

Overall response

The report is highly disappointing. It fails to address broad administrative issues which will mean endemic trespassing, hunting, unregistered vehicles and makeshift homes on private land will continue. Having said that, it does recommend some common sense solutions to improve the situation for farmers in Lightning Ridge. NSW Farmers will be pushing hard to have these adopted as a positive first step.

What does the report recommend?

Compensation

- Mr Wilcox has recommended modest increases to compensation, which would be set by government in as a blanket rate.
 - NSW Farmers has never been primarily concerned about the rate of compensation. This is a secondary issue but a welcome improvement nonetheless.
 - There should still be an option for landholders in unique circumstances to negotiate above the blanket rate. Mr Wilcox has for some reason decided against this.

Keeping landholders informed

- The report notes that landholders have 'little idea about the number of current claims over their land and the identity of the people who hold those claims'. This means landholders can't tell who has permission to be on their land and who is trespassing.
- The report recommends better systems for notifying landholders of claims and making details available online. It also calls on government to consider ID cards and vehicle stickers for authorised prospectors.
 - NSW Farmers welcomes these common sense initiatives and strongly supports any means of preventing the endemic trespass that currently occurs.

Plans for prospecting operations and areas

- The Report recommends standard plans be used for mining operations in conjunction with broader plans for opal prospecting areas.
 - NSW Farmers supports this long overdue initiative which will hopefully lay down a plan to rehabilitate sites before they are damaged. We will need to assess the detail in the standard plan.

What has the report overlooked?

Access and Rehabilitation

- Mr Wilcox points out "there is no point in imposing conditions that the Department is unable or unwilling to police". This sets the theme for the report, which fails to make serious recommendations about serious problems.
- The report concluded that there was "no need to change rules around remedies and rehabilitation". We are extremely disappointed by this decision. There are clear production and value implications for properties affected by mullock heaps and to leave these on private property at the end of a claim is unacceptable.
- The Report did not look at Access Management Plans. NSW Farmers understands that very few of these are in place, despite being mandatory. This means landholders cannot impose biosecurity and other requirements to protect their businesses.
- NSW Farmers made strong representations about the need to improve administrative oversight from a range of agencies through an interdepartmental working group. The report has ignored this sensible request and will see Lightning Ridge continue to fall through the sights of the Policy, RTA, EPA, LHPAs and the Division of Resources and Energy.

Release of the Report

- No explanation has been offered as to why it took from 6 July until 30 November for this report to be released.