



This is the Author's version of the paper published as:

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Year:- 2007

Title: Formulating War Service Land Settlement Policy: The Returned Sailors Soldiers and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia and the Rural Reconstruction Commission

Journal War & Society

Volume: 26

Issue: 1

Pages: 39-60

ISSN: 0729-2473

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Formulating War Service Land Settlement Policy – the Returned Sailors Soldiers and Airmen’s Imperial League of Australia and the Rural Reconstruction Commission

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In 1943 the Curtin Labor Government threw down a direct challenge to the Returned Sailors Soldiers and Airmen’s Imperial League of Australia (RSSAILA) by establishing a Rural Reconstruction Commission (RRC) and charging it with responsibility for formulating recommendations on War Service Land Settlement (WSLS). This decision was consistent with the wartime Labor Governments’ preference for seeking expert advice through independent commissions of inquiry. But it cut across the privileged and ‘undisputed position’ hitherto enjoyed by the RSSAILA.¹ The League’s ability to shape repatriation policy and pressure governments to take measures aimed at ameliorating the hardships suffered by soldier settlers after the First World War had been achieved through direct access to ministers. Especially critical were the ‘close personal links’ which its National President, Sir Gilbert Dyett, had forged with Prime Ministers Bruce and Scullin.² But their successors, Curtin and Chifley, kept the League at arm’s length and compelled it ‘to make its representations along with other interested parties to investigating committees before which it had no privileged standing’.³

Historians who have written about soldier settlement concentrate on the ‘disastrous’ First World War experience⁴ and, like Lloyd and Rees in their commissioned history of repatriation, identify the RSSAILA as the ‘most effective representative ... to the federal government’.⁵ Garton examines soldier settlement after both wars. He makes extensive use of the RSSAILA’s archives at the National Library of Australia, emphasises the organisation’s ‘extraordinary capacity to renew itself’, but does not analyse its interaction with the RRC in formulating WSLs policy.⁶ Neither does Kristianson, who was one of the first scholars to use the RSSAILA archives. However, his study of the League’s effectiveness as a pressure group contends that the years 1941-45 were probably ‘the most unsuccessful period’ in its history, ‘when many of [its] demands about repatriation were ignored or

rejected' and when it 'was unable to persuade the Commonwealth to take over complete control of soldier settlement'.⁷

The few historians who have written about the RRC agree that commissioners were conspicuously successful in seizing the initiative on soldier settlement. Their second report was delivered to Chifley, the Treasurer and Minister for Post-War Reconstruction, in mid-January 1944, just ten months after they had begun taking evidence, and provided the guiding principles for the WSLs scheme adopted by the Commonwealth and State Governments in October 1944. Butlin and Schedvin attribute this outcome to the report's emphasis on 'concrete policy considerations', 'the mood of pessimism which guided its preparation' and, above all, its timeliness.⁸ Martin and Penny broadly concur, writing that the second report was the RRC's one substantial success: 'a remarkable achievement explicable partly as a result of ministerial impotency'. Although they insist that the RRC was an independent expert inquiry, which operated 'in the style of a Royal Commission', their conclusion is that the commissioners, when formulating recommendations, became 'willing tools', if not of ministers, then of senior officers in the Ministry of Post-War Reconstruction, notably the Director-General Dr H.C. Coombs and the Director of Research J.G. Crawford.⁹

The problem with this interpretation is that it is based on cursory examination of the recommendations embodied in the RRC's ten published reports¹⁰ and neglect of the inquiry process disclosed in its voluminous unpublished transcripts of evidence. By evaluating the RRC's effectiveness or 'success' in terms of outcomes—the quality and impact of its recommendations—Martin and Penny adopt what Prasser describes as the 'decisionist' model of public policy making.¹¹ This assumes that the principal function of inquiries is to bring disinterested expertise to the formulation of advice for decision makers. Degling, Baume and Jones propose an alternative model which concentrates on process and assumes that the 'ultimate policy effectiveness of official inquiries' resides 'not in their alleged capacity for harnessing disinterested expertise but in their capacity for orchestrating negotiation and bargaining between stakeholders'.¹² The implication here is that commissioners are themselves stakeholders who use the actual process of investigation, consultation and negotiation to advance their own agendas as well as to accommodate the interests of other stakeholders.

Analysis of the transcripts of evidence suggests that while the RRC was appointed under *National Security (Inquiries) Regulations*, which enabled commissioners to subpoena witnesses (powers they never sought to exercise) and take sworn testimony, it did not operate in the ‘quasi-legal’ style of a Royal Commission.¹³ Rather it was as an ‘advisory’ inquiry of the type customarily employed in policy formation. Unlike an ‘inquisitorial’ inquiry—and particularly a Royal Commission—appointed to deal with ‘a specific complaint or a scandal or disaster’, a ‘policy advisory’ inquiry is informal in procedure. It consequently allows commissioners many more opportunities to interact with witnesses in an untrammelled fashion.¹⁴ In Royal Commissions the commissioners strive not only to maintain their independence but also to give the appearance of impartiality and lack of bias by having evidence gathered and presented by counsel assisting the inquiry. Having counsel take major responsibility for examining witnesses is by its very nature adversarial with two or more opinions or viewpoints rigorously tested through cross examination.¹⁵ In policy advisory inquiries, by contrast, commissioners examine witnesses themselves; directly test the witnesses’ competency against their personal experience or against other evidence that they have collected or had collected on their behalf; and negotiate, bargain, persuade or even cajole to secure agreement on the major recommendations.¹⁶

In appointing the RRC Chifley sought men with ‘prestige and wide experience, not necessarily expert technically themselves, but capable of using experts’.¹⁷ He appears to have aimed for an independent, ‘balanced’ membership and firmly resisted pressure for direct representation from State Governments and rural interest groups, the most persistent of which were the Australian Wheat Growers’ Federation and the Queensland Dairymen’s Association.¹⁸ His choice as Chairman was F.J.S Wise, Minister for Lands and Agriculture (and afterwards Premier and Treasurer) in the Labor Government in Western Australia, where, until the 1960s, a majority of Caucus held rural and goldfields seats.¹⁹ The Deputy Chairman was J.F. Murphy, Secretary of the Commonwealth Department of Commerce and Agriculture. Murphy, like Wise, was a part-time commissioner and, after being appointed Controller-General of Food in May 1943, was able to attend only ‘a limited number’ of RRC sittings.²⁰ The two full-time commissioners, S.M. Wadham, Professor of Agriculture at the University of Melbourne, and C.R. Lambert, Chairman of the Rural

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Reconstruction Board of New South Wales, consequently shared the burden of touring rural districts, examining witnesses and drafting nine of the RRC's ten reports.²¹

All four commissioners enjoyed high public visibility and credibility on account of their long, close and practical association with rural industries and rural people. Such association did not imply that they would take the side of rural people; indeed, when examining witnesses, they rigorously challenged the 'rural perspective'. But all of them, as Wise afterwards recalled, had 'in some aspect or another ... experience of the problems associated with the settlement of returned men on the land, following the First World War.'²² Wise's own experience, like Lambert's, derived from administering his State's rural relief and debt adjustment schemes during the 1930s, and Wadham's from representing the RSSAILA on the Victorian Government's Home Maintenance Board responsible for the reconstruction of farming in the Mallee region in 1929-30.²³

Wadham had seen service with the British Army in the Middle East in 1917-18 and was the RRC's only returned serviceman. He was also the only commissioner to reflect publicly on the RRC's work. An experienced committeeman, who had been a member of the Royal Commission into the Wheat, Flour and Bread Industries in 1934-36, and a well-known broadcaster and journalist, he maintained that the RRC was not an inquiry 'of the white-washing type'. Political considerations nevertheless were to the fore. Commissioners 'were asked to give first priority to the problems of land settlement for returned servicemen' and were 'subjected to considerable pressure to recommend leasehold tenure'. Wadham noted, with some satisfaction, that they 'refused to adopt this policy'.²⁴

A university colleague described Wadham as 'one of the most lovable personalities in Australian academic life', but many people found him gruff, hot-tempered, opinionated, and uncompromising.²⁵ It was one thing to take a controversial stance when broadcasting or writing for popular audiences, but quite another to give untrammelled expression to these views during evidence-taking. Yet Wadham was upfront about his intellectual baggage and bellicose and overbearing when examining witnesses on issues like craft education for country children, which had become an *idée fixe*.²⁶ Nor did he hesitate to comment publicly on the RRC's work, publishing pamphlets on rural reconstruction in 1943 and 1944. The second of these declared that

farmers were locked into a culture of rural dependency that had been fostered by piecemeal fiscal assistance from governments in the years after 1930. He saw ‘nothing to be gained from keeping farmers on the land producing things which were not wanted’ and wasting other ‘people’s time, patience and money’. Farmers, he continued, were ‘so accustomed to getting adventitious assistance that they have begun to lose independence of thought’; they ought to consider ‘using brains as well as brawn’.²⁷

In his writings and broadcasts, and in his examination of witnesses, Wadham was emphatic that WSLs was a subset of land settlement, and needed to be considered in the same broad historical context. It was not simply a matter of drawing lessons from the failures of post-First World War soldier settlers—whose circumstances already had been considered by the Commonwealth Government’s Pike Royal Commission, established in 1927-29 to apportion losses between the Commonwealth and the States—but of making recommendations that would address shortcomings of Australian land use in general. He therefore insisted that the RRC’s report on WSLs be preceded by another report, using the historical survey methodology which he and Gordon L. Wood had adopted in their 1939 monograph, *Land Utilization in Australia*.²⁸ A chapter of this first report, aptly titled ‘The Lessons of the Agricultural History of Australia’, emphasised that the ‘history of land utilisation and the farming industries suggests conclusions which are of vital significance today. Any policies which do not take into account the lessons of the past spring from uninformed optimism.’²⁹

The reason why the RRC was under such pressure to report on WSLs was that Cabinet wished to have a Commonwealth policy in place before State Governments began setting their own favourable agendas.³⁰ The New South Wales Government had introduced a War Service Land Settlement Bill in the Legislative Assembly on 11 September 1941. According to J.M. Tully, the State’s Minister for Lands, ‘... the responsibility of settling on the land ex-members of our forces is really that of the Commonwealth Government but we are giving a lead in the matter and hope that it will display sufficient courage and backbone to follow that lead’.³¹ This was a repeat of the First World War experience, with State Governments wanting Commonwealth Government funding, but seeking to deny the Commonwealth any input into either

policy or administration. The point was not lost on staff in the Reconstruction Division of the Department of Labour and National Service, who warned colleagues in the Prime Minister's Department against approaching the States about their intentions for fear that they make unreasonable demands or complain (as South Australia had done to the Pike Royal Commission) that they had been pressured into action against their will.³²

Like the Commonwealth, the RSSAILA was concerned to pre-empt State action, particularly by New South Wales, which appeared to be 'endeavouring to get in before the Commonwealth Government [could] do anything'.³³ On 18 August 1942 the League's Federal Executive wrote to Prime Minister Curtin, recalling 'the tragic failure of land settlement after the 1914-18 war under State Government control', and proposing that the Commonwealth take sole charge of soldier settlement by appointing 'Land Committees of returned soldiers in each State, with power to carry out all land repatriation measures that may be introduced after the present war'.³⁴ Curtin gave no commitment and RSSAILA officers divided over tactics. Sir Gilbert Dyett wanted to make direct personal representations to ministers. However, strong pressure from the Victorian Branch and his failing health compelled him to agree to the Federal Executive convening a 'Land Conference' that would allow branches input to proposals which a RSSAILA deputation would present at a special conference with the Commonwealth Government.³⁵

The League's 27th Annual Federal Congress meanwhile resolved on 25 November 1942 that WSLs ought to be a Commonwealth responsibility. But overtures to the Commonwealth Government proved unproductive, despite representations from Major-General C.H. Brand, a United Australia Party Senator for Victoria, who enjoyed regular access to Curtin and was widely acknowledged as Parliament's foremost spokesman for returned soldiers.³⁶ On 29 January 1943 Brand asked on notice whether the government would 'consider calling a conference of representatives of the Soldiers' Land Settlement Committees in each State with the object of assisting the Government in formulating a policy of land settlement as a means of repatriating ex-service men of this war?' Chifley's reply, supplied on 11 February, was that there would be no special conference: RSSAILA representatives would have to present their evidence to the RRC alongside other interests.³⁷

Undeterred, the RSSAILA organised a three day conference of its State Land Committees on 22-24 February 1943 and Dyett proposed to Curtin that he should meet with the RRC in April to present its resolutions.³⁸ But the Queensland Branch, still smarting from the failure of the Queensland Government to secure the appointment of a Queensland as one of the commissioners, insisted that branches should be permitted to present their views directly to the RRC.³⁹ With Dyett's concurrence, commissioners began by examining the Western Australian Branch on 25 March in Perth and subsequently heard testimony from every branch and selected sub-branches before meeting with the Federal Executive on 31 May to canvas provisions that would be incorporated in the League's draft WSLs bill.⁴⁰ Commissioners then arranged a further meeting in Melbourne on 25 October with Dyett and representatives of all State Land Committees except Western Australia's to receive the League's draft. This had been prepared following a second conference of Land Committees on 27-28 May and had been submitted directly to governments. It embodied the League's existing commitment to exclusive Commonwealth control over WSLs, stipulated that land tenure should be perpetual leasehold, and provided that rental should be fixed at 2% of the land's 'productive value'.⁴¹

Hearings with the branches were robust but generally cordial. Commissioners took care to identify themselves with RSSAILA witnesses, emphasising shared experiences, highlighting agreement on guiding principles and trying to persuade them to modify untenable proposals. Dyett had told commissioners 'he would like [them] to get local views, even though they might be in conflict with Federal [Executive] policy'. Yet there were fewer disagreements than might have been expected, either between branches or between branches and commissioners. This was partly because commissioners adhered to Wadham's idea of drawing on historical experience and treating WSLs as a subset of land settlement in general, and partly because it had been agreed that commissioners would wait until the draft WSLs bill was in their hands before they began considering the RSSAILA's proposed arrangements in detail. Disputes between branches over the content of the bill had been resolved at the two Land Conferences and by the time representatives met with commissioners on 25 October the unresolved issues from the RRC's standpoint were the bill's unapologetically self-serving provisions and the constitutional and administrative impediments to their realisation. Murphy struggled to persuade Dyett

to consider amendments, but was met with the retort: 'Personally I do not believe in negotiating.' Major Millhouse from the South Australian Branch was similarly uncompromising, telling Wadham: 'We do not mind what is done with regard to the other settlers providing that the soldier settlers get what we have provided here.'⁴²

Most branches had been more accommodating, preparing detailed written submissions and selecting as witnesses experienced farmers with a firm grasp of finance and marketing. For instance, Alfred Yeates from the Western Australian Branch was a fruit-grower who had represented producers on the State's Dried Fruits Control Board and chaired its 1932 Royal Commission on Group Settlements and Dairying, while Keith Todd, Chair of the New South Wales Land Committee, was an irrigation farmer and, as he told Wadham, a former member of his State's Home Maintenance Area Board. 'So was I', responded Wadham.⁴³ Wise similarly drew attention to shared expertise, telling Queensland's Fraser East: 'As an old boy of Gatton [Agricultural College], and afterwards something of a successful farmer, I know the type of training there'. This did not prevent him from inquiring whether 'life on the land' was 'too much of a risk for returned men'. Should they 'seek something more favourable ... than ... wholesale land settlement', for instance by training them for employment in 'less hazardous' secondary industries? East agreed that agriculture was indeed risky, but replied that this made it all the more necessary to determine the suitability of potential settlers, to offer them appropriate training and advice, to provide generous financial concessions, and to ensure that their farms were prepared to an adequate standard prior to allocation, but not overcapitalised.⁴⁴ These 'valuable suggestions', as the RRC described them in its second report,⁴⁵ were duly reiterated in evidence from other branches and incorporated in the RSSAILA's draft WSLs bill.

The League's suggestions were broadly consistent with the findings of Mr Justice Pike and with the views RRC commissioners brought to the inquiry. Pike had concluded that 'the main causes of failure' among soldier settlers after the First World War were: 'want of capital'; 'want of home maintenance area'; 'unsuitability of settlers, due to a large extent to war services and want of training'; and 'drop in the value of primary products, chiefly on irrigation areas'. In one of the most damning sections of his report, he compared the circumstances of soldier settlers in New South Wales with those of civilian settlers on adjacent holdings, and found that 'the ordinary civilian settler had his land on terms far and away superior to those granted to the

average soldier settler'.⁴⁶ The RRC for its part identified the causes of failure as lack of experience on the part of settlers, overcapitalisation of farms, falling world commodity prices, inadequate agricultural advisory services, poor Commonwealth-State relations, and difficulties in adjusting farm areas to allow diversified production.⁴⁷

Making explicit 'reference to the lessons of the past', the RRC's second report contended that soldier settlement, like closer settlement in general, had been predicated on faulty assumptions about long-term sustainability. During 1918-20 rural commodity prices reached unprecedented levels. Exports increased significantly, and returns adequately covered production costs. Commentators pointed to the success of water conservation and pasture improvement projects, and predicted that considerably higher stocking rates could be combined with increased production of wheat and other cereal crops on newly subdivided holdings.⁴⁸ That viewpoint found widespread acceptance in policy-making circles and led State and Commonwealth Governments to see farming as a means of providing employment for returned soldiers and migrants. The 'general attitude to farming' in those years was 'so close to that which [was] developing in 1943' that commissioners believed it deserved 'careful review and intense analysis'. They warned that increased employment in the agricultural sector had not been accompanied by any extension of overseas markets and that insufficient attention had been given to the disparity between 'the production-cost structure' of Australian rural industries and 'the purchasing power of populations in other countries'.⁴⁹ The glutting of already restricted markets and a fall in worldwide commodity prices had been exacerbated by the onset of economic depression in 1929, as well as by the Commonwealth Labor Government's ill-considered decision to encourage farmers to grow more wheat, in the hope that this would help alleviate a crisis in the country's balance of payments.⁵⁰

'Your League would do very good service', Wadham told a New South Wales witness, 'if you could make the members and the general public' appreciate that the settlement of returned men on the land was 'bound up with prices' for agricultural commodities and was 'one of the major post-war problems'.⁵¹ This was, in fact, an issue on which there was a high level of understanding and agreement between commissioners and RSSAILA representatives. Western Australia's Alfred Yeates had commenced by observing that 'future success' of land settlement and 'rural

rehabilitation' in general lay largely with 'successful marketing ... Practically all Australia's primary industries ... are exporting ones and ... Australian costs are among the highest in the world.'⁵² Queensland's Fraser East concurred, telling Wise: 'The whole thing depends upon that.' The Western Australian Branch thought the solution lay in improvements to centralised marketing and commodity pooling. But while Wadham believed that marketing needed to be addressed, he declared his opposition to price stabilisation arrangements including home consumption prices, which he considered 'both politically troublesome and financially awkward' and, 'when long continued', likely to discourage efforts 'to improve efficiency and remedy faults in the cost structure'.⁵³

He laid more emphasis on reducing production costs and set about persuading RSSAILA witnesses that the future of Australian agriculture depended on putting an end to government-sponsored subdivision that created inefficient and economically unviable 'one-man' or 'one-family' farms. Lambert already had found considerable support from New South Wales Branch witnesses for the principle that farms should be capable of sustaining diversified production, and acreages determined on the basis that they would provide a living from the least profitable type of production.⁵⁴ Wadham, however, went further, advocating 'commercial' farming on big, aggregated holdings, large enough to provide sufficient capitalization for adequate mechanisation; although he realistically admitted that it would probably be necessary to strike a balance between economic and political considerations and establish 'two-man farms', large enough for an owner and an employee.⁵⁵

One of the advantages of commercial farming from Wadham's standpoint was that it could absorb former soldiers who would be better off as agricultural labourers, rather than as owners or managers. He pursued this idea with customary vigour, leading a witness from the Victorian Chamber of Agriculture by suggesting that 'after the last war there were a number of fellows who were good workers on the land' but were 'quite incompetent' at budgeting or planning: 'Did you encounter any of those sorts?'⁵⁶ He led RSSAILA witnesses just as blatantly, finding there was support from the New South Wales Branch for the idea, but reservations about how easy it would be to satisfy preconditions: for example, establishing a regulated or 'award' system of agricultural wages and providing adequate farm accommodation and amenities so that workers were not 'merely "pigging it" in a humpy'.⁵⁷ The Western Australian Branch

agreed with Wadham's idea in principle, but sounded a note of caution, referring to the mixed fortunes of group settlement schemes in their State, the seasonal character of much of the employment and the difficulty of identifying men with management potential. 'It is almost impossible to say which man will succeed and which will not', commented Yeates. Apparently Wadham's fellow commissioners thought so too, because no attempt was made to translate it into a formal recommendation in the second report.

Wadham and Lambert also tried to use the inquiry process to persuade the RSSAILA to abandon its opposition to 'alien'—meaning Italian—land ownership. Was it reasonable, Wadham asked Queensland's Fraser East, to dispossess Italian landholders when their leases expired? 'I gather that in many cases the Italians actually purchased their leases from Britishers', he continued. East admitted this was so, 'and in most cases at a very considerable profit'. 'And you suggest that those leases should be compulsorily resumed and that those who paid the premium in that way should be dispossessed?' East said that was indeed what he was suggesting, prompting Wadham to inquire whether he envisaged treating naturalised Italians in the same way as those who were not naturalised. 'Yes', said East. 'That would not make a very pretty story in straight dealing', Wadham retorted with crushing finality.⁵⁸

Lambert too did not hesitate to tackle the League's self-serving stance, observing to East that, between the wars, branches and sub-branches had been 'persistent advocates on behalf of the claims of all soldier settlers, without regard to their merits, with the result that very often the worst type of soldier settler [had] set the pace'. He wanted to know whether those responsible for the administration of WSLs could 'look forward to some help from your central League to get over that difficulty', but was not encouraged by what he heard. Where this became critical was when Dyett and representatives of the State Land Settlement Committees appeared before commissioners on 25 October with their draft WSLs bill. Like the RRC, and particularly Wadham, the RSSAILA was not impressed by the lax and unaccountable fashion in which State Governments had expended Commonwealth funding for both soldier settlement and rural debt adjustment and sought a solution through the creation of a dedicated Commonwealth body to oversee administration of the new WSLs scheme.⁵⁹ But the RSSAILA, unlike the RRC, insisted that its proposed

Commonwealth Land Settlement Commission (LSC) ought to be staffed solely by returned servicemen and control all aspects of WSLs 'entirely'.⁶⁰

The administrative implications of these arrangements were raised at the outset by Murphy and Lambert, who inquired whether returned servicemen nominated by the RSSAILA would necessarily be qualified for senior management roles of this character and whether it was practical and cost-effective for the proposed LSC and its subsidiary State Land Settlement Boards to appoint their own staff and not utilise the services of existing State agencies such as Lands Departments and Rural Banks. An emotional Dyett responded that 'it would cause complications, much embarrassment, heart burnings, and would be pregnant with pitfalls if the Commission were not to have the power to appoint its own personnel, entirely as a separate structure'.⁶¹ Under forceful questioning from Lambert and Wadham he admitted that he envisaged the LSC being able to 'attract to the Commonwealth Public Service sufficient State officers'; though (as the RRC's second report commented), it 'was not made clear how the transfer ... was to be effected, and what was to be done with them when the bulk of the soldier settlement work was completed'.⁶²

The constitutional implications of the RSSAILA proposals were far more intractable. Contrary to League claims, the Commonwealth could not take exclusive control of all aspects of WSLs unless by referendum it was given power over land utilisation and settlement.⁶³ Pressed by Murphy, Dyett conceded that these were State preserves and the Commonwealth '[had] not the power' (and was unlikely to obtain the power) to assume sole charge of them. 'We take no part in such developments', he disarmingly continued, 'but we envisage ... that the Commonwealth Government shall establish its own land settlement scheme and if necessary superimpose a separate structure ... to obviate a repetition of ... the heart-rendering experiences after the last war.' During further exchanges with Murphy and Lambert he interjected that there would be 'another war' before the matter was determined. Yet he and his colleagues declined to modify their proposal for exclusive control through a completely separate LSC.⁶⁴

The RRC agreed that Commonwealth Government involvement was 'a necessity' because it seemed 'inevitable' that it would 'be required to play the greater part in the financing of settlement' (perhaps as much as £160 million 'or more' to settle perhaps as many as 50,000 servicemen), and because it was responsible for

repatriation and international trade agreements. Since the success of new land settlement was dependent on finding markets for increased production, commissioners considered it vital that a Commonwealth body decide which schemes were sufficiently viable to warrant funding. At the same time, they acknowledged that State Governments would have to select settlers and acquire and prepare suitable land because they were responsible for the land settlement function.⁶⁵

Commissioners—who already had identified ill-defined relationships and ensuing uncertainty over the boundaries between Commonwealth repatriation and State land utilisation functions as one of the major ‘lessons’ from the history of the First World War scheme⁶⁶—accordingly advocated collaborative arrangements based on ‘complementary machinery for finance and administration’. One element would be a ‘Commonwealth Investigating Authority’, which would examine and advise the Commonwealth Government on the suitability of settlement plans formulated by ‘State’ (and ‘Regional’) ‘Soldier Settlement Authorities’. Commissioners saw this as advantageous because it placed a veto in the hands of a nominally independent Commonwealth agency. The Soldier Settlement Authorities in each State would meanwhile monitor work and expenditure preceding the allotment of farms to individual settlers, including the provision of improvements and the training of applicants.⁶⁷ The other element would be a ‘Commonwealth Financing Authority’ which would operate as a branch of the Commonwealth (Mortgage) Bank and use ‘State rural credit organizations [like the Rural Bank of New South Wales] as its agents’, providing integrated financial services linked with technical guidance and advice from State Agriculture Departments.⁶⁸ The attraction of this arrangement for commissioners was its flexibility. Soldier settlers could be advised, supervised or managed as individual circumstances and prevailing economic conditions required.⁶⁹

In comparison the RSSAILA’s proposed LSC was ‘given almost an open charter’ and allowed to acquire land and fix terms to the settler.⁷⁰ This was ‘so like the provisions of the last Soldier Settlement [Scheme]’, Lambert observed, that ‘it frightens me’.⁷¹ Commissioners’ concerns were heightened by their realisation that the RSSAILA envisaged providing what effectively was a double concession by limiting lease payments as well as interest rates on advances for plant and stock to 2% indefinitely and calculating lease payments on the basis of ‘productive’ (not market) value, fixed with ‘regard to the net annual revenue which can be derived from the land

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when worked with reasonable efficiency and diligence and after deducting all costs of production, including labour and management'. While commissioners themselves favoured valuation on this basis, they proposed setting limits so that all advances were interest free for five years, charged at 2% for the next five years, then fixed at the prevailing market rate thereafter. With freehold tenure—which they favoured over leasehold—commissioners calculated this would provide 30% equity for an individual settler after ten years.⁷² These concessions would be hedged to prevent settlers from trafficking by sub-letting or reselling: practices that were shamelessly defended by RSSAILA witnesses.

Similarly self-serving was the RSSAILA's definition of a 'returned soldier' as 'a person who during the war of 1914-1918 or during the war which commenced on the third day of September 1939 ...served ... in a combat area'.⁷³ The RRC pointed out that this definition meant that the draft legislation's generous provisions would apply not only to soldiers of the Second World War but also to those from the First World War. The implications were staggering. At the conclusion of the Second World War returned soldiers could be competing with their own fathers for allotments and interest concessions. The RSSAILA's call is not altogether surprising because First World War veterans dominated the League until the 1960s. But it placed the Commonwealth Government in a quandary, as Crawford, the Director of Research in the Ministry of Post-War Reconstruction noted when urging Coombs, the Director-General, to widen the scheme to include First World War veterans who saw action in the Second World War.⁷⁴

Martin and Penny do not analyse the 'procedures of scrutiny and comment' to which the second report on WSLs was subjected, suggesting it was dealt with expeditiously at Chifley's direction and therefore spared the 'delays' between completion and release to the public that occurred with all subsequent reports. They further imply that the second report was exceptional in that commissioners were not pressured by officials or ministers 'to alter details ... for essentially political reasons'. Although they concede that 'some commissioners—and most notably Wadham—occasionally resisted such pressure ... they gave every indication of being willing tools' of Post-War Reconstruction 'ideologues'.⁷⁵ This is a serious misreading of the political environment in which the second report and its recommendations were reviewed and

prepared for transmission to Cabinet and two Premiers' Conferences. Even before the report was formally presented to Chifley on 18 January 1944, Lambert had come under sustained pressure from Crawford to amend details in the RRC's draft.

Subsequently, Wadham took such exception to Post-War Reconstruction's proposed Cabinet agenda that he wrote to Coombs threatening to use his position as an established media commentator to publicise his disagreements.⁷⁶ And on 29 May 1944, Wise wrote to Coombs insisting that all four commissioners had 'no reason to depart in principle from the views ... and recommendations' contained in the second report. It seemed to them, he continued, 'that the Government will require to consider whether it will adopt the Commission's Report and recommendations or some other plan. We feel that responsibility for that decision rests with the Government itself.'⁷⁷

The extent of this standoff—which, as Wise observed, went beyond disputes over leasehold tenure to embrace 'very important points of difference' relating chiefly 'to finance (including financial concessions to settlers) and the division of administrative and financial responsibilities between the Commonwealth and State Governments respectively'⁷⁸—was not immediately apparent in Crawford's initial response. Writing to Lambert on 29 December 1943, he admitted that 'some of the major points in my notes are no more than queries in my mind', but they 'are meant to help—they should not disguise my general agreement and pleasure with your general approach to a difficult problem'.⁷⁹ Yet in a minute for Coombs (dated 3 January 1944—'a holiday?'), Crawford reported that he had 'sent a few innocuous queries to Mr Lambert on his draft, but [was] convinced that the report wants rewriting'.⁸⁰ The surviving records are patchy. However, there is no evidence that Crawford's more trenchant comments were forwarded to commissioners or that significant rewriting occurred. Some minor amendments along the lines suggested in Crawford's December letter were nevertheless incorporated in the report, notably an estimate (judged by Crawford to be excessive) of the likely numbers of settlers (50,000 or 9% of returned servicemen) and the anticipated costs to governments. A small dustup then occurred over the brevity of Post-War Reconstruction's executive summary, with Wise forwarding commissioners' own more extensive version directly to Chifley on 28 January.

Crawford was already preparing an outline for a Cabinet agenda and—somewhat ironically in view of the RRC's own strictures against the RSSAILA's draft

bill—did not hesitate to criticise commissioners for failing to provide enough administrative detail of the kind needed for legislation. His own draft was circulated for comment to the Department of Commerce and Agriculture in the third week of March before being forwarded to Treasury and the Commonwealth Bank. A two page document, ‘Matters for Discussion with the Rural Reconstruction Commission’, was then drawn up and considered at meetings with Lambert in Canberra on 21 April and in Sydney on 26 April.⁸¹ The submission disclosed that Treasury had ‘definite views’ on the division of financial responsibilities between governments and, like Post-War Reconstruction, considered the RRC’s scheme to be ‘overweighted against the Commonwealth’. Both agencies consequently wanted to set stricter limits to the amount of WSLs to be financed under agreement with the States and believed this could be accomplished by reducing commissioners’ emphasis on ownership, promoting other avenues for rural employment as tenants, share farmers or contractors, offering no interest concessions on advances to purchase stock or machinery, and substituting leasehold for freehold tenure.

Crawford had failed to persuade Lambert to give ground on leasehold tenure, which had been embraced by the RSSAILA for the reasons that freehold was not possible under Commonwealth law and leasehold did ‘not conduce to a high capitalisation in land value to convert to a freehold tenure’.⁸² Murphy had described the League’s support for leasehold (with an option to purchase—inserted at the insistence of the Victorian Branch) as ‘very contentious’.⁸³ However, there was insufficient time to pursue the reasons when commissioners met the Federal Executive on 31 May, and it was not raised at the October meeting which considered the draft WSLs bill. But the RRC’s first report (written by Wadham) declared that leasehold led ‘to low-grade exploitative occupancy’, whereas freehold gave farmers an incentive to service their holdings properly.⁸⁴ Freehold thus was fundamental to putting the country’s agricultural production on a sustainable basis. Wise could see advantages in the Western Australian system of perpetual leasehold, but maintained that the leasehold tenure proposed in the draft Cabinet agenda was unacceptable because it was ‘far more rigid in its restrictions on the lessee than any existing perpetual lease tenure’.⁸⁵

Crawford had also unsuccessfully pressed Lambert to follow through the implications of Wadham’s assertions that not all applicants would be suited to farm

ownership and Lambert's own suggestion that agricultural employment offered a solution in the event of there being more applicants than available farms: matters on which commissioners had found a good deal of support in witness testimony. It may have been this Crawford had in mind when he complained to Coombs that the second report bore 'no obvious relation to the evidence received'.⁸⁶ In fact, the second report flagged these matters without making them the subject of formal recommendations. It warned that the 'creation of settlement opportunities [would] be a slower moving process than the creation of farm employment opportunities' and reiterated that settlement opportunities would be constrained by markets, prices, suitable land to produce for those markets, vicissitudes of climate and the qualifications and experience of settlers.⁸⁷

In a letter to Coombs, Wadham complained that Post-War Reconstruction's draft Cabinet agenda was 'agriculturally, financially and administratively ... quite unsatisfactory'. Its proposal for vesting administration and financing of all aspects of WSLs in a single Commonwealth Rural Rehabilitation Board was 'extremely unsatisfactory'; it would be 'financially disastrous' to permit settlers to engage in 'subsidiary activities (share-farming, contracting, etc.)'; and the substitution of leasehold for freehold tenure 'would lead to exactly the same state of affairs as caused all the trouble last time'.⁸⁸ Crawford responded by incorporating commissioners' warnings about limited settlement opportunities in the first of five guiding principles for WSLs. He deleted references to tenancy, share farming and contracting and recast three further principles to incorporate the RSSAILA's 'valuable suggestions'—about the suitability of settlers, the preparation of holdings and adequate capitalisation—which commissioners had endorsed in their second report. (Subsequently, a further principle was added dealing with agricultural extension services.) But Crawford offered no concessions on administration or finance and retained the commitment to leasehold tenure with the option to purchase (if the government wished to provide such an option) as the final guiding principle.

A meeting of the four commissioners with Post-War Reconstruction's senior officers in Canberra on 26 May failed to secure any modifications and ended with the decision that Wise would embody commissioners' comments in a document to 'be attached as an appendix' to the Cabinet agenda. This document emphasised that commissioners did not regard 'land settlement as a particularly suitable method of

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rehabilitating returned servicemen', and had only done so 'at the definite request of Hon. the Minister'. One of their 'main objectives ... was to merge the returned men into the general body of farmers at an early date', but this could not be accomplished under the proposed distribution of financial responsibilities between the Commonwealth and the States which offered no concessions to bring the rents on the soldiers' blocks down to the most favourable of the existing perpetual leasehold rates (2½% in New South Wales). Wise pointed out that the States could claim that the Commonwealth had no constitutional right to impose leasehold tenure, and dismissed Treasury and Post-War Reconstruction arguments that in recommending freehold tenure and associated financial concessions the RRC was appropriating public funds to create private assets, pointing out that the same objection applied to all forms of assisted land settlement. And, while noting that the agenda offered the option for States to be 'agents' of the Commonwealth, he roundly criticised its preferred option that State Governments assume entire responsibility for the administration and financing of settlers after the allocation of their holdings, pointing out that there was 'no assurance that all the States [had] suitable credit facilities or sufficient resources for such a task'.⁸⁹

Chifley meanwhile had decided that he would not circulate the WSLs agenda to Cabinet.⁹⁰ Instead it was referred to a ministerial sub-committee which submitted proposals to Cabinet on 14 July. Three days later the full text of the second report was tabled in the House of Representatives. On 19 July Prime Minister Curtin announced it was 'not correct' for journalists to presume 'that Cabinet had adopted this report completely as a basis for its proposals'. After hearing advice from interested Commonwealth departments and external stakeholders, ministers had 'accepted only some of the RRC's recommendations'. In particular, they had decided against establishing 'separate Commonwealth authorities' and intended to propose that State Governments carry out the scheme 'as principals with certain Commonwealth financial aid'. This assistance would be available for settlement on a perpetual leasehold tenure of land and improvements with the option to purchase the improvements only or both land and improvements.⁹¹

At a Premiers' Conference on 25 August 1944 the issue of leasehold tenure proved contentious. So did the proposal that the States take primary responsibility for the management of WSLs. While the most affluent States—New South Wales,

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Victoria and Queensland—were prepared to accept a modified version of the Commonwealth’s proposal that they act ‘as principals, carrying major administrative responsibility with certain financial assistance from the Commonwealth’—they insisted that the ‘condition and type of tenure ... be a matter for the State to determine’. (Subsequently, New South Wales and Queensland ‘voluntarily adopted the perpetual leasehold type of tenure’.⁹²) By contrast, the less affluent States—Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania—‘favoured the scheme in which the State [acted] as agent for the Commonwealth, which, though delegating considerable administrative duties to the States, [undertook] a greater share of the administrative and financial responsibility’. However, they wanted this scheme ‘modified to throw a greater portion of the irrecoverable costs on the Commonwealth’. In return the Commonwealth expected them to implement perpetual leasehold tenure, to engage in the ‘fullest consultation’ with the Commonwealth Government, and to accept its ‘general supervision’.⁹³

Coombs had hoped to establish the scheme on a more uniform basis so that ex-servicemen in any one State were given the same assistance in respect of land settlement as those in any other State. He judged it ‘reasonable for the Commonwealth to state its participation in terms of a leasehold system’, applying what is best described as cost-benefit analysis to both forms of tenure, to demonstrate that the RRC’s proposal (which was strongly backed by Victoria) was far more expensive.⁹⁴ The RRC accepted that freehold tenure would require the settler to have a substantial amount of equity in his farm in order to be a success. To provide such equity the government would be required to offer settlers significant interest concessions over a longer period of time (as much as ten years). In estimating the total cost of settling one returned serviceman, Coombs incorporated costs associated with the preparation of the allotment, administrative costs, costs of financing the settler, contingent losses, interest on stock and equipment during the establishment period, loss of rental during the establishment period, and settler training. The bottom line was emphatically in the Commonwealth’s favour, with each soldier settler costing £2392 under the RRC’s freehold plan and only £1242 under the Commonwealth’s leasehold arrangements.⁹⁵

The debate about leasehold and freehold reveals a fundamental difference between ministers and commissioners that was for the most part based on their different

objectives. The RRC, in making its recommendations, was hoping to sow the seeds for long-term structural reform in the rural sector. It had exploited to the fullest extent its brief to make recommendations ‘as to the appropriate rural policy for Australia to follow post war ...’.⁹⁶ It had seized the opportunity to develop a separate policy on soldier settlement as the occasion for making a break with traditional patterns of settlement and type of settler. Similarly, it had sought to create a new approach to agricultural policy that was mindful of the Australian climate and topography, as well as economic and technological changes. This was in strong contrast to the Commonwealth Government’s outlook. By necessity it had short-term priorities on its agenda. Although Chifley in a letter to Wadham indicated that he desired a plan for future rural policy in general, the immediate problem was how best to repatriate returned servicemen.⁹⁷ He required a policy that would avoid past mistakes and be cost effective. The choice of leasehold land tenure suggests that the Commonwealth was attracted not only by the lower costs, but also by the likelihood of steady and somewhat more immediate revenue flows.⁹⁸

In order to reach a settlement at the reconvened Premiers’ Conference on 5 October, the Commonwealth agreed to make separate agreements according to whether the States were ‘principals’ or ‘agents’. It not only found itself obliged to give ground on leasehold tenure, in the face of persistent lobbying by Victoria, but to offer further financial concessions. It already had agreed to bear all the costs involved in training returned servicemen, whereas the RRC had envisaged the States taking responsibility for the administrative costs of farm employment and training.⁹⁹ It now moved to win over the three poorer States by proposing that it would meet three-fifths, rather than one-half, of ‘the difference between the cost of the property and the agreed productive value’. It also accepted a proposal by the three more affluent States that it ‘bear in addition to the costs outlined in the original proposals’ one-half of the cost of rental or interest concessions and one-half of ‘any subsequent losses arising from guarantees given in regard to special interest arrangements’ for settlers.¹⁰⁰

Given the complexity and sensitivity of WSLs, in terms of relations between the Commonwealth Government and the RSSAILA on the one hand and between Commonwealth and State Governments on the other, it is understandable why Cabinet should have referred the entire matter to a commission of inquiry. Rather than letting

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one very active pressure group serve as the principal source of policy advice, as it did after the First World War, the Commonwealth used the RRC to place the RSSAILA at the same level as other stakeholders and keep its officers at arms' length. In addition to permitting a full range of opinions to be ventilated, it made it possible to initiate negotiations with State Governments on a set of guiding principles derived from recommendations of an ostensibly expert and disinterested group.

Those who have written about the RRC generally have agreed that it began its existence as an independent, expert commission of inquiry. Martin and Penny attribute its success to the way in which commissioners allowed themselves to become 'willing tools' of Post-War Reconstruction bureaucrats. Butlin and Schedvin assume its continuing independence and measure its success by ticking off recommendations that made their way into policy. They note that five of the six guiding 'principles suggested by Cabinet as a basis for discussion with the States' and afterwards included in preambles to WSLs agreements derived directly from the RRC's second report. The one principle—perpetual leasehold tenure—that did not was eventually assented to by all states except Victoria. Although Butlin and Schedvin accept that 'there was room for serious argument' about tenure, they do not grasp the essentially opportunistic character of the RSSAILA's stance on this issue. Nor do they appreciate the centrality of 'ownership' through freehold tenure to the RRC's blueprint for sustainable agriculture: a point Lambert emphasised in correspondence with Wadham as well as in the fourth chapter of the ninth report on rural land tenure and valuation.¹⁰¹

By treating the RRC as an inquiry in the style of a Royal Commission rather than as an advisory inquiry of the type normally used in policy formation, these commentators have neglected or downplayed commissioners' own agendas. Acting as stakeholders who construed their role to include the accommodation of other stakeholders, commissioners seized opportunities presented by the more informal inquiry process to secure broad agreement on guiding principles. Encouraged by Wadham, they drew—and led RSSAILA branch witnesses to draw—'lessons' from the post-First World War soldier settlement experience as well as from the history of land settlement in general. Among the more important of these lessons was that leasehold tenure led to exploitative land use, whereas ownership encouraged producers to act in an environmentally responsible fashion and implement measures

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that enhanced productivity over time. This lesson was of a piece with the cautious, even ‘pessimistic’, approach to WSLs which commissioners adopted and closed ranks to defend in the face of opposition from officers in Treasury and Post-War Reconstruction.

Far from being ‘willing tools’ of Crawford and Coombs, commissioners emerged as doughty opponents prepared to maintain their view that the success of any new WSLs scheme depended on the formal demarcation of administrative and financial responsibilities between Commonwealth and State Governments. This too was a lesson that the RRC, in common with the RSSAILA, had drawn from previous soldier settlement experiments. But while the RSSAILA adopted a naïve, opportunistic and ultimately unrealisable commitment to exclusive Commonwealth control, the RRC moved to secure an arrangement that divided administrative responsibilities according to whether they related to the Commonwealth function of repatriation or the State function of land settlement. The demarcation of financial responsibilities proved more problematic, with officers from Treasury and Post-War Reconstruction seeking to limit or reduce charges on the public purse. Here again, commissioners proved themselves determined advocates, ready to champion the RSSAILA’s demand for financial concessions at least as generous as those enjoyed by settlers in general. Their readiness to accommodate RSSAILA interests in this fashion suggests that writers like Kristianson, who have seen WSLs as an unqualified ‘defeat’ for the RSSAILA, have failed to understand the complex policy-making environment which resulted from the wartime Labor Governments’ preference for seeking supposedly disinterested advice through the inquiry process.

¹ G.L. Kristianson, *The Politics of Patriotism: the Pressure Group Activities of the Returned Servicemen’s League* (Canberra: ANU Press, 1966), 23.

² *Ibid.*, 38-42, 49, 157-9.

³ *Ibid.*, 75-7.

⁴ M. Lake, *The Limits of Hope: Soldier Settlement in Victoria 1915-38* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1987) judges soldier settlement a failure, as do J.M. Powell, ‘Soldier Settlement in the Dominions, the Debt of Honour’, *Journal of Australian Studies*, 8 (1981), 86 and K. Fedorowich, *Unfit for Heroes: Reconstruction and Soldier Settlement in the Empire Between the Wars* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 144-90, who adopt a comparative approach and discern a ‘second-hand imperialism’ behind the aspirations of politicians and bureaucrats. S. Garton, *The Cost of War: Australians Return* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2000), 141-2 advances the ‘heretical’ proposition that ‘soldier settlement was not the “great failure” that its critics have sought to portray it as’. He does this by comparing failure rates of 19th century free selectors, which he claims were significantly higher than those of either post-1918 or post-1945 soldier settlers. Turning to the post-1945 experience, A.R. Barrett, *A History of the War Service Land Settlement Scheme Western Australia* (Perth: Government Printer, 1965) and R. Smallwood, *Hard to Go Bung: World War II Soldier Settlement in Victoria 1945-62* (Melbourne: Hyland House, 1992) are official histories, the

latter tendentiously insisting: 'It is hard to be sure, nearly fifty years later, what impact the RRC's conclusions had' on WSLs in Victoria (87-8). By contrast, K. George, *A Place of their Own: The Men and Women of War Service Land Settlement at Loxton after the Second World War* (Kent Town, S.A.: Wakefield Press, 1999) concentrates on elucidating the settlers' own experiences, rather than evaluating whether the scheme was 'a good or bad plan for rehabilitating returned service personnel' (3). She nevertheless makes effective use of detailed research in records of both Commonwealth and State agencies to provide the necessary administrative context, whereas the few other published studies of WSLs are essentially local histories drawing on settlers' individual or collective reminiscences. Examples are J. Nunn, *Soldier Settlers: War Service Land Settlement Kangaroo Island* (Hawthorndene, S.A.: Investigator Press, 1981) and T. Spence, *Jerramungup: Soldiers of the Soil* (Maylands, W.A.: T. Spence, 2003).

⁵ C. Lloyd and J. Rees, *The Last Shilling: A History of Repatriation in Australia* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1994), 43-61, 219-27.

⁶ Garton, *Cost of War*, pp. 63-9, 126, 135-7.

⁷ Kristianson, *Politics of Patriotism*, 191.

⁸ S.J. Butlin and C.B. Schedvin, *War Economy 1942-1945* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1977), 734-8. An opinion shared by Morna Vellacott, *War Service Land Settlement in Victoria, 1945-1960*, Litt. B. thesis, Australian National University, 1983; copy deposited at the National Library of Australia (henceforth NLA), MS8409, 94.

⁹ A.W. Martin and Janet Penny, 'The Rural Reconstruction Commission, 1943-47', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 29: 2 (1983), 218, 225-6, 229.

¹⁰ Australia, Rural Reconstruction Commission, Reports, 10 vols (Canberra: Australian Government Printer, 1944-46). Citations hereafter follow the RRC's own convention and are identified by report number and paragraph (not page) number(s).

¹¹ S. Prasser, 'Royal Commissions and Public Inquiries: Scope and Uses' in Patrick Weller (ed.), *Royal Commissions and the Making of Public Policy* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1994), 11-12, 14-15. See also R.F.I Smith and P. Weller (eds), *Public Service Inquiries in Australia* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1978), 10-11.

¹² P. Degling, P. Baume and K. Jones, 'Staging an Official Inquiry for Policy Change: the Case of the Drug Evaluation Review in Australia', *Policy and Politics*, 21: 4 (1993), 271.

¹³ Coombs had resisted calls from the Attorney-General's Department for the RRC to be established under a simple administrative process on two grounds: first, that it would lack the coercive powers required if it was to discharge its functions and do so in a publicly credible fashion; second, that Frank Wise, the proposed Chairman, who was a Western Australian Government minister, could not under his State's Constitution take an office of profit under the Crown without being left open to severe penalties. The National Security Act conferred powers that would override these constitutional and legal impediments, providing this was held to be in the interest of more effectual prosecution of the war. The Attorney-General's staff questioned these assertions, but Coombs had his way after protracted correspondence. See memo from Coombs to Secretary, Attorney-General's Department, 26 January 1943 and ensuing exchanges in NAA A4721, W11622. S. Prasser, 'Royal Commissions in Australia: When Should Governments Appoint Them?', *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 65: 3 (2006), 32 argues it is misleading to classify inquiries of this type as Royal Commissions, even if they invoke their coercive powers and are chaired by members of the legal profession.

¹⁴ The term 'policy advisory' inquiry is adopted by Prasser, *Royal Commissions and Public Inquiries in Australia* (Sydney: Lexis Nexis Butterworths, 2006), 22-27 from D.H. Borchardt, *Commissions of Inquiry in Australia* (Bundoora, Vic.: La Trobe University Press, 1991), 11. Prasser substitutes it for the term 'investigatory' inquiry coined by L. Hallett, *Royal Commissions and Boards of Inquiry* (Sydney: Law Book Company, 1982), 12-14, 149-50, but reserves Hallett's term, 'inquisitorial' inquiry for 'mostly statutory royal commissions', 'dominated by the legal profession', frequently with 'a single [judicial] member'.

¹⁵ Hallett, *Royal Commissions and Boards of Inquiry*, 22-25, 218, 210-11, 221. Prasser, *Royal Commissions and Public Inquiries in Australia*, 24-26, makes the point that, contrary to popular perceptions, Royal Commissions are not 'judicial inquiries'. They are not obliged to follow the rules of evidence, they make no judgements, have no power to enforce judgements, and report to executive government which appointed them. On the other hand, Royal Commissions present reports that are judgemental in tone, which often seek to apportion blame or responsibility, and which recommend action against individuals or organisations. They cannot commence this action themselves, but the

prescriptive character of their recommendations and their perceived impartiality places governments under strong pressure.

¹⁶ Ibid., 27.

¹⁷ Cabinet agenda no. 245, 21 May 1942, National Archives of Australia (henceforth NAA), A2700.

¹⁸ Martin and Penny, 'Rural Reconstruction Commission', 229.

¹⁹ J. Buxton, 'Electoral Politics Past and Present in Western Australia' in R. Pervan and C. Sharman, *Essays on Western Australian Politics* (Nedlands, W.A.: University of Western Australia Press, 1979), 35-63; table 3.4 (38) shows that 64-67% of members of the Labor Caucus in 1943-48 were in non-metropolitan seats.

²⁰ RRC, 1:3.

²¹ Biographical detail about commissioners is drawn from G.S. Reid and M.R. Oliver, *The Premiers of Western Australia* (Nedlands, W.A.: University of Western Australia Press, 1982), 74-8; R.S. Swift, 'James Francis Murphy' in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 15 (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2000), 445-6; P.C. Grundy, 'Cecil Ralph Lambert', Ibid, 48-9; and L.R. Humphreys, *Wadham: Scientist for Land and People* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2000).

²² Recorded monologue by F.J.S. Wise, 1978-, Oral History Section, NLA TRC619/3/170.

²³ S.M. Wadham, 'The Boundaries of Arable Cultivation in Victoria', *Economic Record*, 6 (May 1931), 1-27.

²⁴ S.M. Wadham, 'Recollections and Reflections on Government Commissions', *Farm Policy*, 2: 3 (1962), 99.

²⁵ G. Blainey, 'Sir Samuel Wadham' in *Sir Samuel Wadham, Selected Addresses with a Biographical Study by Geoffrey Blainey* (Melbourne: Privately published, 1956), 1; Humphreys, *Wadham*, 35-7, 100.

²⁶ Ernest Breakwell (NSW Inspector of Schools) transcript of evidence, 3 September 1943, University of Melbourne Archives (henceforth UMA) Wadham Papers (henceforth WP) 9/79.

²⁷ S.M. Wadham, *Reconstruction and the Primary Industries*, Realities of Reconstruction no. 7 (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1944), 11-12, 18, 20. Wadham's other publication, *The Land and the Nation* (Melbourne: Stockland Press, 1943) was based on broadcasts he had given on ABC radio in 1941-42.

²⁸ RRC, 1:1.

²⁹ RRC, 1:33.

³⁰ Note on Soldier Settlement appended to Cabinet agenda no. 245, 21 May 1942, NAA A2700.

³¹ *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, Legislative Assembly, 11 September 1941, 1059.

³² Attachment ("Soldier Settlement") to letter from Secretary, Department of Labour and National Service to Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 10 September 1942, NAA A9816, 1943/598.

³³ Letter from K.H. Todd, NSW Country Vice-President RSSAILA to Sir G. Dyett, 7 April 1943, NLA MS6609, series 1, item 1227C pt 1.

³⁴ Letter from General Secretary RSSAILA to Curtin, 18 August 1942 covering resolutions dated 7 August 1942, NLA MS6609, series 1, item 1227C pt 1.

³⁵ Letter from Secretary, Victorian State Branch to General Secretary, 17 August 1942 and reply from General Secretary, 20 August 1942, NLA MS6609, series 1, item 1227C pt 1.

³⁶ D. Bennet, 'Charles Henry Brand' in *Biographical Dictionary of the Australian Senate*, vol. 2 (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2004), 135-7.

³⁷ *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 189 (29 January 1943) and 498 (11 February 1943).

³⁸ Letter from General Secretary to Curtin, 1 March 1943, NLA MS6609, Series 1, item 1227C pt 1.

³⁹ Letter from Queensland Branch Secretary to General Secretary, 15 May 1943, NLA MS6609, Series 1, item 1227C pt 1.

⁴⁰ RSSAILA WA Branch transcript of evidence, 25 March 1943, NAA CP462/1; Summary of RSSAILA action on WSLs, NLA MS6609, Series 1, item 1227C pt 2a.

⁴¹ The heads for a WSLs bill were based on a paper prepared by the Western Australian Branch and distributed as Circular 44/43 on 26 January 1943 (copy in NLA MS6609, series 1, item 1227C pt 1). The draft bill was prepared by a staff member in the Office of the South Australian Parliamentary Draftsman.

⁴² Transcript of RRC conference with Sir Gilbert Dyett and other RSSAILA representatives, 25 October 1943, NAA A6182, 82A.

⁴³ RSSAILA NSW Branch transcript of evidence, 7 September 1943, NAA CP462/1.

⁴⁴ RSSAILA Queensland Branch transcript of evidence, 23 July 1943, NAA CP462/1.

⁴⁵ RRC, 2:174.

- ⁴⁶ Australia, Parliament, *Report on Losses due to Soldier Settlement*, Parliamentary Paper 46, (Canberra: Government Printer, 1929), 23.
- ⁴⁷ RRC, 2:125-47.
- ⁴⁸ T. Whitford, 'An Historical Analysis of Cattle Grazing on the Murrumbidgee Flood Plain 1895-1996', *Rural Society*, 9: 2 (1999), 457.
- ⁴⁹ RRC, 1:56-7.
- ⁵⁰ E. Dunsdorfs, *The Australian Wheat-Growing Industry 1788-1948* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1956), 267-74.
- ⁵¹ RSSAILA NSW Branch transcript of evidence, 7 September 1943, NAA CP462/1.
- ⁵² Statement by Mr A. Yeates appended to the RSSAILA WA Branch Memorandum of Evidence, NAA CP462/1.
- ⁵³ RRC, 1:61.
- ⁵⁴ RSSAILA NSW Branch transcript of evidence, 7 September 1943, NAA CP462/1.
- ⁵⁵ Wadham, *The Land and the Nation*, 7-9, 19. He maintained this stance throughout the life of the Commission: see S.M. Wadham, Review of *Family Farm Policy* in *Economic Record*, 24 (December 1948), 277-8, but had already conceded the need for compromise in his 'Foreword' in A.J. & J.J. McIntyre, *Country Towns of Victoria: a Social Survey* (Carlton: Melbourne University press, 1944), v-vii. He clashed sharply with B.A. Santamaria from the National Catholic Rural Movement (NCRM) when Santamaria described commercial ('corporation') farming as 'antisocial' and advocated 'family farming'. (B.A. Santamaria representing the NCRM transcript of evidence, 18 October 1943, UMA WP9/79.) Wadham professed to find the NCRM position incomprehensible, branding it 'peasant' or 'subsistence' farming: an identification that found its way into a slighting dismissal in the third report (RRC, 3:514).
- ⁵⁶ Victorian Chamber of Agriculture transcript of evidence, 22 October 1943, UMA WP9/79.
- ⁵⁷ That is, in the kind of bark hut constructed by Australian Aborigines.
- ⁵⁸ RSSAILA Queensland Branch transcript of evidence, 23 July 1943, NAA CP462/1. Examining the thoughtful Keith Todd from the New South Wales Branch, Wadham devoted considerable effort to trying to persuade him that the League's policy of dispossessing Italian immigrants was likely to be counterproductive. Even if, as he suggested, the Italians were 'compensated', it surely was 'not a very wise thing to dispossess migrants' if you wanted 'to encourage migration'. Todd conceded the point, and observed that the first problem should be to re-establish veterans 'before we give serious consideration to the question of encouraging migrants to this country'. Lambert intervened to indicate agreement.
- ⁵⁹ S.M. Wadham, *Necessary Principles for Satisfactory Agricultural Development in Australia*, the Joseph Fisher Lecture in Commerce given in Adelaide on 5 July 1946 (Adelaide: Hassell Press, 1946), 14 and Wadham, *Reconstruction and the Primary Industries*, 11-12, 18. Wadham was especially critical of State Governments for propping up wheat farmers on marginal lands rather than rectifying long-term structural problems by buying them out. State Governments, he argued, had turned farmers into 'mendicants' dependent on 'handouts'.
- ⁶⁰ RRC, 2:171-3.
- ⁶¹ Transcript of RRC conference with Sir Gilbert Dyett and other RSSAILA representatives, 25 October 1943, NAA A6182, 82A.
- ⁶² RRC, 2:173.
- ⁶³ RRC, 2:181.
- ⁶⁴ RRC, 2:173.
- ⁶⁵ RRC, 2:183-5.
- ⁶⁶ RRC, 2: 132-4.
- ⁶⁷ RRC, 2:188-91.
- ⁶⁸ RRC, 2:191-2.
- ⁶⁹ RRC, 2:165.
- ⁷⁰ RRC, 2:176.
- ⁷¹ Transcript of RRC conference with Sir Gilbert Dyett and other RSSAILA representatives, 25 October 1943, NAA A6182, 82A; RRC, 2:177-178.
- ⁷² RRC, 2:230-1.
- ⁷³ RRC, 2:179.
- ⁷⁴ Draft minute by Crawford for Coombs, 19 March 1944, NAA A12085, 10.
- ⁷⁵ Martin and Penny, 'Rural Reconstruction Commission', 225-229.
- ⁷⁶ Letter from Wadham to Coombs, 11 May 1944, UMA WP9/79.

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- ⁷⁷ Letter from Wise to Coombs, 29 May 1944, NAA A6189, 312/2.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid.
- ⁷⁹ Letter from Crawford to Lambert, 29 December 1943, NAA A12085, 10.
- ⁸⁰ Minute by Crawford for Coombs, 3 January 1944, NAA A12085, 10.
- ⁸¹ Copies of these documents can be found in NAA A6189, 312/2; NAA A571, 1948/1285; NAA A606, R2/1/3. See also 'Re-establishment of Service Personnel in Rural Occupations', draft minute by Crawford for Coombs, 19 March 1944 and letter from C.L. Steele (Department of Commerce and Agriculture) to Ross Brownlie (Secretary, RRC), 31 March 1944, NAA A12085, 10.
- ⁸² Briefing notes for Sir Gilbert Dyett's meeting with the RRC on 31 May 1943, NLA MS6609, series 1, item 1227C pt 1.
- ⁸³ Transcript of RRC meeting with RSSAILA Federal Executive, 31 May 1943, NAA A6182, 65.
- ⁸⁴ RRC, 1:9.
- ⁸⁵ Letter from Wise to Coombs, 29 May 1944, NAA A6189, 312/2.
- ⁸⁶ Letter from Crawford to Lambert, 29 December 1943 and minutes by Crawford for Coombs, 3 January 1944 and 22 February 1944, NAA A12085, 10.
- ⁸⁷ RRC, 2:146, 150, 157, 159, 222.
- ⁸⁸ Letter from Wadham to Coombs, 11 May 1944, UMA WP9/79.
- ⁸⁹ Letter from Wise to Coombs, 29 May 1944, NAA A6189, 312/2.
- ⁹⁰ 'Cabinet agendum no. 665A' is pencilled onto Steele's spirit duplicated copy in NAA A606, R2/1/3; however, there is no copy of 665A in NAA A2700.
- ⁹¹ Statement by the Prime Minister, Rural Reconstruction Commission's Report—Soldiers' Settlement, 19 July 1944, NAA A461/7, BK326/1/3.
- ⁹² 'Settlement of Returned Service Personnel: 1939-45 War', *Official Yearbook of the Commonwealth of Australia*, no. 37, (Canberra: Australian Government Publisher, 1946), 114.
- ⁹³ Cabinet agendum no. 665B, Land Settlement of Servicemen, 4 November 1944, NAA 2700.
- ⁹⁴ Minute by Coombs for Chifley, 11 September 1944, NAA A606, R2/1/3.
- ⁹⁵ Ministry of Post-War Reconstruction minute, 'Proposals for Land Settlement of Servicemen—Leasehold or freehold', 28 August 1944, NAA A461/7, BK326/1/3.
- ⁹⁶ Letter from Chifley to Wadham, 18 December 1942, UMA WP9/79.
- ⁹⁷ Ibid.
- ⁹⁸ So was the New South Wales Government, as its Minister for Lands (Tully) made clear in a letter dated 11 July 1944 to the Commonwealth Treasurer, NAA A12085, 10.
- ⁹⁹ RRC, 2:257.
- ¹⁰⁰ Cabinet agendum no. 665B, Land Settlement of Servicemen, 4 November 1944, NAA 2700.
- ¹⁰¹ Letter from Lambert to Wadham, 30 November 1945, NAA A6189, 312/8.