is fully illustrated by the fact that District Council Chairmen do not receive policy position, advice or discussion papers; rather they receive a print out if every press release the NSWFA produces. They also receive shadow letters, which they can place in local papers on the Association’s behalf.

The Association uses surveys of membership to provide a quick information base upon which to pursue policy advocacy. The NSWFA administers surveys via a form in the NSW Farmer magazine or sent directly to all District Council Chairmen. On other issues, such as the administration of government regulations, the Association encourages members to provide examples of poor administration or problems with implementation. From time to time ‘information nights’, public meetings, or forums are called on certain issues\(^9\).

**Provision of Services**

Most organisations provide some form of tangible service or individual benefit on an exclusive basis to members. The basic duo of reductions in insurance and advice or representation on industrial matters is common to most organisations. The NSWFA has a co-operative buying service, provides financial services and has negotiated discounts with preferred companies on a range of items from holidays to fertiliser. The NSWFA generates income from some of the services it provides. For instance its link with Telstra, which provides discounted prices to NSWFA members, also generates a commission for the Association. The NSWFA also operates a training company that acts as a broker to provide educational activities in regional NSW. Acting through the NFF, SFO’s have set up a company called Farmwide Pty Ltd that provides a number of services and undertakes projects in rural Australia\(^11\).

**Recruiting Membership**

The subscription for membership is due annually. It consists of a base subscription rate per property with additional fees paid to commodity sections. The commodity fees are calculated on the number of livestock or the hectares under crop. In this way

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\(^9\)The 1997-98 debate over the restructure of the wool industry is a prime example.

\(^11\)The NSWFA called such forums on the AWB restructure, WIK and the restructuring of the arrangements for releasing from the Woolstockpile amongst other issues.
the fees are proportional to the production level of the member. The average annual subscription per members has consistently been at around $130 (NSWFA 1996a).

The membership criteria serve as a measure to maintain a degree of homogeneity in the constituency. Membership is on a property basis, which given the family nature of farm production, means that one family member must be nominated as its representative. Typically the representative is the male member of the partnership. Restrictions have become more relaxed over time. Whilst ‘associate’ membership allows access to partners or children of the listed member, more often than not this category is denied full voting rights. In debates within the NSWFA over extending voting rights to ‘partners’ of members some have argued branches would be ‘swamped’ by large families and that the association would lose revenue. Others have retorted that “Sure we would lose funds but we would make up with higher attendances.” (NSW Farmers 1995h, 27).

A conspicuous limitation on membership is that applied to farm managers. They are unable to be members unless their employer is a member, and then they are only extended associate membership. Such a measure reflects the position that the Association represents those farmers with a ‘proprietal interest’. The supporting logic maintains that interests derive from ownership of the means of production, and as such managers do not have a large enough stake in the outcome of policy; hence their involvement in policy making needs to be curtailed.

**External Linkages**

Apart from relationships with the NFF and associated CC’s, the external relationships of SFO’s typically constitute their targets of influence. Australian interest groups generally utilise the minister, public departments, the media, parliament, political parties and public opinion as avenues for influence (Abbott 1996, 106). In the case of the NSWFA, these can be summarised as, state government departments, parliamentary parties and urban Australia.

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State Government

State farm organisations, given their affiliation with the NFF, typically focus their attention on state issues pertinent to agriculture. In this capacity they interact regularly with state governments and bureaucracies. The historical importance of agricultural development to state prosperity has resulted in most states maintaining a Department of Agriculture or Primary Industries or equivalent. The staff of SFO’s typically includes people who have worked in relevant state government departments, which creates a cross-pollination of ideas and a degree of epistemic conformity. In NSW, the NSWFA maintains a close relationship to the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Land and Water. Whilst the depth of the informal links fluctuates from time to time, dependant on the personalities involved, the formal links have remained virtually the same since formation.

The NSWFA and Department of Agriculture conduct a ‘Meeting of Executives’ every four to six months. This involves five or six of the most senior executives of both organisations, the results of which remain in confidence. The NSWFA nominates members to sit on a variety of committees. Those involving both the Department of Agriculture and the NSWFA at the time of writing numbered 35 (NSW Department of Agriculture 1997). Interaction between local members and departmental officers occurs at the local level, with significant variation between the quality of that relationship across the state (NSW Department of Agriculture Pers. Comm. 1997).

Parliamentary Parties

Since the split with the Country Party the NSWFA is rarely party political. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that the NSWFA’s predecessor made donations to all political parties with an emphasis on the Country party. The NSWFA decrees in its ‘Articles of Association’ (1994b);

The Association shall be non party political and the name of the Association shall not be used in any way which may be construed as party political provided that nothing

\[12\text{There is evidence that the NSWFA has become directly involved in party politics. Dick (1985: 5) reports that the NSW LGPA sought to actively lobby for the downfall of the Hawke federal Government.}

\[13\text{John White former CEO of the GA, LGPA and NSWFA commented “We were major financial contributors in the first half of my career to all political parties but particularly to the National Party and the Liberal Party. Pro rata we gave more to the Country Party than to the Liberal and more to both of them than we gave to Labor.” (Pers. Com. Sydney 14/10/96)}\]
shall be done to infringe the ordinary civil rights of members or officials acting in a private capacity.

However, informal links do exist, the strongest of which is with the National party.\textsuperscript{14} The most obvious informal link is the crossover of the general membership of both organisations.\textsuperscript{15} Some senior members of the Association have gone on to become parliamentary members of the National Party in NSW.\textsuperscript{16} The farm sectors historic links with the National Party predispose it to emphasise working through this party, whilst the flow of members from the NFF family to the National party creates helpful networks in terms of navigating the parliamentary arena (Abbott 1996, 65-66). Apart from claiming a significant portion of each other’s constituency perhaps the most interesting link in the context of this thesis is that both the Nationals and the NSWFA seem to claim credit for the same policy achievements.

Cross-participation between NSWFA and the National Party has remained strong (Connors 1996; 47)\textsuperscript{17}. Whilst the NFF, as had its affiliates, adopted a non-partisan approach to politics, NSW has on occasions continued to pursue party politics rather than policy. The NSWFA, despite a policy of non-endorsement, effectively advocated a Coalition victory in the 1993 federal election by supporting the ‘Fightback’ package (Stapleton 1993, 9)\textsuperscript{18}. This brush with partisan politics has made it difficult for the NSWFA to lose the perception that it is an extension of the NSW National Party. Indeed, at the NSWFA 1996 Annual Conference, a vote of no confidence was passed in the NSW Minister for Agriculture. Mr Amery, a Labor minister in the Carr government, replied:

\textsuperscript{14}The daughter of the 1996 Vice President ran as the National party candidate for the NSW Lower House seat of Southern Highlands, whilst in 1996 the long serving Policy Director of the Association took up the position of adviser to the Deputy Prime Minister, and National party leader.

\textsuperscript{15}General Secretary of the NSW National Party suggested that they share a vast proportion of the same membership with the NSWFA (Paul Davey, Pers. Com. Sydney 18/11/97). One General Councillor went as far as to suggest to me that an informal rule exists that all Executive Committee members must be National Party members.

\textsuperscript{16}Tony Windsor, who is now the independent member for Tamworth in the NSW Lower House, was once a General Councillor of the NSWFA and subsequently a National Party member for Tamworth. Bruce Crossing was a GC member and Vice-President of the NSWFA and is now a NSW National Party Member.

\textsuperscript{17}The current Executive Director of the NSWFA, Peter Comensoli, supports this view. He explained that there is a significant overlap of National Party members in his organisation, however there are also elements of the Labor and Liberal Parties. Interview. Sydney. May 1997

\textsuperscript{18}Support for the Coalition was forthcoming from the LGPA in the 1986 election (Sargent 1986; 3). Support was explicit in statements made by the President Mr Tooth, whilst in 1993 it was more implicit and supported the coalitions policies rather than its politics.
Appendix 1

Description of the NSWFA

The National Party clearly was behind yesterday’s attack. They have hijacked the association to the detriment of farmers in this State. The question has to be asked, how many members of the NSW Farmers executive and general council are card carrying members of the National Party? (Penfold 1996, 3).

Educating Urban Australia

Rural interest groups have had to adopt the principles of a promotional form of policy crafting in order to maintain some wide electoral and social support but also to renew a claim to relevance in the wider economy and community. Campaigns were initiated by NSW Livestock and Grain Producers Association in 198519 and 198620, and by the NSW Farmers Association in 199421, and by the NFF in 1993 with its ‘New Horizons’22 policy outline.

The often observed rise of promotional groups23 has impacted on rural sector policy negotiations. Their post-materialist messages of environmental protection have extended a challenge to rural interests, demanding substantiation of their claim to be the genuine stewards of the land. The NSWFA has tried to combat these groups through public relations exercises that promote farmers as the antithesis of environmental vandals. Further, they have tried to prompt members to nominate for the board of organisations such as the RSPCA. These efforts have extended to forming a ‘ticket’ for the election of delegates to the constitutional convention24. The success of these strategies is yet to be seen25. Of course, many of these movements have support from farmers, and hence some may find the politics of these organisations more attractive to those of the formal interest group. The success of

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19The Land 1985, 18 July, pp.17.
20 This campaign had as its theme "Now's the time to show your hand. "National Farmer (17 April,1986: 13). Farmers handing out pamphlets in metropolitan shopping centres outlining rural issues augmented this.
21The Land 1984, 24 Nov., pp.16. This involved a new logo and slogan "NSW Farmers Association for Growth".
22The Land 1993, 11 Feb., pp.7.
23Matthews (1980) has a well defined outline of the interest versus promotional association distinction.
24Dick (1997) reports that the ‘Democracy First’ group has five candidates “...including former NSW Farmers Association senior vice-president, David Hodgkinson, and three other NSW Farmers members.”
25This activity led to a in depth article in the SMH (Barrowclough 1997). It reported that in 1996 all the candidates backed by the NSWFA were elected. The lack of prosecutions by the RSPCA has led to accusations that the RSPCA has been infiltrated and taken over by the farm lobby. Peter Comensoli (NSWFA Chief Executive) retorts that changes to the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals ACT and the RSPCA’s forthcoming campaign over the live sheep trade is evidence that the farm lobby is not exercising undue influence.
both Landcare and AWiA, who have modelled themselves on movements, tends to support this thesis.

The structure, goals/charters/mission statements, external linkages and organisational activities, of the NSWFA are formal statements of their activities and goals. However a range of informal organisational practices exist which serve to provide some consistency to organisational policy. These practices are not ipso facto negative; for instance a degree of stability in leadership combined with clear policies and a professional secretariat can enhance policy influence. Yet, the possibility does exist for such measures to be used to filter out and suppress genuine expressions of member’s interests and as such, to limit the representative functions of the organisation.
Farmer Representation Project

The NSW Farmers’ Association - ‘Looking Forward’:

Final Report and Discussion Paper

By:

Darren Halpin
School of Agriculture and Rural Development
University of Western Sydney (Hawkesbury)

Introduction:

The purpose of this document is to detail the results of my research with members and staff of the Association. This report aims to contribute to the debate about the role and organisation of the Association amongst the membership.

Rather than provide ‘recommendations’ as such, I will outline a set of issues that reflect the views of members and non-members regarding the Association. The issues emerged primarily from my interaction with farmers at the ‘grass roots’\(^1\). In this respect I will reflect what members/farmers are saying and draw out the implications of their views. Throughout the document are suggestions for change, however in the final section (VIII), I offer some more detailed thoughts on how the Association might respond to these views. Again these are broad thrusts rather than specific recommendations.

I have attached a statistical report (Appendix 1) which summarises the combined results of the member/non-member survey for all branch case studies, and the results of the 1996 Annual Conference survey. Where possible in this report, I will refer to a set of statistics from my research to back up statements. I will not quote figures but refer to specific tables in the statistical report. This avoids the monotony of ploughing through pages of tables. However I do suggest you take the time to look at the statistics in more detail as they illustrate a great deal about the differences and similarities in views, participatory patterns in voluntary groups and social characteristics between members, non-members, and annual conference participants.

I look forward to your feedback and hope I can assist those who wish to engage in critical debate.

\(^1\)I have formerly interviewed over 35 farmers or farm couples from the three case study branches. I have attended a number of branch meetings and the last two Annual Conferences. I was present at the NSW ‘Country Summit’ and at the 1997 NSW Women in Agriculture Planning Weekend.
Appendix 2  NSWFA Discussion Document and Statistical Report 1997

Issues:

A number of issues have emerged as a result of my interaction with members and non-members of the NSWFA. The purpose of this document is to categorise these issues and outline them in a concise manner. The following list is by no means exhaustive, therefore I anticipate that this process will facilitate the emergence of further issues.

I  Participation or Membership Levels?:

There are roughly 30,000 farm establishments in NSW. Approximately 13,500 of these farmers are members of the NSWFA. My research suggests that around 30% of these members consider themselves as active in the Association [see Table 14.1]. That means that close to 5000 farmers out of the approximately 30,000 farmers in NSW are actually actively involved in the NSWFA. This low rate of participation could be a problem for two reasons:

1. Policy development with input from less than one sixth of the farm establishments in the state means that only a minority of views will be reflected. Initially this makes policy development easier for the Association, as a smaller range of views filter through to Annual Conference. However, ultimately this makes the Associations' job harder as it has the dual task of 'selling' its policy product to the other five sixths of the farm establishments as well as the government. The low rate of participation incurs a cost to the Association in the form of constantly deflecting internal and external criticism of Association policies and direction.

2. Members who do not participate in the NSWFA are likely to participate in other organisations [see Section 14.0]. This may result in them leaving the Association to join another group, or, forming other quasi-political organisations that could challenge the Associations platform (It is interesting to note that Landcare and Rural Women's Organisations are increasingly performing a political role).

It is my suggestion that the Association resist encouraging membership as an end in itself. The Association should explore how best to encourage participation as an expectation of membership. In pursuing this strategy, I suggest that the Association investigate how other organisations encourage participation, such as Landcare, and how they have been successful in securing the involvement of a diverse range of members of the farming community.

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2This ignores the question as to whether the spouse in a farm family is to be considered a separate farmer in their own right. If this were the case then the number of farmer would be nearly double that of farm establishments.

3Members interviewed often stated they were active yet had not been to a meeting in two or three years.
II INCENTIVE MANAGEMENT:

I believe it is advantageous, for the purposes of planning and coordinating the Associations activities, to distinguish between 4 groups within its current and potential constituency. These groups are, Active members, Non-Active members, Past members and Non members. The importance of these categories is reflected in my decision to present the statistics in the appended report in such a way as to compare these four categories.

Active members are those who have formal input into the Association, whether through attending branch meetings or approaching branch presidents with comments or input. Non-Active members do not make such input but nevertheless maintain their membership. Past Members are those that have previously been a member of the NSWFA or one of the organisations which preceded it. Non Members are those who do not hold membership and therefore are the target for recruiting.

My research indicates that these groups are discrete in the sense that they are either joining, or would consider joining the Association for different reasons and therefore expect different ‘incentives’ in return. These incentives range from political, social and material.

The overwhelming result is that most current members joined the Association out of loyalty or an obligation to the rest of the farming community and the need for a political voice no matter what its message. Some oppose the policies, are cynical of the motives of those that participate, and exhibit low levels of interest in the activities of the Association. However they still remain members out of this obligation. To recruit these people the Association really need only appeal to their sense of obligation to the wider farm community and reinforce the fact that the Association is the only representative organisation for farmers. Whilst this will secure their membership, getting them to participate would require addressing the more substantial areas of organisational structure, political philosophy and policy process.

A large proportion of past members would never return to the Association as a matter of principle. They left as a result of particular policy or philosophical decisions. Often they left as a result of trying to work through the Association and becoming frustrated. Many of these people may never re-join and hence recruitment would be difficult. However, proof of reform within the organisation could prompt them to reconsider.

A small proportion of non-members (typically part-time farmers), are not aware of the Association or have not been approached to join. However a large proportion of non-members, like past members, are awaiting organisational, philosophical or policy changes before they would consider joining. A number have lapsed membership due to financial constraints and have yet to renew it. The rest do not see the relevance of the organisation or do not believe anything will be achieved via the political process.
The interesting statistic is that amongst all categories, material incentives or service provision plays a minor role in maintaining or attracting members [see Section 16.0].

Further, interviews with farmers indicates that a large degree of cynicism exists about the value of services. Some joined, tried them and left once they did not gain the advertised rewards. Some even professed to have calculated that they could get cheaper elsewhere. The figures regarding length of membership indicates that 20% of non-active members have been members for less than 5 years [see Section 16.0]. This perhaps reflects the low level of commitment and participation developed by maintaining service provision as the main incentive.

Some members join the Association initially for its material benefits. However as time goes by it is necessary to convert this material motivation into a political or social one. An emotional attachment needs to be developed otherwise membership levels are likely to rise and fall sporadically (perhaps as the material incentives become readily available at comparable prices). One idea may be to consider a 'social' activity for each branch to welcome new members into the Association\(^4\). This occasion could coincide with other local festivals or events.

Additionally, members should feel proud to say they belong to the Association. Sponsorship of local sporting teams or fundraising efforts goes a long way to raising the esteem of members and makes becoming a member socially desirable (social incentive)\(^5\).

Whilst the provision of services is sure to attract a small number of members, my research indicates these new members have little or no psychological or social commitment to the Association. Hence services promote small increases in membership but do nothing to enhance participation or to secure commitment to the Association for the long term.

III THE UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS OF MEMBERSHIP:

In the last section I suggested that a change in philosophy, policy and organisational structure are the main ways to increase membership and participation in the long term. The lack of participation by members reflects disillusionment with the Association. I believe that this disillusionment is due in part to members having unrealistic expectations of the political gains the Association can make. These expectations are sustained by the widespread belief that agriculture is the basic sustaining force of Australia, both in economic and cultural terms.

My survey results illustrate that large portions of all member categories believe that the nation's well being depends on agriculture [see Table 12.2]. The logical conclusion from this view is that members would expect power to emerge from their relative economic and social importance. Lack of political results then, is interpreted as poor representation

\(^4\)I understand that this is already being tried in one region of the state.

\(^5\)This is being done by the Cotton Growers Association in Gunnedah.
and lobbying by their organisations. There are indications that farmers understand that they are declining as an electoral force, however the high expectations of their representative organisations remain. Other ‘minority’ groups within society which farmers perceive as having power beyond their numbers and economic importance (e.g. environmentalists and indigenous people) further exacerbate this.

This is not to say that farmers’ criticisms of the Association amount to nothing but unrealistic expectations. What I am arguing is that farmers maintain that their importance to the nation is at levels which prevailed in the 50’s and 60’s. This places unrealistic demands on the Association. The frequency and nature of the unrealistic demands may diminish (sorting the wheat from the chaff in relation to criticism of the organisation) if members understood more clearly the position agriculture is in as it relates to other interests on the Australian political scene. Criticism will continue, however it will be based on a real perception of political possibilities rather than sweeping plans about what farmers should be doing which are unachievable and inappropriate for the 1990’s.

The best way to challenge these perceptions is by interaction with people of different backgrounds and experience, people who may not hold these beliefs so dearly. My research indicates that the Association is missing out on a large resource by not actively pursuing part-time and hobby farmers for membership. Many of these people have a great appreciation of how to work with the bureaucracy as well as different cultural values and beliefs. Part time farmers are a prime source of these new ideas.

Research indicates that many part time farmers are willing to be involved but are hesitant to do so as the NSWFA is perceived as a organisation for ‘real’ farmers. I suspect if they knew that most farmers themselves, (or at least one member of the farm couple), work off-farm to support the farms viability they would realise that they are not much different from the general farm population. To include diverse types of people into branch activities means breaking into comfort zones which have often been built up over a decade or more. To catalyse such change requires strong leadership from the Association which embraces diversity of views, experience and background.

IV PRESENTING POLICY ISSUES WHICH ENCOURAGE UNCERTAINTY:

The manner in which the Association characterises policy issues to members appears to be another reason why both increasing participation, and maintaining and expanding membership, is difficult. In its public statements, the Association labels its protagonists as ‘greenies’, ‘unions’, the ‘bureaucracy’ and ‘government’. The problematic issues as the Association sees it are government interference, corrupt world markets, environmental constraints and poor micro and macro economic policy settings. This characterisation, however accurate, is generally reflected in comments by most farmers about the cause and nature of their problems [See Section 10.1].

Whilst this characterisation seems to strike a chord with most farmers it does not improve the prospect of mobilising farmers to participate in the Association. The issues which the
Association pursues and represents to members are extremely complex, nebulous and hence daunting. By labeling broad sections of the community as the ‘protagonists’, rather than particular organisations or departments, serves only to generate general hostilities and prejudices amongst the farming community. The portrayal of the off-farm political environment as foreboding and dominated by opposing interests, coupled with the problems being characterised as generally intractable, does little to promote active participation in NSWFA. After all it is an organisation whose goal is to address these ‘intractable’ issues within the apparently ‘hostile’ environment. In the context of these characterisations, responding to political problems by attending Department of Agriculture field days and information seminars becomes more logical and rational to many farmers.

The overriding impression of the political environment amongst the farming community is that issues are complex and intractable. Further that farmer interests will be thwarted at every turn by unsympathetic greenies, urbanites, bureaucrats, indigenous people and ‘minority groups’ in general. The key for the Association is to maintain a sense of urgency amongst membership without creating a sense of powerlessness and hopelessness. Achieving this balance will facilitate participation rather than apathy and resignation. If promoting participation is the aim of the Association it should consider three things;

1. Issues must be presented in such a way as to reflect a balanced coverage of interested parties.
2. The coverage should include an active role for the membership in their resolution.
3. Issues should be characterised as able to be dealt with rather than intractable.

V  EMPOWERMENT OF MEMBERS TO ACT OFF-FARM:

A great deal of literature addresses the role that voluntary organisations play in facilitating the learning of their members. In this context learning has often meant developing proper meeting procedure, familiarisation with democratic principles, and skills in drafting submissions to government inquiries. Recent theoretical work has raised the possibility that learning also has a psychological function. That is, through participation in voluntary Associations members, develop not only an awareness of how political systems work, but feel empowered to engage with them.

The implications for the Association are clear. Whilst members in the Association develop the skills mentioned above, little attention is given to the level of psychological empowerment they feel towards engaging the external (off-farm) environment. My research indicates the majority of the farm community is aware of the source and nature of the pressures that manifest themselves on the operation of their farms [see Section 10.0]. However active members express more of a willingness to mount ‘off-farm’ actions as a response. These actions consist of involvement in farm organisations or marketing initiatives. Non-members and past members more often nominated ‘on-farm’
responses, which consist of purely management responses such as working harder or changing commodity.

In the context of these results it would appear that the lack of participation by members or non-members in the Association is largely due to the perception that they cannot successfully change their off-farm environment. Hence activities related to practical on-farm management issues take on a greater importance than policy discussions.

The ability to recognise off-farm responses as a legitimate part of a response repertoire is necessary to make active participation appear rational. This is a psychological disposition which allows some farmers to consider the off-farm environment as within their 'sphere of control'. This disposition is essential if the organisation is to initiate action off-farm and expect members to join in willingly. Therefore the Association should consider trying to educate not only an awareness of the political issues (one which my study shows largely exists at a basic level), but a psychological disposition which enables a farmer to believe that they can exercise a level of control over the off-farm environment. As mentioned in the previous section this involves portraying policy issues as 'manageable' in such a way as to promote involvement rather than promote powerlessness.

VI THE NEED FOR SOCIAL POLICY:

Neither the 1993-94 or the 1995 Policy statement publications mention the policy of the NSWFA regarding important social issues which face rural people. With increasing isolation in many areas of the state, increasing youth unemployment as farm jobs decline in number, the increasing incidence of suicide in rural areas and the decline in government services (banking, postal, education, administrative and transport services), the Association must pursue issues in these areas with the same level of gusto as it does 'terms of trade' and the 'diesel fuel rebate' issues.

The NSW Farmers' Corporate Objectives lists as the fourth and last point "To maintain and improve the social and environmental well-being of the membership." (NSWFA 1994: 7). This, however, is not reflected in the rest of the document as no section is reserved for social issues. Whilst one could argue that if the membership do not raise an issue then the Association cannot act, this is not a productive position. At times the executive of farm organisations have raised issues which are not popular with membership. An example of this would be Landcare, which the National Farmers' Federation (NFF) pursued despite member discomfort. Perhaps the Association needs to show leadership and provide its membership with alternative 'modern' views on these types of contemporary social issues in a similar way as it has done with its introduction of the 'Farm as a Business' philosophy in relation to economic and production related issues.

The NSWFA sporadically involves itself in issues such as tertiary education and communication issues (such as phone charges), but usually in relation to its economic impact rather than social consequences.
If these concerns are not addressed then other forums or organisations may take the initiative, and ultimately the members.

VII ORGANISATIONAL IMPEDIMENTS TO PARTICIPATION:

What remains now is to examine the organisational impediments to participation. That is, what organisational or bureaucratic attributes of the Association hinder participation in or membership of the Association. The final section (VIII) will outline ideas on what can be done to turn the situation around.

i) DISTANCE BETWEEN BRANCH AND ANNUAL CONFERENCE:
The interviews I conducted with a diverse range of farmers, farm couples and families, indicated that many feel a great divide between what the Association does at an executive level and what they do at a branch or farm level. It would appear as though many feel politics is played out at the Annual Conference or even General Council level. Many commented that motions from branches were consistently left off the business paper, that old motions were repeated year after year, and that the forum was dominated by the views of general counselors and the executive committee.

The committee structure was also a source of criticism. There is a widespread perception that little innovation, creativity or forward thinking occurs in these forums. This impression is largely due to the slow turnover of senior office bearers. It is further enhanced by the impression that a small number of senior members, having monopolised the Association, also take up the positions on national commodity councils which decide on investment of members’ commodity levies.

To asses the perceptions of members, the Annual Conference agenda has been examined for the years 1986, 1987, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, in order to establish how many changes there have been in the individuals who are elected to the General Council. The results show that 21% of members of the 1995 General Council had been in the position concurrently for all of the years surveyed. This observation is the type of information which fuels the grass roots impression that office bearers are involved in order to ‘further their own political career’ as opposed to the betterment of agriculture.

The concerns of each policy tier are quite distinct from one another. That is, the issues they are best able to deal with are different. Association policy emerges from the Annual Conference tier, and represents a generalised expression of the memberships’ will. However this tier deals with issues which are of state and nationwide importance. Hence, motions only become Association policy if they are sufficiently important to generate statewide interest. Meanwhile the branches, whose members are overcommitted by way

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7The year denotes the July of the year in which members are outgoing office bearers. For example, 1994 means that these members were office bearers from July 1993 to July 1994. This analysis does not cover every year so some members may have left for a period during the period 1988-1992. However this is unlikely as my assessment of the movements in and out of General Council indicate that most members stay on it once elected continuously until they are removed. Not many come and go intermittently.
of time, try to pursue issues which are of local importance. These local issues are often the ones which grow branch membership and, importantly, participation levels.

The Association policy process must more obviously reflect the duality in the operation of its branches. At one level branches must be locally focussed and at the other state and nationally focussed. At present the process reflects the ‘big picture’ at the expense of the small. The Association does not emphasise the importance of branch activities in the local area on local issues. It is precisely these issues which give the Association respectability and credibility.

ii) LOCAL BRANCH POLITICS:
The general position of the Association is that if members do not get involved then they implicitly agree with policy. If they disagree the onus is on them to get involved and change the policy. Further, that the Executive and General Council are accountable to membership as they are elected annually. Many members I interviewed believe that achieving change is not as easy as is suggested by the Association. Two points support this argument.

1. The Association has a policy process which relies on a local form of politics. This politics plays out at the District Council and Branch level. Local politics, in the form practised by the Association, inevitably has its power ‘gatekeepers’ who manage the development of ‘credible’ policy. The definition of ‘credible’ emerges from the core active membership of the branch and District Council who are supportive of the Associations’ official policy. Therefore any challenges to official policy (those which are out of the spectrum of credible policy) must be made through these local political forums which, for the uninitiated or largely inactive member, becomes quite daunting. Further, the less prominent members of the community are less likely to gain a majority if any vote was taken at a branch or District Council meeting.

2. Accountability amongst those elected to General Council and Executive positions is less than satisfactory, primarily for the same reasons that the local politics of branches is hard to break through. It would appear (from anecdotal evidence) that those who attend the Annual Conference each year tend to be the same people. If this is the case, then the one forum which is able to make these office bearers accountable is similar in constitution, and therefore world view, from year to year. This continuity in world view limits any opportunity to remove personnel based on disagreements regarding fundamental policy directions, as it would mean that a significant proportion of the Annual Conference changed its mind. These changes do happen, but normally for factional commodity reasons as opposed to ones based on policy objections. The perceived inevitability that certain worldviews will prevail, regardless of the argument put forward is another point of criticism by members and non-members alike. [see Sections 12.0 and 13.0 which illustrates the divisions in attitudes about many statements regarding policy and the importance of agriculture. It also reveals the areas of overwhelming agreement.]
iii) FARM ESTABLISHMENTS VERSUS INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS AS ‘UNIT’ OF MEMBERSHIP:

In finalising my survey and interview methodology, it became difficult to know whether I was to contact ‘farm establishments’ or ‘individual farmers’. The compromise is, of course, to interview the designated voting member of that farm establishment. Although this is a valid research approach to use in order to gauge the nature of the Associations membership, it revealed some problems with establishments being members.

Utilising ‘farm establishments’ as the unit of membership means that, in effect, ‘farm families’ are members. The representative of that farm family then becomes involved in the policy process of the Association. My research, the anecdotal evidence of members, and the long held suspicions of rural researchers, is that most of these representatives are male and above the age of fifty. This means that farm women and youth have trouble accessing the Association for policy input.

This problem was acknowledged by the past Executive Director of the NFF Rick Farley in an article published in the ‘Country Web’. He stated that “Most farmer organisations only attach one vote to each membership. Farm families generally are strapped for cash and can’t afford more than one membership to enable more members of the family to participate. That issue now is being addressed by some state farmer organisations.” (Country Web, Winter, 1995. N0.8, p.9.)

Data from studies into Landcare suggests that farm women and younger farmers are participating in these organisation. Further, the Australian Women in Agriculture (AWiA) movement is gaining momentum and may become more of a political force. This could cause significant problems for the ease with which the Association develops policy.

VIII SUGGESTIONS FOR ORGANISATIONAL REFORM:

The NSWFA faces much the same problems that plague other voluntary organisations. The only difference is that the Association has goals which are not easily recognised when reached. As the Michels Warren Report identified, lobbying is an activity which is for the most part private and unpublicised, the results of which are not easily measured on a continuum of success to failure. This means that grass roots discontent is common and hence motivating interest and participation is difficult. This is reflected at the coal face, where local branches are finding it hard to retain enough interest in the Association to get a reasonable attendance level at meetings. Some branches operate as a District Council so as to reduce the number of meetings.

The core of NSWFA members who attend their local branch meetings religiously, tend to overlap significantly with the people who attend other activities such as Landcare and Department of Agriculture meetings or discussion groups [see Section 14.0]. It would appear that these people are over committed and indeed that the areas of concern these organisations pursue are to some extent overlapping. My experience at a recent branch
meeting illustrates the point. Discussion focussed on a local issue concerning the development of farm land for subdivision. The member, who was also a member of the local Progress Association, was set the task of gauging local farmer’s opinions on the issue in order to take them to the next Progress Association meeting for discussion. Following the next Progress Association meeting he was to report back to the NSWFA meeting. This process may well be characteristic of the repetition which goes on amongst local organisations in many rural communities.

It appears that many NSWFA members see the Association as valuable but do not wish to be directly involved. Many become involved in other local voluntary activities, perhaps ones that result in concrete and easily measurable outcomes.

From these observations one is able to distil a core area of concern regarding the sustainability of the Associations current organisational structure. This concern could be put as follows. As the farm population becomes smaller, the economic pressures greater, the issues more complex and the consultative policy process more demanding the willing involvement of the membership in internal consultations (including branch meetings, filling in surveys, attending rallies, filling office bearer positions and responses to Association queries) will become harder to secure. The discussion, in my view, needs to be around organisational structures which are compatible with these pressures.

The suggestion I make is to move politics back to the grass roots as much as possible. The mechanics of such a move are a matter for a great deal of planning and debate, however I can suggest a few principles which could guide this move.

The first is flexibility. At present any motion must pass through three tiers to become policy. This is too cumbersome and removed from the grass roots. Giving more authority to local branches is the first step. This obviously implies weakening other tiers. In this respect I suggest the regional level be placed under scrutiny as it appears largely unnecessary.

Branches should have a level of autonomy to join with other branches as they see fit. If they wish to act as a block then they should be able to do so (effectively forming their own District Council). This allows members to decide the basis on which they wish to organise themselves. For instance it could be geographical (land systems, catchments or river systems), or related to proximity to grain silos, main towns or meeting halls, or based on commodity (grain growers or wool producers) groupings. However these groupings should be as broad as possible, therefore encouraging diversity, whilst mindful that the issues discussed are of mutual concern to a critical mass of members.

The second guiding principle is authority. At present, representatives from District Councils are granted authority to represent the interests of their peers at Annual Conference by procedural means. That is, members who turn up to a District Council meeting and vote for a delegate are the only ones conferring authority on the successful delegate. However, according to proper organisational procedure, that delegate represents all members who are registered under the District Council. Instead of this situation, I
propose that members must give authority to delegates rather than it being guaranteed by procedural means.

One way to achieve this would be to apportion each branch and District Council x number of votes per x number of members. The number of representatives a District Council is entitled to at Annual Conference would be determined based on the number of members who indicated they were willing to support the proposed delegates. This could be indicated through a proxy system. Effectively each member must acknowledge their branch/District Council representative at Annual Conference by accepting them as a representative. If they do not, their membership does not get counted in working out the branches, and hence District Councils delegate entitlement. Through this process, members can show disapproval by withdrawing voting rights to their branch/District Council delegate rather than the more extreme step of leaving the Association altogether.

This process is undoubtedly complex and time consuming, yet it provides an avenue for members to show discontent and participate in the Association at a grass roots level. Perhaps the Association can come up with a similar idea which cuts down on the time consuming and bureaucratic aspects of its operation. Perhaps members can withdraw their votes via proxy rather than everyone having to attribute their vote.

The other principle is that of autonomy. Instead of the Association, and local branch presidents, trying to set agendas for the membership, why not put the impetus back onto members? Branches meet infrequently and often struggle for attendance. Why not make branch funding dependant on the branch coming up with an issue it wants to pursue for a set period of time. The Association could set down guidelines and areas of focus (similar to Landcare and other government funding processes) and field applications from branches. To receive its capitation, the branch must have a proposal for its activities, a signed list of say 20% of the branch membership and then must report the results to head office or the local field representative. The process must be very simple to administer and coincide or complement, where possible, larger projects under way by the Associations Executive.

This process does not encroach on the normal policy process as the Head Office can still send policy issues out for a ‘grass roots’ response. However it does provide a clear focus for membership involvement and develops qualities of leadership, ownership and learning, all of which are crucial for the long term success of agricultural industries. In an organisational sense it makes the head office more accountable and their decisions more transparent.

A further suggestion is that branches could be allowed to form around issues as opposed to the current general purpose structures which exist in anticipation of a problem. With ‘issue based’ branches, locals can decide on issues which they feel passionate about. This would enable the community to form around the Associations structure for the lifetime of the issue. Membership will grow locally as people witness the facilitatory role the Association is adopting.
It has become apparent that all voluntary organisations (Landcare, NSWFA, Progress Associations, CWA, AWiA etc), in their local forms, draw their constituencies from the same source. Hence a new form of organisation which has as its mode of operation the facilitation of a coordinated response from local communities to both local and broader issues is required. This would have many attractions, not least of which is a better use of the time of local people. Additionally it would break down the gender and age differences between those who currently attend the different groups, and inhibit the formation of elites amongst these organisations which prevents 'particular' members attending or 'particular' issues being discussed. An issue based branch structure could assist in making this facilitatory role for the Association a reality.

The principles of flexibility, authority and autonomy should have the effect of encouraging the final principle of political learning. Instead of the Association developing policy and then having to sell it to its own membership, it will achieve the opposite effect. Members through the above activities will become more familiar with the political process, the rigours of policy development and the values of the Association. This slow enculturation process will develop commitment and loyalty amongst membership such that participation in policy formulation will be easier to achieve. This participation will ultimately ensure that policy is challenged prior to development rather than afterwards. This will further avoid the embarrassment of public disunity around policy debates and the concomitant decline in the authoritativeness of the Association's voice.

More than all this, it will give the members a chance to get involved in issues important to them and learn about the political process. The resultant product is a farming community which has not only the 'means' to change policy (NSWFA) but the individual 'capacity' to make use of this means. It appears to me that the task of the Association must be to develop such a capacity amongst the farming community of NSW.
Conclusion:

These observations may be met with some scepticism from within the Association. This critique should not be left unexpressed. Rather, it should be aired publicly, as only then will a culture of debate be initiated and creative solutions be found to current issues of concern.

I would be delighted to visit the Associations head office or branch meetings to take up any of these issues in detail. Further, if any person or persons wish to take up the opportunity to review the strategic direction of the Association then contact me and perhaps I can assist.
1996 NSWFA Annual Conference, Active Member, Non-active Member, Past Member and Non-Member Survey

Statistical Report

By:
Darren Halpin
School of Agriculture and Rural Development
University of Western Sydney - Hawkesbury

March 1997
Appendix 2  NSWFA Discussion Document and Statistical Report 1997

Introduction:
The following is a description of the survey results from the Annual Conference, Member and Non-member survey 1996. No complex analysis has been attempted, however this can be conducted at the request of the Association (perhaps a group of interested staff or members can develop a set of specific questions which I can provide information on). The results are a description of the frequency distribution (as a percentage) for each question on the survey form for each membership category. The first section is a summary of the typical responses of each membership category. The mode (category with the greatest number of responses) or median (mid-point in the data) are presented to give an indication of the ‘typical’ responses. The mode is the most relevant measurement for categories not of a nominal nature (education, enterprise type etc) whilst the median is relevant for interval data (age and farm size).

Sampling Procedure:
Surveys were sent out to all voting members of the Tarcutta Branch (69 members), Gunnedah District Council (174 members) and the Goulburn Branch (160 members) of the NSWFA. The response rates were 55%, 53% and 52% respectively. Surveys were sent to non-members in Goulburn (50), in Tarcutta (117) and in Gunnedah (500). The response rates were approximately 25%, 20% and 24% respectively. The table below illustrates the break up of each member category by survey. (Please note: I did not ask Goulburn non-members whether they were past members hence there are 0 past member from Goulburn).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey (Total number of valid surveys)</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non-Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goulburn (103)</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarcutta (58)</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gunnedah (175)</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>82.4</td>
<td>60.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (n=78)</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=133)</td>
<td>(n=34)</td>
<td>(n=91)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Annual Conference survey was conducted with delegates to the 1996 Annual Conference. During a session of the conference delegates were handed a survey form and asked to complete it. The overall response was 80 from about 500. This represents a response rate of approximately 16%. Given that the NSWFA staff controlled collection and distribution of survey forms it is impossible to definitively determine the number of surveys distributed and the number of delegates who actually attended the conference.

Combining case study sub-samples for this analysis:
For this analysis I have incorporated all three branch/District Council case studies into the one sample. Whilst this may mean that some geographical variations on some questions are obscured, this analysis gives a good overall picture of membership and non-membership views and characteristics. Given that the response rates are consistent
between case studies, that non-member results emerge from a census of all rural rated establishments in case study areas (with the exception of Goulburn), and all branch members were surveyed in each case study, any variation between case studies which is obscured by this analysis is merely a function of the different relative concentrations of farmers in the regions surveyed. Were the object of the analysis to look for regional differences in farmers, a different analysis technique would have been adopted.

The obvious points where one would expect differences to occur between case studies are in terms of participation rates, farm size and dominant commodity produced on the farm. In this analysis there is a little variation in level of active membership in NSWFA. The Tarcutta case study has a higher participation rate than the other two branches. The size of farms was bigger for Association members and reduced in size as the respondents became less involved (Tarcutta Past members being the only exception). The magnitude of the difference is obviously dependant on the location of the farm (properties in Gunnedah are generally larger than those in Tarcutta or Goulburn). The commodity produced on the farm differed between case studies. Within case studies there was a difference between the enterprise type of members and non-participants (Goulburn is the exception where a majority of both membership categories produce Sheep/Wool).

Coding of Survey:
Most questions in the survey are details which were easily coded. That is, they relate to the demographics and property descriptions of the respondents. However a small number required coding of open-ended questions. For these questions I have provided an explanation regarding my coding process. Without understanding the rationale for my coding of these questions, the results are almost meaningless.

Feedback:
As always, I would value any feedback the Association or its members may have regarding these results. I have my own interpretations for these results, however I would gratefully receive the interpretations of others. I can be contacted at:

Via Mail: Darren Halpin  
School of Agriculture and Rural Development  
University of Western Sydney- Hawkesbury  
Richmond NSW 2753

E-Mail: d.halpin@uws.edu.au

Phone/Fax: (045) 701 847-Work Phone  
(045) 701 750- Work Fax  
041 202 1490- Mobile

352
SUMMARY

TYPICAL NSWFA MEMBERS, NON-ACTIVE MEMBERS, PAST MEMBERS AND NON-MEMBERS.

The following is a brief summary of the sociological characteristics of the 1996 NSWFA membership and non-membership. They are based on the mean or median of the data presented in the body of this report. There is a great deal of variation, particularly in education and income variables, so I warn against using this information to make any decisive statements about the membership until the rest of this document is examined. I have not summarised the ideological and political attributes of respondents as this would make the summary too lengthy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Annual Conf.</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non-Member</th>
<th>Measure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>50-59 Years</td>
<td>50-59 Years</td>
<td>40-49 Years</td>
<td>40-49 Years &amp; 50-59 Yrs</td>
<td>40-49 Years</td>
<td>Mode &amp; Median</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Intermed./ School Certificate or University /College Graduate</td>
<td>Trade</td>
<td>University /College</td>
<td>Intermed./ School Certificate</td>
<td>University /College</td>
<td>Mode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant Enterprise</td>
<td>Mixed Farm-Livestock and Farming Enterprise</td>
<td>Sheep/ Wool</td>
<td>Sheep/ Wool</td>
<td>Beef</td>
<td>Beef</td>
<td>Mode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property Size</td>
<td>1000-1249 Ha</td>
<td>750-999 Ha</td>
<td>500-749 Ha</td>
<td>500-749 Ha</td>
<td>250-499 Ha</td>
<td>Median</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm Labour</td>
<td>Casual/ Contractor (Includes part time family)</td>
<td>Casual/ Contractor (Includes part time family)</td>
<td>Casual/ Contractor (Includes part time family)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Mode</td>
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<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>$0-9,999</td>
<td>20,000-29,999</td>
<td>1-9,999</td>
<td>10,000-19,999</td>
<td>&lt;0</td>
<td>Median</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Report Highlights

In addition to the summary items provided in the previous table, there are a number of tables in this document are of particular interest:

⇒ Plans for the Future?
Section 8.0 Details the plans of respondents for their properties over the next 5 years. (Note the difference between the expansionist plans of Annual Conference and Active Members compared to other categories)

⇒ Use of Labour
Section 9.0 Illustrates that members of the Association use non-family labour to a greater degree than non-members.

⇒ The Economic Importance of Agriculture
Table 12.3 Outlines the attitude of respondents to the question of the importance of agriculture to the economic well being of the nation. (Note that all are in general agreement of the importance of agriculture. One suspects that this belief drives the high expectations of the influence an organisation such as NSWFA can have on policy issues.)

⇒ Privatisation of and Participation in Department of Agriculture?
Section 13.0 has the responses of the sample to policy questions. There is a great deal of diversity amongst and between categories. Of particular interest are 13.1 on the reduction of subsidies and 13.7 on the privatisation of the Department of Agriculture. (Note that in 13.7 Active members and Annual Conference delegates are more overwhelming in their support for the retention of Department of Agriculture. The reason for this becomes obvious when viewed in the light of 14.3, which illustrates that NSWFA members participate to a greater degree in Department of Agriculture than non-members.)

⇒ Participation of Farmers in Voluntary Groups:
Section 14.0 Outlines the participation of members in other organisations. 14.1 gives the level of active participation of NSWFA members in the association. 14.2 gives the participation level of the sample in Landcare.

⇒ Why Join the NSWFA?
Section 16.0 Outlines the reasons why members joined the Association.

⇒ What would entice Non-members to Join?
Section 17.0 Outlines the things that would entice non-members and past-members to join the Association.
### Appendix 2  NSWFA Discussion Document and Statistical Report 1997

#### 1.0 Age:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age (Years)</th>
<th>Annual Conference</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non-Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;20</td>
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<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>27.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-79</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80+</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
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<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=78)</td>
<td>(n=78)</td>
<td>(n=132)</td>
<td>(n=34)</td>
<td>(n=91)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 2.0 Gender:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Annual Conference</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non-Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>91.9</td>
<td>93.3</td>
<td>90.4</td>
<td>96.7</td>
<td>75.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple/Partnership</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=74)</td>
<td>(n=75)</td>
<td>(n=125)</td>
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<td>(n=86)</td>
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</table>

#### 3.0 Education:

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Annual Conference</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non-Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Formal Education</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate/School Certificate</td>
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<td>15.4</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>31.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSC/Leaving Certificate</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade Qualific.</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University/College Qualific.</td>
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<td>28.2</td>
<td>33.1</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>38.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=79)</td>
<td>(n=78)</td>
<td>(n=130)</td>
<td>(n=34)</td>
<td>(n=88)</td>
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### 4.0 Occupation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Annual Conference</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non-Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full Time Farmer</td>
<td>86.1</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>67.9</td>
<td>70.6</td>
<td>48.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part Time Farmer</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>37.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town Person</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Manager/Consultant)</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100.0 (n=79)</td>
<td>100.0 (n=78)</td>
<td>100.0 (n=131)</td>
<td>100.0 (n=34)</td>
<td>100.0 (n=90)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5.0 Dominant Enterprise:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enterprise</th>
<th>Annual Conference</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non-Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sheep/Wool</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beef/Sheep</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goats/Beef</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beef</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>40.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grain</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotton</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grain/Cotton</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Farm (Livestock and Farming)</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>21.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100.0 (n=78)</td>
<td>100.0 (n=78)</td>
<td>100.0 (n=131)</td>
<td>100.0 (n=32)</td>
<td>100.0 (n=86)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 6.0 Area:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area (Ha)</th>
<th>Annual Conference</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non-Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;250</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>48.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250-499</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>27.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500-749</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>750-999</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000-1249</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1250-1499</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1500-1749</td>
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<td>5.1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1750-1999</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000+</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(n=77)     (n=78)       (n=129)       (n=32)       (n=86)

### 7.0 Relationship to Property:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Annual Conference</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non-Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Own and run the property</td>
<td>89.9</td>
<td>89.7</td>
<td>87.0</td>
<td>93.9</td>
<td>84.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own but not run the property</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not own but work on the property (including siblings working for their parents)</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other: (Manager or Adviser)</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(n=79) (n=78) (n=131) (n=33) (n=86)
8.0 Future Plans for the next five years:
(Asked as an open-ended question and coded with categories emerging from responses).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plans</th>
<th>Annual Conference</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non-Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expansion</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaving the Land</td>
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<td>6.8</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Farm Transfer</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing Enterprise</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving Present Setup</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing (Maintaining Present Setup)</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=72)</td>
<td>(n=73)</td>
<td>(n=126)</td>
<td>(n=31)</td>
<td>(n=80)</td>
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</table>

9.0 Use of Labour:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Labour</th>
<th>Annual Conference</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non-Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fulltime Non-Family</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulltime Family</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual/Contractors</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>39.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>46.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=75)</td>
<td>(n=78)</td>
<td>(n=129)</td>
<td>(n=31)</td>
<td>(n=86)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10.0 What Issues Concern you and what can you do to Respond?
All respondents were asked to nominate the issue which concerned them the most about the future of the farm. They were then asked to nominate a response they could make. Through these two questions I was trying to assess the extent to which farmers perceive the source of their predicament and their capacity to respond as either 'off-farm' or 'on-farm'. The assumption being that most farmers would nominate concerns as mostly emerging from off-farm. Further that NSWFA members were most likely to be comfortable responding off-farm as opposed to responding in an on-farm management way. Both these assumptions appear true.

10.1 The Biggest concern regarding the future of the Farm?:
(Asked as open-ended question and coded with categories emerging from responses)
On-Farm issues include poor enterprise choice, bad neighbours or family issues etc; Off-Farm Issues include cost/price squeeze, low commodity prices, government interference or environmentalists etc; Natural Ecosystem issues include poor soils, low rainfall or drought etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Annual Conference</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non-Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On-Farm Issues</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-Farm Issues</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td>72.7</td>
<td>64.5</td>
<td>69.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural/ Ecosystem Issues</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=75)</td>
<td>(n=78)</td>
<td>(n=128)</td>
<td>(n=31)</td>
<td>(n=84)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10.2 What action can you take to deal with this (Concern) challenge?
(Asked as open-ended question and coded with categories emerging from responses).
On-Farm Action includes working harder, working smarter or changing enterprise; Off-Farm Action includes off-farm diversification, futures, joining the NSWFA, uniting to fight government and environmentalists or farmers taking ownership of collective marketing authorities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Annual Conference</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non-Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On-Farm Action</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>47.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry/Off Farm Action</td>
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<td>25.6</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing/ Don’t Know</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave the Land</td>
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<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 11.0 Income:

(What is the estimated average annual farm income [the difference between total cash receipts and total cash costs for five years divided by five] over the past five years?)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income ($)</th>
<th>Annual Conference</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non-Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;0</td>
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<td>22.7</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,000-9,999</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000-19,999</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20,000-29,999</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30,000-39,000</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40,000-49,000</td>
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<td>3.0</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50,000+</td>
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<td>19.7</td>
<td>9.0</td>
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<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
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<td>(n=66)</td>
<td>(n=111)</td>
<td>(n=24)</td>
<td>(n=58)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
12.0 Ideology Items:
The following are responses to statements regarding the state of agriculture in Australia. Some of the statements may be objectively untrue, however the responses reflect the perceptions of respondents. In this sense, the statements represent the types of rhetoric used by politicians, farm organisations and other political actors to motivate action. The responses indicate the willingness of those surveyed to accept rhetoric which draws on these themes as legitimate. That is, if the basis of a policy position is that “The farm is an ideal place to raise a family” then it must be a broadly accepted position otherwise support will not be forthcoming.

A major focus of this research program is measuring the strength of the membership adherence to agrarianism. This rural belief system is said, by a range of rural sociologists and historians, to be the basis for many of the decisions made by farmers. Farmers are said to vote, associate, persist and make strategic farm decisions, based on the influence this belief system holds.

This study uses elements of a scale used in previous works to examine the major tenets of agrarianism. The omission of a number of questions (and the complete omission of theme 'iv' from Flinn and Johnson (1974)) reflects a judgement that they were repeating elements of other questions that were more appropriate to the Australian context. In particular references to 'lack of authority and lawlessness.' seemed to reflect the USA's domestic situation more than Australia's. Question 4 on the Craig and Phillips scale has been replaced with a question from the Beus and Dunlap (1994) scale. This decision was made on the basis that Beus and Dunlap (ibid) found the previous question had a low correlation with agrarianism.

12.1 “The farm is the ideal place to raise a family.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Annual Conference</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non-Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>93.5</td>
<td>88.5</td>
<td>88.6</td>
<td>87.9</td>
<td>88.5</td>
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<tr>
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<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12.2 “If the economic situation for farmers continues like it is now, eventually family farms will be replaced by large corporate farms.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Annual Conference</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non-Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>66.2</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>62.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

361
12.3  "A downturn in agriculture is likely to have a similar effect in the entire country."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Annual Conference</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non-Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>58.4</td>
<td>70.8</td>
<td>70.6</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>(n=77)</td>
<td>(n=130)</td>
<td>(n=34)</td>
<td>(n=88)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12.4  "Farmers ought to appreciate farming as a good way of life and be less concerned about their cash income."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Annual Conference</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non-Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>89.3</td>
<td>92.2</td>
<td>90.2</td>
<td>84.8</td>
<td>80.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
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<td>2.6</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
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<td>(n=77)</td>
<td>(n=132)</td>
<td>(n=33)</td>
<td>(n=89)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

12.5  "The replacement of family farms by corporate farms would have undesirable economic and social consequences for the nation."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Annual Conference</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non-Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>67.6</td>
<td>76.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>(n=77)</td>
<td>(n=131)</td>
<td>(n=34)</td>
<td>(n=89)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 12.6 “The movement of the population back to rural areas would go far to cure the problems of this nation.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Annual Conference</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non-Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>59.4</td>
<td>61.2</td>
</tr>
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<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(n=75) (n=52) (n=75) (n=32) (n=67)

### 12.7 “Farmers should raise all of the crops and livestock possible as long as there are hungry people.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Annual Conference</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non-Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>51.5</td>
<td>48.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
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<td>19.6</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>48.6</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>40.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</table>

(n=70) (n=46) (n=70) (n=33) (n=66)
13.0 Agricultural Policy Items:
The following are responses to statements regarding the proper focus of agricultural policy in Australia. The statements are general and often refer to the underlying assumptions of an agricultural policy rather than the policy resolutions themselves. Hence, the responses represent these members' position on what should be the aims of a new agricultural policy. The questions in this section, with the exception of the last two, were derived from a series produced by Beus and Dunlap (1994).

### 13.1 “Subsidies to agriculture should be phased out.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
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<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non-Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>27.2</td>
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<td>39.2</td>
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<td>21.3</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>65.7</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>(n=75)</td>
<td>(n=130)</td>
<td>(n=30)</td>
<td>(n=84)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 13.2 “There should be stricter regulations on conversion of farmland to nonfarm uses.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Annual Conference</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non-Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>13.0</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>55.9</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>65.4</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>54.4</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(n=77)</td>
<td>(n=130)</td>
<td>(n=33)</td>
<td>(n=90)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### 13.3 “Farm policy should try to increase number of farmers.”

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Response</th>
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<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non-Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>29.5</td>
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<td>19.2</td>
<td>21.5</td>
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<tr>
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<td>46.2</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>59.4</td>
<td>45.5</td>
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<td>(n=130)</td>
<td>(n=32)</td>
<td>(n=88)</td>
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</table>
### Appendix 2  NSWFA Discussion Document and Statistical Report 1997

#### 13.4 "Increasing exports of ag products should be a major policy goal."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Annual Conference</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non-Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>0.8</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>3.3</td>
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<td>3.9</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
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<td>97.7</td>
<td>85.3</td>
<td>93.3</td>
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<td>(n=77)</td>
<td>(n=130)</td>
<td>(n=34)</td>
<td>(n=90)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 13.5 "Agricultural policy should be geared to large farms"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Annual Conference</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non-Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>88.2</td>
<td>79.7</td>
<td>85.3</td>
<td>79.7</td>
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<tr>
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<td>7.9</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>16.2</td>
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<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=76)</td>
<td>(n=51)</td>
<td>(n=74)</td>
<td>(n=34)</td>
<td>(n=69)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 13.6 "Property plans should be compulsory before any development of existing land can be undertaken."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Annual Conference</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non-Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>37.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>20.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>41.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=77)</td>
<td>(n=53)</td>
<td>(n=74)</td>
<td>(n=34)</td>
<td>(n=69)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 13.7 "Department of Agriculture should be privatised"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Annual Conference</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non-Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>86.9</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>58.1</td>
<td>58.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=76)</td>
<td>(n=22)</td>
<td>(n=16)</td>
<td>(n=31)</td>
<td>(n=69)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

365
### 13.8 “A deregulated domestic market for grain is preferable to a regulated one.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Annual Conference</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non-Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>38.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>38.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=73)</td>
<td>(n=51)</td>
<td>(n=74)</td>
<td>(n=30)</td>
<td>(n=68)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
14.0 Participation in Voluntary Groups:
The survey asked respondents to indicate whether they actively participate in any of the following government or community organisations.

14.1 NSWFA:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Participation</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
<td>36.97</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Active</td>
<td>63.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100 (n=211)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14.2 Landcare:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Participation</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>63.0</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>35.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>81.7</td>
<td>70.6</td>
<td>64.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0 (n=73)</td>
<td>100.0 (n=131)</td>
<td>100.0 (n=34)</td>
<td>100.0 (n=87)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14.3 Department of Agriculture:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Participation</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>81.7</td>
<td>84.88</td>
<td>82.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0 (n=68)</td>
<td>100.0 (n=126)</td>
<td>100.0 (n=33)</td>
<td>100.0 (n=87)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14.4 Local Government:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Participation</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>74.2</td>
<td>89.4</td>
<td>84.4</td>
<td>82.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0 (n=66)</td>
<td>100.0 (n=123)</td>
<td>100.0 (n=32)</td>
<td>100.0 (n=85)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14.5 Others: (Sport Clubs, Church, School Committees, Breed Societies, Political Affiliations and Professional Associations)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Participation</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>84.4</td>
<td>71.2</td>
<td>88.5</td>
<td>83.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0 (n=64)</td>
<td>100.0 (n=104)</td>
<td>100.0 (n=26)</td>
<td>100.0 (n=68)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

367
### 15.0 Other Family Members Participation:
The respondents were asked to indicate whether other family members participated along with, or instead of, the person filling in the survey.

#### 15.1 NSWFA:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Participation</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>88.2</td>
<td>92.6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 15.2 Landcare:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Participation</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>87.0</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>78.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 15.3 Department of Agriculture:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Participation</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>86.6</td>
<td>91.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>95.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 15.4 Local Government:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Participation</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>97.0</td>
<td>96.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>95.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 15.5 Others *(Sport Clubs, Church, School Committees, Breed Societies, Political Affiliations and Professional Associations)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Participation</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>62.1</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>56.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>60.7</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>43.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

368
16.0 Reasons for and Length of Membership:
Respondents who were members were asked, "Why are you a member of the NSW Farmers’ Association?". A number of possible responses were suggested however it was an open ended question, and coding was done on the basis of the responses received. Members were also asked to indicate the length of time they have been a member of the NSWFA (or its previous organisations).

16.1 "Why are you a member of the NSW Farmers’ Association?"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Services/Benefits/ Wages Information.</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>23.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lobbying/ Need to be Represented.</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>40.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to farm Community.</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services and Commitment.</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lobbying and Commitment.</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My parents were.</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination of all the above.</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intend on leaving.</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(n=48)</em></td>
<td><em>(n=69)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16.2 How long have you been a member for?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Active Member</th>
<th>Non-Active Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-9</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-14</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25+</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(n=50)</em></td>
<td><em>(n=64)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
17.0 Non-member Enticement for Membership:
Non-members and Past members were asked to indicate what would entice them to join the NSWFA. This was an open ended question, however some suggested responses were made. These were coded according to themes emerging from responses.

17.1 What would entice you to become a member of the NSWFA?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Past Member</th>
<th>Non-Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change in Policy or Philosophy</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>29.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better Contact/ Communication</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services/Benefits</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to be Asked</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(n=23)</em></td>
<td><em>(n=44)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gunnedah NSWFA District Council Survey Form
Appendix 3

Example Survey Forms

Dear Branch Member of the Gunnedah District Council,
New South Wales Farmers Association.

Welcome to the study into "Farmer Representation in Australia". Enclosed is a survey form which is part of a PhD study being conducted by Darren Halpin from the School of Agriculture and Rural Development at the University of Western Sydney (Hawkesbury). This survey is being sent to every registered member of the selected branches as of February 1996.

The branches comprising the Gunnedah District Council of the NSWFA, through consultation with the executive and chairman, has been selected as a case study for this project. The studies purpose is to determine, who participates in the NSWFA and why.

You will be aware that as an organisation, the NSWFA has reviewed its structure at the state level through the Michels Warren Report. This current study provides an opportunity to give head office a grass roots view of the organisation.

Part of the purpose of this research is to give the organisation and the general public an idea of what is occurring in farmer representation. To achieve this, the results will need to be published and disseminated in a variety of forums. This being said, **all information is absolutely confidential.** Individual responses, any figures presented or results published will not disclose the identity of any individuals. If you require access to your information this can be arranged at your request.

Please take the opportunity to be involved in this study by:

1. Filling in this survey and returning it in the **reply paid envelope** supplied;
2. Being part of the follow up interview process.

If there are any inquiries regarding this survey, please do not hesitate to get in contact with Darren Halpin at:

**School of Agriculture and Rural Development**
University of Western Sydney (Hawkesbury)
Richmond NSW 2753
Phone: (045) 701 847
Fax: (045) 701 750

Thank you for your time and anticipated cooperation,

Darren Halpin, UWS-Hawkesbury.
"RURAL REPRESENTATION IN AUSTRALIA"
NSWFA Gunnedah District Council Survey
The responses to this survey are confidential.
No names will be used in the analyses and reporting of results.
To be filled in by the properties designated member of the NSWFA.

*Are you prepared to be part of a follow-up interview process in the near future? (Circle Appropriate Response) YES NO

If you answered 'No' proceed to Section 2. If you answered 'Yes' please fill in your contact details. If an interview is to be sought I will be in contact with you firstly by letter and then by phone to confirm arrangements. The interview will be conducted at your convenience (taking around 45 minutes) and will develop on the ideas covered in this survey. Your cooperation would be more than appreciated.

1. Contact Details:

Name: __________________________________________
Address: __________________________________________
Phone No: ___________________________ Fax No: ___________________________

2. Personal Characteristics
2A)- Age (Circle Appropriate Response):
20-29  30-39  40-49  50-59  60-69  70-79  80+

2B)- Sex: (Circle Appropriate Response)
   Male
   Female

2C)- Occupation: (Tick Appropriate Response)
   Full Time Farmer
   Part Time Farmer
   (Employed in second job elsewhere)
   Towns person
   Other (Please Specify)

2D)- Education (either completed or in the process of being completed): (Tick Appropriate Response)
   No Formal Education
   Intermediate/School Certificate
   Leaving Certificate/HSC
   Trade Qualifications/TAFE
   University/College Qualification
3. PROPERTY DETAILS:
(If you do not operate or own a property then disregard section 3.)

3A) Do you:  
(Tick Appropriate Response)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Own and run the property</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own but not run the property</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not own but work on the property</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(including siblings working for their parents)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Specify)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3B) What is the area (not including leased or agistment property) of your farm?  
Hectares.

3C) Name the dominant enterprise (in terms of $ returns) on your property:  
(eg. Sheep/ Wool, Wheat, Beef, Farm Tourism etc)

3D) What plans do you have for your property in the next 5 years?  
(eg. Expansion of operation, leaving the land, siblings taking over.)

3E) Do you employ any labour on the farm other than your own? (Specify)  
(Include children as other labour if they work full-time on the farm.)

3F) What would you consider the biggest concern regarding the future of the farm?

3G) What action can you take to meet and deal with this challenge?

3H) What is the estimated average annual farm income (the difference between total cash receipts and total cash costs for five years divided by five) over the past five years? Specify if you have deducted wages for yourself as manager.
4 Member's Views:
4A)- Tick the appropriate response regarding your views on agriculture:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tick the appropriate response</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The farm is the ideal place to raise a family.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the economic situation for farmers continues like it is now, eventually family farms will be replaced by large corporate farms.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A downturn in agriculture is likely to have a similar effect in the entire country.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers ought to appreciate farming as a good way of life and be less concerned about their cash income.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The replacement of family farms by corporate farms would have undesirable economic and social consequences for the nation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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4B)-Tick the appropriate response regarding your views on agricultural policy:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tick the appropriate response</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

375
5. **COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT:**
5A)- Are you actively involved (attend meetings and/or provide input) in any of the following groups? (Circle Appropriate Response)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NSWFA</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Landcare</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dept of Ag. Groups</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Government Bodies</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others (Specify) eg. School, Church, Social, Sport or Political organisations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

5B)- Do other family members attend or are they actively involved in any of the above groups instead or in addition to yourself? If so, state which group and the family member who attends. (eg. Landcare group attended by my daughter and church group attended by all of us.)

5C)- What makes these community organisations attractive to participate in and what makes those you do not participate in unattractive?

5D)- Why are you a member of NSWFA? (eg. Provide valuable services, feel a commitment to wider farm community, need to be represented, your parents were etc.)

5E)- Which NSWFA Branch within the Gunnedah District Council are you a member of?

5F)- For how many years have you been a NSWFA Member? ___________ Years

Thankyou for your time in completing this survey!

This research is being completed as part of Darren Halpin's research for a PhD through the University of Western Sydney (Hawkesbury), with the cooperation of the NSWFA. Feel free to phone him on (045) 701 847 or Fax (045) 701750.
Gunnedah Region Survey Form
"RURAL REPRESENTATION IN AUSTRALIA"

The responses to this survey are confidential.
No names will be used in the analyses and reporting of results.

*Are you prepared to be part of a follow-up interview process in the near future? 
(Circle Appropriate Response) YES NO

If you answered 'No' proceed to Section 2. If you answered 'Yes' please fill in your contact details. If an interview is to be sought I will be in contact with you firstly by letter and then by phone to confirm arrangements. The interview will be conducted at your convenience (taking around 45 minutes) and will develop on the ideas covered in this survey. Your cooperation would be more than appreciated.

1. Contact Details:
   Name: ____________________________________________
   Address: ____________________________________________
   Phone No: __________________ Fax No: __________________

2. Personal Characteristics
   2A)- Age (Circle Appropriate Response):
       20-29 30-39 40-49 50-59 60-69 70-79 80+
   2B)- Sex: (Circle Appropriate Response)
       Male       Female
   2C)- Occupation: (Tick Appropriate Response)
       Full Time Farmer
       Part Time Farmer (Employed in second job elsewhere)
       Towns person
       Other (Please Specify)

2D)- Education (either completed or in the process of being completed):
      (Tick Appropriate Response)
      No Formal Education
      Intermediate/School Certificate
      Leaving Certificate/HSC
      Trade Qualifications
      University/College Qualification
3. **PROPERTY DETAILS:**
(If you do not operate or own a property then disregard section 3.)
3A)- Do you: (Tick Appropriate Response)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Own and run the property</th>
<th>Own but not run the property</th>
<th>Do not own but work on the property (including siblings working for their parents)</th>
<th>Other (Specify)</th>
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</table>

3B)- What is the area (not including leased or agisted property) of your farm? 
_________________________ Hectares.

3C)- Name the dominant enterprise (in terms of $ returns) on your property:
(eg. Sheep/ Wool, Wheat, Beef, Farm Tourism etc)

3D)- What plans do you have for your property in the next 5 years?
(eg. Expansion of operation, leaving the land, siblings taking over.)

3E)- Do you employ any labour on the farm other than your own? (Specify)
(Include children as other labour if they work full-time on the farm.)

3F)- What would you consider the biggest concern regarding the future of the farm?

3G)- What action can you take to meet and deal with this challenge?

3H)- What is the estimated **average annual** farm income (the difference between total cash receipts and total cash costs for five years divided by five) over the past five years? Specify if you have deducted wages for yourself as manager.
### Appendix 3

**Example Survey Forms**

4. **Farmer's Views:**

4A) - Tick the appropriate response regarding your views on agriculture:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tick the appropriate response</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The farm is the ideal place to raise a family.</td>
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<td>If the economic situation for farmers continues like it is now, eventually family farms will be replaced by large corporate farms.</td>
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<td>A downturn in agriculture is likely to have a similar effect in the entire country.</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

4B) - Tick the appropriate response regarding your views on agricultural policy:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tick the appropriate response</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
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<tr>
<th>NSWFA</th>
<th>YES</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Dept of Ag. Groups</td>
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<td>Local Government Bodies</td>
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<td>Others (Specify) eg. School, Church, Social, Sport or Political organisations)</td>
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5B)- Do other family members attend or are they actively involved in any of the above groups instead of or in addition to yourself? If so, state which group and the family member who attends.(eg. Landcare group attended by my daughter and church group attended by all of us.)

________

________

5C)- What makes these community organisations attractive to participate in and what makes those you do not participate in unattractive?

________

________

5D)- If you are not a NSWFA member, what factors led to this decision? What measures could this organisation take to change your mind?

________

________

Thankyou for your time in completing this survey!

This research is being completed as part of Darren Halpin's research for a PhD through the University of Western Sydney (Hawkesbury), with the cooperation of the NSWFA. Feel free to phone him on (045) 701 847 or Fax (045) 701750.
Annual Conference Survey Form
Dear Member of the NSW Farmers' Association.

Welcome to the study into "Farmer Representation in Australia". Attached is a survey form which is part of a PhD study being conducted by Darren Halpin from the University of Western Sydney (Hawkesbury) with the co-operation of your organisation.

1996 Annual Conference delegates have all been given a survey which is designed to gauge their opinions on a broad range of policy and non-policy matters. The studies ultimate purpose is to determine who participates in the NSWFA and why, thus giving a strong information base from which further strategies for developing the Association for the benefit of all members may be made.

You will be aware that the NSWFA has reviewed its structure at the state level through the Michels Warren Report. This present study provides an opportunity to gauge a snapshot of grass root members opinions and beliefs.

Please take the opportunity to be involved in this study by:
- Firstly, filling in this survey and returning it in the envelope supplied;
- Secondly, being part of the follow up interview process.

All information is absolutely confidential. Individual responses will be viewed by Darren Halpin only, and any figures presented or results published will not disclose the identity of any individuals.

If there are any inquiries regarding this survey, please do not hesitate to get in contact with Darren Halpin at:
School of Agriculture and Rural Development
University of Western Sydney (Hawkesbury)
Richmond NSW 2753
Phone: (045) 701 847
Fax: (045) 701 750

IMPORTANT: I will place bright orange boxes on tables in the conference room for the easy return of completed survey forms. Keep this cover sheet for further reference.

Thankyou for your time and anticipated co-operation,

Darren Halpin.
"RURAL REPRESENTATION IN AUSTRALIA"
NSWFA 1996 Annual Conference Survey
The responses to this survey are confidential.
No names will be used in the analysis and reporting of results.
TO BE FILLED IN BY EACH DELEGATE TO THE 1996 NSWFA ANNUAL CONFERENCE.

Contact details are sought to aid in the identification of delegates for further interviews. If an interview is to be sought I will be in contact with you firstly by letter and then by phone to confirm arrangements. If you choose not to participate in the study any further than completing the survey then these details are not necessary.

This information is absolutely confidential.

1. Contact Details:
   Name: __________________________________________
   Address: _________________________________________
   Phone No: ___________________________ Fax No: ____________

2. Personal Characteristics
   2A) Age (Circle Appropriate Response):
       20-29  30-39  40-49  50-59  60-69  70-79  80+
   2B) Sex: (Circle Appropriate Response)
       Male
       Female
   2C) Occupation: (Tick Appropriate Response)
       Full Time Farmer
       Part Time Farmer
       (Employed in second job elsewhere)
       Towns person
       Other (Please Specify)

2D) Education (either completed or in the process of being completed): (Tick Appropriate Response)
     No Formal Education
     Intermediate/School Certificate
     HSC/Leaving Certificate
     Trade Qualifications
     University/College Qualification

2F) What District Council do you represent as a delegate to this conference?
3. **PROPERTY DETAILS:**
(If you do not work on or own a property then disregard section 3.)

3A)- Do you: (Tick Appropriate Response)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Own and run the property</th>
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3H)- What is the estimated **average annual** farm income (the difference between total cash receipts and total cash costs for five years divided by five) over the past five years? Specify if you have deducted wages for yourself as manager.
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4 Member's Views:

4A) Tick the appropriate response regarding your views on agriculture:

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<td>Dept. of Ag should be privatised</td>
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<td>A deregulated domestic market for grain is preferable to a regulated one.</td>
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</table>
Appendix 3

Example Survey Forms

5. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT:

5A)- Are you actively involved (attend meetings and/or provide input) in any of the following groups? (Circle Appropriate Response)

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5B)- Do other family members attend or are they actively involved in any of the above groups instead of or in addition to yourself? If so, state which group and the family member who attends. (eg. Landcare group attended by my daughter and church group attended by all of us.)

_________________________________________________________________________

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5C)- What makes these community organisations attractive to participate in and what makes those you do not participate in unattractive?

_________________________________________________________________________

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5D)- Why are you a member of NSWFA? (eg. Provide valuable services, feel a commitment to wider farm community, need to be represented, your parents were etc.)

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

5E)- For how many years have you been a NSWFA member?

__________ Years

Thankyou for your time in completing this survey!

This research is being completed as part of a PhD through the University of Western Sydney (Hawkesbury), with the co-operation of the NSWFA. Feel free to phone him on (045) 701 847 or Fax (045) 701750
List of Interviews

Industry Associations, Political Parties, Politicians or Government Officials

All these interviews were conducted in person at the locations indicated.

Mr Sandy Cameron, CEO of the South Australian Farmers’ Federation, Adelaide. October 1, 1997.

Mr Peter Comensoli, CEO NSWFA, Sydney. May 16, 1997.


Mr Rick Farley, Executive Director NFF, Canberra. April 20, 1995.


Mr George Rance, CEO of Tasmanian Farmers’ and Graziers’ Association, Launceston. April 15, 1996.


Mr John White, Retired CEO of NSW Graziers’ Association, the LGPA and the NSWFA, Sydney. October 14, 1996.

Mr Tony Windsor MP, Member for Tamworth NSW Legislative Assembly, Sydney. October 29, 1996.
Appendix 4

List of Interviews

Conferences Attended

NSWFA Annual Conference 1995, Dubbo.


NFF Annual Conference 1995, Canberra.

Semi-Structured Interviews with Farmers


Various Committee members of the Mid-Laclan RVMP Committee, various locations in the Parkes region. October 11-13, 1998.


Nineteen farmers, consisting of both Members of NSWFA Gunnedah District Council and regional farmers. Conducted during October 7-11, 1996; November 28-30 1996; and July 2-4, 1997.*

Twelve farmers, consisting of both Members of NSWFA Tarcutta Branch and regional farmers. Conducted during 24-28 February 1997.*

*These interviews were organised as a follow-up to the mail-out questionnaire distributed to farmers in the Gunnedah, Tarcutta and Goulburn regions. Respondents to the survey who indicated they were willing to be interviewed were contacted and an interview time organised. See Sample Interview Schedule overleaf.
Sample Interview Schedule

The interviews were structured around a set of basic questions as indicated in the schedule below. These questions were not always asked, nor were they always asked as indicated on this schedule. Most of the time they catalysed more important discussions about the interviewees expectations and experiences with political representation.

GENERAL

1. Perhaps firstly you could talk about your property, what you produce and what direction you are heading in just to set the context for the discussion.

2. What influences the decisions and plans you have just explained? What is positive and negative? Do you have any control over these? If so through who or what?

3. Agriculture is a dynamic and changing industry. What major changes have you seen? Are these cause for concern?

4. What organisations or structures are most important to your operation and why? eg, the Stockpile management (AWRAP), Wool international, State Government, NSWFA, NFF, Wool Council of Australia, Landcare...

5. Why do you persist in agriculture when issues are making it difficult?

NSWFA:

1. Why did you join the NSWFA?

2. In the survey I asked if you were active/inactive member. What did you answer and why do you class yourself that way.

3. Do you consider yourself a typical member of the NSWFA? If not what is a typical member?

4. What contact do you have with the NSWFA?
Appendix 4

List of Interviews

5. What benefits are there in being a NSWFA member?

6. Are there important issues that the NSWFA is unable to deal with? If so, what organisations do you get help from?

7. Do other members of the family attend other groups instead of you?

8. Would other family members like to attend NSWFA but don't? Why?

9. What do you think the reaction of your wife, son or daughter would be if they attended a NSWFA meeting?

10. Does anything limit your participation in NSWFA or any other organisations?

Ideology.

1. Do you think governments, city people, or the NSWFA understand what it means to be a farmer in the 1990's?

2. What is it like being a farmer in the 1990's?

3. How has this changed over time?

4. Do you think being a farmer is more important a job than other occupations?

5. How important do you think agriculture is to Australia?
NSWFA Office Bearers for selected years

The year on the column headers denotes the July of the year in which they are outgoing office bearers. For example, 1994 means that these members were office bearers from July 1993 to July 1994.

As at July 1997, 21% of members of current General Council have been in the position concurrently for all of the years surveyed. Of those people, they include, Treasurer, Vice President. The President has been a member of the General Council since 1987.

Of the Executive Committee elected in 1996; the treasurer and two of the Committee have been on the General Council since 1985/86. The President, one of the Vice Presidents and five of the Executive Committee have been on the General Council since 1991/92.

The Senior Vice President has been in since 1992/93, whilst the other Vice President and Executive Committee has been involved since 1993/94. The other Executive Committee members was elected straight to Executive from the floor of Annual Conference.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>P</th>
<th>President</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SVP</td>
<td>Senior Vice President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VP</td>
<td>Vice President</td>
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<tr>
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(SVP)
### Composition of the Motions addressed by Annual Conference

Table A. Number of resolutions submitted to Annual Conferences in Main Issue Areas: A Comparison between the Graziers Association (1968-9) and the NSWFA (1995-96)*

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<td>100 (n=397)</td>
<td>100 (n=339)</td>
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*The Issues Areas follow those outlined in Harman (1969). One must expect a certain level of inconsistency given that Harman used GA's categorisation that differs from that the NSWFA now use. The table shows the number of resolutions submitted by branches District Councils, Regions, and Committees, and not the actual number that appear in the agenda paper. I have tried to fit these into the same broad categories as Harman has for comparative purposes. One new category has been added and I have further clarified others where I thought it necessary. * Includes the Diesel Fuel Rebate issue * Includes trade issues * Includes weeds * Includes native vegetation and threatened species issues. This Category was not part of the original analysis in Harman (1969:228)
Committee Motions
Of the motions that appear the Agenda proper for the consideration of Annual Conference, a small minority have been either sponsored solely or co-sponsored by committees of the General Council or the Executive Committee. The way in which these motions are treated by the conference and the extent to which they are placed on the agenda paper unmodified will help test the proposition that the NSWFA leadership use these motions to steer the direction of the Association. If this proposition were correct then one would expect its motions to be passed more regularly and be included in the Agenda proper in an unmodified manner.

Including Committee Motions in the Agenda Paper
Table B indicates the number of motions submitted for inclusion in the Annual Conference Agenda (submitted), the number of motions appearing in the Agenda (Agenda Motions) and the number of Agenda Motions that were lodged by Committees of the General Council (Committee Motions).

In 1996, a committee sponsored 32 motions in some way. Of these, 22 were considered by conference in the form originally submitted by the committee and 7 were used as part of a composite motion. That is, their motion was used as part of a larger motion. 2 were replaced with wording from co-sponsors. Finally, one motion was totally reworded — apparently by those who compiled the Annual Conference Agenda. The printed motion bears not resemblance to that submitted. This is despite it being co-sponsored by a branch that used the same wording as the committee (Motions 516 and 75 turned into RA1 in the conference papers)

In 1995, of the 19 motions that were submitted by committees, 18 were printed in the proceedings verbatim for direct consideration by the conference. In the remaining case, the Agenda Committee rewrote the motion in a more concise fashion.

The use of these motions appears to be particularly effective when large and complex issues are under consideration. It would appear the Wool, Wheat and Economic and
Trade committees, submit quite large and detailed motions which set out their position and seek support for their ongoing bargaining. Often these motions will be put to a vote in a unanimous fashion to accentuate the force of the motion. Further, any subsequent motions in a similar area will then be withdrawn so as to retain constancy with the established position.

**Voting on Committee Motions**

The proceedings of the 1996 Annual Conference were examined to see whether the voting on committee motions was different to that of other motions. Of the 22 motions from committees that were placed verbatim in the agenda, 14 were passed without amendment. A further 6 were subject to minor word changes. 1 was referred to the October GC. Of those that were part of composite motions 2 were accepted without addendum and 3 were subject to minor amendment. 4 motions were redrafted in a major way that left their original wording obsolete. One of the motions was deemed covered by a past motion. The balance were agreed to in their printed form although had been altered from the submitted motion by the annual conference committee. No motions were lost out right.

These figures indicate the success that these committees have in gaining support for their ideas at conference. Many other motions are introduced to conference for immediate consideration. Again these were agreed to without exception.
### Table B. Comparing level of Submitted, Agenda and Committee motions at Annual Conference of NSWFA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</table>
Report on Survey of NFF Member Organisations.

The following is a summary of the responses by the state organisations who replied to the survey. The response rate was 50%. The process required a greater response and so I will discontinue it in its formal sense. Nevertheless I thought it important that those who sought to participate are provided with some feedback regardless of its utility.

N.B. Not enough commodity councils replied to make a report on their results meaningful.

Results
I have endeavoured to provide a picture of the range of responses to each question. This was made difficult by two factors. The first was the small response rate, and the second was the request that some matters be kept confidential.

Question One:
*What do you consider to be the major challenges for your organisation during the next five years?*

♦ The two most common responses were environmental issues and the need to raise the general awareness of rural people regarding marketing of their produce.

♦ Maintaining the influence organisations had on the government was seen by over half the respondents as a challenge to their lobbying activities.

♦ Of concern to some was the need to secure micro-economic reform for their membership.

Question Two:
*Characterise the relationship between the executive of the organisation and membership? Have any issues caused tension?*

♦ Three of the five organisations stated that they had a very good relationship with membership and tensions were often along commodity lines.

♦ The other two stated that their membership found it hard to identify progress by the organisations.

Question Three:
*Describe the role your organisation plays in representing its membership.*

♦ All organisations stated that they had strong contact and generally good relationships with both state and local governments. These tiers of government were identified as being the contact points for organisations activities.
Questions Four:

*Describe any anticipated changes to the future structure of your organisation. What is the rationale for such changes?*

- Two organisations stated that no changes were likely.
- Two others mentioned reviews which had taken place and results would be implemented.
- One talked about opening up membership to other minor commodity groups.

**Summation**

These results, whilst holding few new insights, illustrate that some organisations are approaching significant change and feel that a challenge to their influence on government may arise. Meanwhile, others are operating smoothly with no hint of member disenchantment.

Thankyou for your participation and I hope your organisations have every success in representing the rural producers of Australia.
"Farmer Interest Representation in Australia"

Welcome to the Nationwide Survey of member organisations of the National Farmers' Federation. The purpose of this survey is to ascertain the broad views of all state organisations and commodity councils on the current and future challenges they face in representing their membership.

**What's the Method of the Survey?**
This survey technique involves the completion of a small number of open ended questions. The results of all surveys will be summarised and circulated to respondents. The purpose being that all constitute members of the NFF will be exposed to the views of their peers. The result of this process is a dialogue amongst a range of participants who are separated geographically, and hence would otherwise be unable to share ideas. However, the process leaves the author of the responses completely anonymous. No response is attributed to either a single person or organisation.

It will proceed in a number of steps:
1. Fill in the 'Survey', and the 'Details of the Organisation' sheet which are attached to this letter. Return this to the address on page 2.

2. You will receive a summary of the results of all the respondents to the first survey. At this time you will be supplied with a second survey and asked to answer it based on an assessment of the responses of other members as contained in the summary document. This second survey will resemble that of the first. Fill this in and return it to the same address.

3. The results of this will be written up in a final summary, and returned to all respondents. Further communications will be entered into at a later date regarding action from the survey.

This technique is commonly used in strategic forecasting. It enables all organisations to anonymously express their concerns and views to their peers, and finally modify their views upon appreciating those of the others.
Appendix 7    Report on Survey of NFF Family

Why is the survey being conducted?
This survey is part of a PhD study by Darren Halpin. Results will form a background for his PhD research into "Farmer Interest Representation in Australia". Additionally it will provide feedback to the NFF about the functioning of its organisation and the concerns of its constituent members and affiliates.

The attached information sheet gives some further guidance to what is being asked in each question. Please answer as unambiguously as possible.

Also attached is a 'Details of the Organisation' sheet which asks for some background about your organisation. This is for analysis purposes only and will not be used to attribute responses to particular organisations in the reporting process.

Please note: Any results used in publications (whether internal or external) will not indicate the source of any comment, so therefore the individual results remain confidential. The only person who is aware of the source of responses is the researcher Darren Halpin.

Thankyou for taking the time to respond. You will receive a first summary report shortly.

Please send responses or direct inquiries to:
Darren Halpin
School of Agriculture and Rural Development
University of Western Sydney (Hawkesbury)
Locked Bag 1
Richmond NSW 2753

(045) 701 765 -BH    (045) 701 750-FAX
(02) 899 9706-AH
Details of the Organisation

Name of Organisation/Commodity Council:

________________________________________________________________________

Name and Title of respondent filling in the survey:

________________________________________________________________________

What is the Charter/Corporate Statement/Mission Statement of your organisation?

________________________________________________________________________

How many members do you currently have?

________________________________________________________________________

Draw a diagram representing the structure of your organisation:
SURVEY ONE

Name of Organisation/Commodity Council _______________________

1. What do you consider to be the major challenges for your organisation during the next 5 years?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

2. Characterise the relationship between the executive of the organisation and membership? Have any issues caused tension? Explain.

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

3. Describe the role and functions your organisation undertakes in representing its membership.

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

4. Describe any anticipated changes to the future structure of your organisation. What is the rationale for such changes?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Thankyou for your co-operation.
Appendix 7

Report on Survey of NFF Family

Question Explanations

1. This is designed to explore what you consider to be the major challenges over the next 5 years. By challenge I mean issues, other organisations or events that may either challenge your organisation's current path, status as legitimate representative or effective voice of members.

2. This question asks the respondent to describe the relationship between membership and the secretariat. This incorporates:
   - the % of potential members who are actual members,
   - trends in membership over time,
   - any indications regarding the mood of the membership,
   - the result of any recent reviews of the effectiveness of the organisation.

3. This question asks for the details as to the way in which you meet the needs of your members. What activities does the organisation carry out to achieve its aims? Explore the possible areas that you may expand into or eventually deal with in the process of representing your members.

4. Have any changes been made to the organisational or procedural structure of the organisation prior to that in the "Details of the Organisation" sheet (attached for you to fill out).
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319


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Authenticity and the Representative Paradox:
The political representation of Australian farmers
through the NFF family of interest groups.

by
Darren Halpin

A thesis presented to the
University of Western Sydney Hawkesbury
in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Critical Social Sciences Research Group
University of Western Sydney Hawkesbury

December, 1999
PLEASE NOTE

The greatest amount of care has been taken while scanning this thesis,

and the best possible result has been obtained.
Acknowledgements

As with any endeavour of this magnitude, especially one that extends for such a lengthy period of time, there are multitudes of people who need to be acknowledged. My supervisor, Dr Peter Martin, has fostered my interest in this research area since my undergraduate education. Throughout the passage of this research he has provided encouragement, challenged my ideas and assisted in my professional development. These are all things that I am grateful for.

I must acknowledge the many academics at a range of Universities who have given me encouragement and made me feel part of the academy. Thanks to the many staff members of the School of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Critical Social Sciences Research Group, both at the University of Western Sydney Hawkesbury, who have assisted me, given me advice, provided encouragement and made me feel part of an academic community. I must also recognise the University of Western Sydney Hawkesbury for awarding me a Hawkesbury Postgraduate Research Award to complete this Doctorate. Thanks to Dean Simpson for his editorial assistance and Rob Kay who has made a journey that tends to be isolating a little more collegial.

For all the farmers who over the past few years have willingly gone out of their way to share their thoughts about political representation — my gratitude. The NSWFA, its staff and members have on the whole been accepting of my scrutiny and have provided me access to most of what was required. Thanks also go to the entire NFF family who has also been willing to respond to my requests for information.

One cannot live on Ph.D. alone. So thanks to my wife, Jenny, for providing support and encouragement through times in which I thought this would never end. Thanks to my parents and family for encouraging me to follow my aspirations. Finally, thanks to my friends who gave me support despite never quite knowing what I was doing.
Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in whole or part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

................................................
(Signature)
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter/Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Appendices</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter One</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The NFF Family of Farm Interest Groups and Political Representation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Australian Farm Interest Groups</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Agricultural Policy Change: From a ‘state-assisted’ to ‘market-liberal’ paradigm</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Outcome of Policy Change</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 The NFF’s Role in Policy Change</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 The Success of the NFF Family</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7 Challenges for the NFF family</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8 Political Representation</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.9 Conclusion</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Two</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A History of Political Representation of Farmers in Australia</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Introduction</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Politics in the Colony: ‘The Squatters Council’</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Formation of Primary Producer Organisations</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 The decline of the ‘local member’ and the rise of Party politics</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Primary Producers in Parliament: The Country Party</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Country Party and Producer Organisations Split</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7 Country Party loses relevance</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8 Implications for Interest Groups</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9 Amalgamation of Farmer Organisations: ‘Merger Madness’?</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10 Professional Interest Groups: Committees, Corporatism and Extra-Parliamentary Politics</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.11 Conclusion</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## First Intermediate Reflection
Periodisation of Farmers’ Political Representation

### Chapter Three
‘Successful’ Australian Farmer Interest Groups?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Accounts of Farm Interest-Group ‘Success’</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Theory of Interest Groups</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>The ‘Successful’ Interest Group</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Explaining the Pervasiveness of Pluralist Assumptions</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>Outstanding Questions</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chapter Four
Understanding Interest Groups Beyond ‘Success’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>External and Internal Dimensions to Group Behaviour</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Framework for Analysis: The Imperatives of Interest-Group Representation</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Interest Groups in Context: Two Planes of Political Representation Levels and Linkages</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Conclusion: Implications for Analysis of Australian Farm Interest Groups</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Second Intermediate Reflection
Complementarity as the Analytical Lens

### Chapter Five
The Logic and Assumptions of ‘Second Wave’ Farm Interest-Group Reform

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Introduction: Defining the Challenges</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Formulating the NFF Family’s Response: The NFF Review Process</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>The SFO’s Response: Enacting the Plan</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>Formulating a Response: NSWFA review</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>Reaction to the Report</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>The ‘Second Wave’ of Reform</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter Six
Complementarity and the NSWFA’s ‘Division of Labour’

6.1 Introduction 176
6.2 Compliance and Authentic Representation 178
6.3 Constructing a Rationale for Political Representation 182
6.4 The Hidden ‘Second Wave’ Reforms 185
6.5 The Representative Division of Labour in the NSWFA 187
6.6 Creating or Projecting Authenticity 189
6.7 Reassessing the Political Environment: Measures of Compliance 197
6.8 The Complete ‘Second Wave’ 200
6.9 The Stability of Complementarity 202
6.10 Conclusion 208

Third Intermediate Reflection
Evaluating the ‘Success’ of reforms?

Chapter Seven
The ‘Reorganisational Paradigm’ in Practice

7.1 Introduction 213
7.2 Reorganising for Dysfunction: The Native Vegetation Conservation Act 214
7.3 Explaining the Absence of Agreement within the NSWFA 232
7.4 Conclusion 239

Chapter Eight
Prospects for the Future: Learning from the NVC Act

8.1 Introduction 242
8.2 The Pattern of Interaction between the NFF family and the State 243
8.3 New Set of Risks: The Characteristics of New Issues 247
8.4 ‘New’ Problems, ‘New’ Organisational Capacities 251
8.5 The Transformation of ‘Traditional’ Issues 254
8.6 Exploring the Ramifications 257
8.7 Speculating about Responses 261
8.8 Conclusion 266
Chapter Nine
Reconsidering the Representative Paradox 268

9.1 Introduction 268
9.2 The NFF Family’s Response 270
9.3 What Paradox? 272
9.4 Constituency, Interests and Identity 275
9.5 Representative Paradox or Paradox of Representation? 278
9.6 Current Role of Identity in Farmer Representation 281
9.7 Imagining ‘Authenticity’ 285
9.8 Conclusion 289

Chapter Ten
Concluding Remarks 291

10.1 Introduction 291
10.2 Thesis Findings 291
10.3 Future Work 297
10.4 A Final Word from the NFF Family 300

List of References 303

Appendices 322
# List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1.1</td>
<td>NFF Family of Organisations</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.1</td>
<td>Imperatives of Interest-Group Leaders</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.2</td>
<td>Functional Interdependency between Two Dimension of Interest Group</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.3</td>
<td>Two Planes of Political Representation</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1.1</td>
<td>Farm Numbers in Australia: 1950-1990</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 1.2</td>
<td>Farm Employment in Australia</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 1.3</td>
<td>Farm Sectors Contribution to Australian gross product</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 1.4</td>
<td>NSWFA membership since formation</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.1</td>
<td>The Early Development of Farm Organisations and the Country Party</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table IR.1:</td>
<td>Periodisation of Farmers’ Political Formations and Associated Organisations.</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.1</td>
<td>Assumptions guiding interactions between the Representative and their constituency</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.2</td>
<td>Consequences for Representation of the Change in Policy Process</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.3</td>
<td>Complete ‘second wave’ reforms</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# List of Appendices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 1</td>
<td>Description of the NSWFA</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 2</td>
<td>NSWFA Discussion Document and Statistical Report 1997</td>
<td>336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 3</td>
<td>Sample Survey Forms</td>
<td>371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 4</td>
<td>List of Interviews</td>
<td>388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 5</td>
<td>NSWFA Office Bearers for selected years</td>
<td>392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 6</td>
<td>Analysis of NSWFA Annual Conference Motions</td>
<td>401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 7</td>
<td>Report on Survey of NFF Family 1995</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

This thesis examines the political representation of Australian farmers. The NFF family of interest groups is charged with the political representation of farmers in Australia. Given that their state affiliates are the only organisations that farmers can directly join, this thesis takes the case of the New South Wales Farmers’ Association (NSWFA) as its major reference point. In investigating the political representation of farmers as exemplified by the NFF family, one is immediately confronted with a paradox. On one hand, both the state and commentators refer to the NFF family as an exemplar of a successful modern interest group. However, on the other, the NFF family is being confronted with escalating levels of disillusionment and criticism from its own constituency. This paradox highlights two points of interest. Firstly it suggests that theoretical frameworks, which assist commentators and researchers to come to the conclusion that the NFF family is ‘successful’, are not constructed in such a fashion as to throw sufficient light on the paradoxical nature of this situation. Secondly, this paradox suggests that the NFF itself must be able to disassociate the contingent relationship between its internal levels of support and external levels of access and influence.

These two focal points are explored in the thesis, with particular emphasis placed on examining how the NSWFA specifically, and the NFF family more broadly, has responded to this paradox. Further, the framework used by researchers to understand the actions of Australian farm interest groups are scrutinised. Discussing ‘authentic’ political representation assists considering the major theme of the ‘representative paradox’. It is argued that this paradox is best understood by locating it within a search by farmers for authentic political representation — both through the NFF family and apart from it.
Preface

This thesis is the culmination of more than four years’ worth of research into how farmers work with their interest groups to seek political representation. One does not, or should not, commence such a journey without a belief that light needs to be thrown onto a problematic context. In my case, the determination to undertake this journey started as a consequence of reflecting on the farmers I had met and talked with as part of my undergraduate education. Almost without exception each one had a view on politics and a story to tell about how their interests were being marginalised. The nature of their political opinions were quite diverse, yet I was convinced that politics was something that farmers found increasingly important. Whilst politics was increasingly a matter of importance, farmers exhibited a strong cynicism about those claiming to be their political representatives.

In these same discussions it became apparent that farmers were not at all content with their economic futures. Many expressed the view that they had a very bleak economic outlook. The rapid pace with which farmers ‘leave the land’ was often pointed to as evidence of this poor outlook. Given this view, I often grappled with why it was that farmers, as a group, did not seem to make this poor economic outlook a rallying point for collective action. Farmers, themselves, seemed to believe they were largely helpless to respond to these economic conditions. The confluence of deteriorating economic conditions, a cynicism towards their political representatives and their realisation of the importance of politics drew my attention to the political representation of farmers as an issue worthy of further investigation. Investigating the role of farm interest groups in articulating these feelings of helplessness and responding to the poor economic outlook of their members was a logical focus for research.

The National Farmers’ Federation was then, and remains, the unrivalled political voice of the Australian farmer. In the academic literature and in the popular press the NFF was often held up as an exemplar of the modern interest group. Government appeared to take the position of the NFF as the unquestioned position of Australian farmers — its authority appeared unquestionable. These evaluations appeared to be quite incongruous with the view I had formulated from discussions with farmers
themselves. In particular, I wondered why it was that the NFF did not appear to be transmitting the desperation of some farmers about their economic predicament.

At the time of commencing my research the NFF family of organisations was, itself, recognising the need to address the disillusionment of members and to more clearly explain its role in facilitating policy change. Given that the State Farm Organisations (SFOs) of the NFF had direct members, it is they who had to deal with the tensions I had observed in my conversations with farmers. To pursue this line of research I decided to focus on the NSW Farmers’ Association (NSWFA). The NSWFA had publicly acknowledged that it was losing membership numbers and was discussing how to turn this around. The issue of reversing membership decline became an entry point into the context and a focal point for my discussions with the NSWFA. Whilst they saw it as a problem in itself, I viewed it as a symptom of a broader malaise in relation to the representation of farmers’ interests.

Let me briefly comment on the research mode. At the time my research commenced, the NSWFA had not been the subject of research in its own right. As such, there was no basic data indicating who were members of these interest-group organisations, the NSWFA’s organisational practices or even its recent history. The most urgent need was to more fully understand who were and were not members of the NSWFA. Initially, I set out to document the functioning of three NSWFA branches/district councils in order to substantiate whether members actually participated in the organisation or not. The aim was to identify ‘factors’ that led to individuals deciding to join and then participate in the Association. I completed a mail survey of all non-members and members of the NSWFA in three areas of NSW (see Appendix Two, Three and Four). I then followed up with in-depth unstructured interviews with some of the survey respondents and members of their family.

Whilst this fieldwork was under way it became apparent that the Association was really encouraging individual farmers to take up membership, but not to actively participate. Determining why members joined and the extent to which they participated in the NSWFA became somewhat redundant upon the realisation that the NFF family did not view members as important beyond gaining financial resources. This led to a reappraisal of the role of the fieldwork. It successfully gave an indication
as to who was joining and participating in the NSWFA and who was not. This approach was useful, as no study had ever attempted to document the views and patterns of participation of farm interest-group members. The data generated became a foundation for pursuing the larger issue of explaining how the NFF and its SFOs could be influential without needing to foster participation of its members in its affairs. On this basis the fieldwork is included in the thesis as background. It is hoped that a future researcher may use the survey forms as the starting point for a more thorough survey that is amenable to a more rigorous statistical analysis. There is definitely scope for such work.

I was often discouraged from pursuing the research by members of the NSWFA. Most encouraged an historical portrait of the Association. However, the task I set myself was a critical explanation as to how the NSWFA, and by extension the NFF, had managed to maintain political success whilst at the same time combating increasing levels of members disillusionment and criticism. The NSWFA assisted me by providing membership lists of relevant branches and some basic data on the Association. However, there was an understandable level of resistance to the approach I was taking in examining the organisation. In the end, this has resulted in my work becoming a point of some controversy within the Association. Some see it as a worthwhile risk and others as an attack. The rapidity with which my research recommendations have been picked up and then dropped reflects the extent to which the disillusionment of members has become an important issue for senior office bearers. Indeed, in the past few years the election of office bearers has, to some degree, been contingent on their approach to internal reform.

The practical import of the research for the NSWFA aside, the thesis directs a significant amount of time and attention to the theoretical treatment of interest groups. A central reason for pursuing this research was to challenge the orthodox approach to studying interest groups. In initially trying to make sense of farm interest groups, the Australian literature did not shed much light on the impact internal machinations have on the 'political' behaviour of the interest group. In response, I have made this question a significant focus in this thesis.
A final point with respect to terminology. This thesis uses the term ‘NFF family’ to refer to the entire federation of state-based organisations. Where I refer to the ‘NFF’ I am referring to the Canberra-based Federal Executive. Given that only state-based member organisations have direct subscription-paying members, the implications of actions of the NFF are often manifested in the experiences of the state organisations. In this manner, actions of the NFF can be said to be extensions of the NSWFA and vice versa. Hence, in some instances, the NSWFA and the NFF are discussed as if they were the same organisation, or in a manner suggesting that the NFF act with the state and the NSWFA feels a response from farmer members. Therefore, to explore farmer representation I examine the interrelationships between farmers, the NSWFA, the NFF and the state.