

## **The Story of Matt & Janet Thompson**

### **Narrogin Beef Producers**

We immigrated from the United States to Western Australia after purchasing land in 2001 for the sole purpose of building a beef cattle feedlot south of the regional town of Narrogin, 2 ¼ hours inland from Perth.

We came with our own lives savings and hope for our future. There was opportunity in the Wheatbelt of Western Australia, and we came to live. We and our four young children (three of whom were born in the Narrogin hospital) are now Australian citizens.

We took much care and spent significant time in planning the site-specific feedlot project, from an environmental, an animal welfare, and a financial perspective.

Upon submitting the detailed plans to the relevant authorities, we were on hold over a year getting approvals. We were finally granted permission to construct a 15,000 head feedlot on the site we proposed.

A small group of people opposed our development from the beginning, and two appeals were lodged against the original works approval.

There is a 12,000 head intensive piggery directly adjacent to our property, which had been there for 20 years, and about which this same group of opponents had bitterly complained, prior to our purchase.

The first post went into the ground in February 2003, and the first cattle went on feed in June of that year. Complaints (usually based on odour) against our facility were made almost from the beginning.

As president of the WA Lot Feeders Association (WALFA), Matt attended a meeting in May 2007 between environmental departments, environmental groups, and industry, to discuss transitioning the National Pollutant Inventory (NPI) system to the National Environmental Protection Measures (NEPM) system, and including so-called greenhouse gases in the required reporting regime.

At this meeting, Matt questioned the number that members of the feedlotting industry were forced to use in our calculation of “pollution” under NPI...namely, ammonia. The figure supplied to our industry for annual

calculations and reporting was physiologically impossible. It meant that our cattle were emitting more nitrogen than they were consuming.

The officials could give not answer.

Matt then proceeded to oppose inclusion of GHGs in the new reporting, stating that, in his opinion, they did not meet the definition of pollution.

The industry people at the meeting were very interested in what Matt had to say, and gathered around him to take copies of the Great Global Warming Swindle DVDs and Lavoisier Group material that he handed out.

Soon after this, the Department of Environment and Conservation appeared to increase their reliance upon complaints against our business, and correspondence with DEC increased dramatically.

Also after the May meeting, the Environmental Defenders Office (EDO, a state- and federally-funded not-for-profit organisation) got involved with the small group of local complainants. The handful of complainants incorporated into the Narrogin Environmental Action Team (NEAT), and they learned how to, in general, gum up the works so that our project would die on the vine before coming to fruition.

At this point, we had built to 10,000 head of our approved 15,000 head development. DEC's actions worried us enough to cause us to stop expanding.

The vast majority of local people are highly supportive or at least ambivalent about our business being in Narrogin. There is a high degree of attention given our development, but mostly from people that are interested in economic activity and ensuring that our community grows and thrives with real, productive businesses providing a base for that local sustainability.

In early 2008, we hired attorneys in Perth, as it had become apparent that a positive outcome was not going to be forthcoming with DEC. After getting up to speed on our case, the solicitor and barrister suggested that we meet with Dr. Johannes Schoombe, an environmental attorney.

After some resistance, we agreed to meet him. He basically suggested that we crawl on hands and knees back to DEC, admit we were "wrong" and hire him, and he would fix all our problems.

Since we had not done anything wrong, and because we could not afford to pay him on an ongoing basis, after meeting with him for 40 minutes, we declined his further involvement. His bill was \$4000.

In 2009, we discovered that Dr. Johannes Schoombe was the convenor of EDO. He had never disclosed, or even attempted to allude to, any such connection.

In the licence issued to us on 31 March 2008, DEC limited our throughput to 6,000 head -- effectively half of our built-up capital infrastructure capacity. They did so knowing full well that such a limit would cause our financial demise, as we could not cash flow the investment at such a restriction.

During the 18 months it took for our appeal to be heard, decided upon and implemented, our business which had proven very viable was ruined.

By the time clarification on our amended licence was received, there were only 6 months remaining on the original two-year licence. Our existing bank was not willing to provide additional funding, no bank was willing to re-finance us, and no purchaser was forthcoming at the auction held on 20 Oct 2009 because of the lack of certainty hanging over the licence.

At one point in time, when we were operating at 10,000 head and constructing in-house, we had over 20 full time equivalent employees. Throughout the last year, we had managed to hold on to 8 of our core group of excellent employees, with the intention of building up our business again once a common-sense outcome was achieved with DEC.

We were forced to lay off these employees in November 2009.

We trucked the last of the cattle from our facility a month later.

After working actively with and encouraging DEC to take action on a new licence from October, DEC finally delivered our new licence on 8 March 2010, knowing that our bank had given us till 15 March to give them a solution. The new licence was untenable, and the appeal ruling did not deliver any relief.

Our operations manager and close personal friend, Lindley Boseley, committed suicide that month. He was well aware of the latest developments. He had taken casual employment since we laid him off, with the idea that he would come back to us when possible.

Lindley was a doer...a problem solver...one of those guys that could turn his hand to anything -- with a smile. He also proved himself to be an amazing

people manager (rare indeed), and he knew more about our place than we do.

While depression is an elusive animal, and we can never know everything that was going on inside of him, we know that Lindley felt frustrated that he could not solve this problem. He was depressed, seeing all he had engineered and helped to build...sitting idle.

Despair is a terrible thing. I understand it. It's depressing to have bureaucrats telling us what we can and cannot do, when they have never produced anything in this world except more red tape. In attempting to justify their jobs, they keep a good man like Lindley from helping to feed the world.

The value in Lindley -- at every level -- was too great to quantify. We feel a deep, dark hole is in our hearts and minds at the injustice of this situation. We feel compelled to get involved to ensure that this does not happen again, and we will do what we must. Above all, though, we want to produce. That's all we ever wanted to do. Produce. Make things. Be productive.

When we are not allowed to do the only thing we ever wanted to do...when good, problem-solving men like Lindley Boseley are driven to despair because the non-producers triumph over the producers...then we must act.

We owe millions of dollars. With a licence, our feedlot has value that would pay back those creditors. Without a reasonable licence, there is no value.

The National Australia Bank appointed receivers in September. We filed a case against DEC in Federal Court in October. We're hoping that, in the interest of all our creditors – NAB and the other very good people who trusted us enough to do business with us – the receivers will allow us to pursue the case before moving in and liquidating assets.

The challenge we all face – producers, consumers, elected representatives – is vast. Environmental extremists have infiltrated many good organisations, and our system of governance which relied upon people's goodness, has been bastardized and taken advantage of. Regulations and policies have advanced without the benefit of a vote, and the bureaucracy is beginning to strangle everything in its path.

In a developed society, land use conflict will always exist; however, much of the conflict today is being created by governments attempting to manage land belonging to other people.

We found out only recently about the so-called conservation corridors in Western Australia, and the plan put forward by DEC in 2006 called "A 100-Year Biodiversity Conservation Strategy for Western Australia." We fear there is a lack of true understanding of economics and the relationship between progress and the environment. The emotion driving movements such as the biodiversity agenda has led to decisions being made that will have severe detrimental effect on our state and country in future. We believe decisions about our own situation have been tainted by many of these emotive movements.

There are many decent people who have been involved with the formerly good organisations, who do not recognize what has been happening, and are unwittingly promoting an extremist agenda. It is vital that you and other good people see the very real and horrific results of that agenda. That's why we're here.