

Resources for improving journalists' understanding
of the economic and financial parameters of
Australia's agricultural and commodity producers

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Agriculture, Australia, business, commodity, demand, dollar, economics, environment, exchange rates, exports, finance, farming, food security, imports, journalism, primary production, public journalism, news reporting, mining, regional, reporter, resources, rural, rural reporter, supply, trade, transdisciplinarity

ABSTRACT

My thesis consists of a creative work, in the form of an instructional guidebook for journalists called *In the Field: A Reporter's Guide to Australian Commodities*, plus an exegesis. This exegesis uses primary research interviews, practice-based observations and university coursework in economics to determine what knowledge about the fundamentals of economics will better inform general journalists who report (whether regularly or irregularly) on, or in, rural and regional Australia. The rural and regional aspect has been focused on because of the importance of commodity exports to Australia's economy.

The goal of the exegesis is to explore how an understanding of economics can help journalists report and interpret the impact that economic events and decisions by government and business leaders can have on society. The word 'economic reporting' or 'economic issues' is used as shorthand throughout the thesis for the sake of brevity. For the purpose of this thesis, I use the term 'economy' to refer to the working of economic systems managed by governments and business leaders, and I use the term 'commodity' to refer to Australia's natural resources (mining or agriculture). The exegesis is a study for general journalists (i.e. not specialist business reporters), although some additional analysis of business and finance issues that are particularly significant to the overall economy are included.

The theoretical framework of the thesis draws on scholarly works in theoretical areas including:

1. Constraints on journalists
2. Journalistic construction
3. Public or civic journalism
4. Transdisciplinary approaches

The research project (this exegesis and the accompanying guidebook) involved the aim of informing journalists about the fundamentals of economics in order that they have a wider understanding of the tools available to government and business leaders and the possible impacts on society stemming from economics issues in news items. But that is not the end point; rather, in order to facilitate the betterment of society through knowledge, this knowledge of economics was

applied within the context of theories of journalism such as public or civic journalism so that such reporting can lead to a positive impact on society. The journalistic theories are explained in the theoretical framework and literature review.

There is little research that studies the level of economics and related business knowledge among general journalists who are not specialist or expert economic or finance reporters, nor are there many resources that specifically aim to boost journalists' understanding of these fields. Yet, even studies into such specialist business, economics or finance reporting is limited (let alone research covering economics knowledge for general journalists). Colm Murphy (2013, 21) noted that instruction in areas such as media law is included and a comprehensive subject in most journalism courses and media organisations but "generally, training in business and financial journalism, is not." This is despite a marked increase in business and finance stories in the media over the last three decades. Jennifer Kitchener (2005, 42) noted "despite its rapid expansion since the 1980s, business reporting remains an under-researched site of journalism studies."

Arguably, no other research to date has focused on financial journalism about or affecting Australia's major rural and regional industries. With commodity exports, environmental issues and weather phenomena regularly becoming the 'lead' news stories in print, broadcast and online media, this exegesis and the accompanying creative work focused on exploring what kind of knowledge that journalists need of the basics of economics relevant to the primary industries (broadly agriculture and mining) and a strategy for providing that knowledge. Journalism theories concerning how journalism can benefit society by informing the public underpin efforts to create the guidebook. This requires journalists to build their professional sophistication in terms of how they report on major issues that affect economic activity and communities in rural and regional Australia.

The primary research for this thesis involved interviews, my own formal study of economics, and practice-based observations.

The interview research is in the form of email questions to practicing news editors of mainstream Australian broadcast companies as well as economic experts specializing in Australia's commodity resources. The interview research aimed to discover how an understanding of the fundamentals of economics would assist journalists reporting on or in rural and regional Australia.

Questions to news editors developed my understanding of what kinds of knowledge and understandings that reporters need if they are to better cover events and issues of economic importance to rural and regional Australia. The interviews focused on what editors thought were news priorities, what level of economics knowledge was required of reporters at various levels of their careers, and indeed, whether editors even regarded a more formal development of this knowledge as necessary or useful.

The questions to economics experts reinforced and extended the interviews with editors and enabled me to develop the formal knowledge that I gained through studying economics into practical examples for my Guidebook. Questions focused on the role of commodities in rural and regional Australia and the importance of commodities to Australia's economy. Experts were asked to list key reports or information reporters should be familiar with and keep up to date on. They were also asked if, and how, the primary industries could be better reported by journalists.

The University economics coursework consisted of my undertaking and fulfilling the requirements of a QUT unit in Economics. I also sat in on lectures and read texts for a QUT postgraduate unit Managerial Finance and read other economics texts in consultation with QUT Economics and Finance lecturer Dr Louisa Coglean regarding my research objectives.

The practice-based research consisted of observations from my professional work as a journalist, in particular as a reporter and presenter for rural and regional current affairs program *Landline* at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) TV, as a presenter for ABC TV Queensland flagship 7pm news bulletins and other reporting and presenting work for ABC TV. My early career work covering Asian and global finance at CNN International Hong Kong also inform my observations.

Findings of the research concluded that both the background knowledge of economics and a regular updating of knowledge of key economic events and reports enable journalists to report with more confidence and authority as well as to draw links between events or cause and effect. The research found practical ways reporters can build such knowledge to satisfy the suggestions of the experts interviewed, without interfering with the day-to-day expectations of a busy newsroom.

The Guidebook is designed to help journalists to use the background knowledge to put into practice selected principles that have been taken from public journalism

theory. Public journalism practice involves journalists finding key links (sometimes obscure or unexpected ones), identifying stakeholders in an issue and listening to communities to identify the deep causes of issues rather than simply surface characteristics. From this, journalists produce reports that raise awareness and assist in the wider social or welfare implications that can arise from the economic issues stemming from rural and regional Australia.

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List of Abbreviations

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ABARES	Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences
BOM	Bureau of Meteorology
CNN	Cable News Network
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
EMTR	Effective Marginal Tax Rate
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NFF	National Farmers Federation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PMSEIC	Prime Minister’s Science, Engineering and Innovation Council
RBA	Reserve Bank of Australia

Terminology

Audience:	The public consumers of media
Talent:	On-air interviewees

Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature: Anne Louise Kunge

Date: 24/06/2013

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Dedicated to my Grandmother Eileen Ellis 1915-2013

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Understanding economics is key to understanding so many other important issues – poverty, at the local, national and global level; health care; education; conservation of the environment. Less obviously, but no less true, it also helps us understand much about the nature of relationships between countries – between governments, but also between companies and individuals. (Krueger 2003, 31)

The primary sectors of Australia's economy are very important to Australia's economy. As Frijters, Dulleck and Torgler (2010, 103) note, the primary industries - namely agriculture, forestry, fishing, minerals and energy - may not necessarily contribute the largest amount to gross domestic product (GDP) or total employment, but they "generate a considerable proportion of the economy's export income".

An understanding of the fundamentals of economics and the relationships between governments, companies and individuals - as noted above by former International Monetary Fund President Anne Krueger - is increasingly strategic for rural and regional journalists. Reporters work in an often fast paced, ever-changing world as governments draw up and implement new policies – from mining permits, trade agreements, transportation and infrastructure to the environment. Such knowledge is also relevant outside the realm of human politics, as 'mother nature' hands out drought, floods or plagues that can wipe out crops, flood mines and halt transport or production of commodities.

Whether the cause is man-made or 'mother nature', an accident or disaster has many and often far reaching financial and economic implications. These implications may be at a local, national or international level, or a combination of all. Some cause and effect from events such as floods or policy shifts may be immediately

obvious. Other ramifications may, on the surface, be less obvious, but have significant financial and welfare implications on individuals and communities.

My thesis consists of an exegesis and an accompanying creative work. This exegesis brings together information from primary interviews, existing academic literature and practice-based journals and observations. It explains the rationale and methodology for the thesis's main creative work, which is a guidebook for reporters. The guidebook is designed for both journalism students and as a professional development book for practicing journalists. It draws together years of experience and expertise from rural and industry economists, academics and journalists into an easy to access summary of the fundamentals of economics relating to Australia's agricultural and mining commodities. It explains financial terms and 'jargon' and includes online resources for future reference. These online links can be used for building and maintaining general knowledge as well as for quick access when researching ahead of an interview or report.

This introductory Chapter outlines the exegesis's objectives and significance. These objectives are further developed in Chapter 2.

1.2 Objectives and significance

The primary objective of this Master of Arts research is to identify what practical knowledge that journalists need of the relevant fundamentals of economics when covering rural or regional Australia and to create a guidebook that helps fill that knowledge gap. I have purposely studied and addressed all journalists in my guidebook, not just rural 'specialists'. The reason is because many city-based journalists cover rural and regional issues that are reported in high profile mainstream news. For example during the widespread flooding in Queensland in the summer of 2010-2011, media organizations sent city-based journalists to rural and regional areas of Queensland. In that instance, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) flew crews of journalists, presenters and producers up from Sydney in the ABC helicopter to support the Queensland-based journalists. Some

covered the Brisbane floods. Others were sent to regional areas and towns such as Warwick in Queensland's Southern region to document the floods in regional and more remote areas. These reporters all provided information for state and national mainstream television news bulletins.

My research involved practice-based observations from my employment as a rural reporter for ABC television and the creation of a guidebook for journalists (discussed further below), but it is primarily an academic project. The outcome of this research is divided into two publications:

1. An academic document in the form of an exegesis of 34,994 words. The exegesis documents the process of gathering primary research and a summary of the relevant economic and journalism theories. These theories and new information from the primary research and practice-based research support and inform the theoretical framework and thus explain the need for providing relevant knowledge of the fundamentals of economics to general journalists.
2. A practical guidebook for journalists of 20,767 words. Once the examination process is complete, this guidebook will be uploaded in PDF format on the internet in order to be accessible to journalists across the nation. The guidebook facilitates journalists to understand basic economic terms and principles, and think strategically about the background and wider context of the events they are covering in rural and regional Australia. Many examples are given in the guidebook such as the downstream impacts on business and communities from a government policy change. An example includes the summer flooding of 2010/2011 in Queensland, where the then Commercial Manager of Elders, Miriam Silva noted there needed to be more consideration in the media of the flow-on effects and impacts that can be linked back to one event such as a flood. There are up/downstream impacts on the farm support sector, for example livestock truck drivers (downstream) and livestock exporters (upstream) that have big impacts (Silva, 2011 interview).

The information in my guidebook is designed to assist journalists who cover matters of economic significance for rural and regional Australia to develop confidence, to think strategically about the wider context of the events they are covering and to represent situations with authenticity. The guidebook is formulated to help journalists to move from basic reporting techniques to more sophisticated practices of journalism that can help improve and support communities. This in turn will help to raise a more considered profile of rural and regional Australia in the media, rather than stereotypical images such as the 'down trodden' farmer. This is discussed further in Chapter 4 on page 73.

According to Freebairn (2003, 390) most definitions of rural and regional Australia refer to areas as those "outside the main capital cities and other large coastal cities such as Newcastle, Wollongong, Geelong and the Gold Coast." As Beer and Clower (2008, 369) note, "regional cities perform a strong regional role via the provision of a diverse range of services to their hinterland, elsewhere they undertake more specialized functions in mining, agriculture or tourism."

The Merriam Webster dictionary defines the term 'rural' broadly as "of or relating to the country and the people who live there instead of the city." The Australian government has developed classification systems to address issues such as the supply of health or education services in rural and remote areas. The classifications broadly relate to geographical distance to nearest services and or population numbers. For example the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2004, 4) noted the Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Areas (RRMA) classification developed in 1994 by the Department of Primary Industries divides Australia into three broad areas: Metropolitan, rural and remote zones. Within those zones there are seven categories. The two metropolitan categories include capital cities and/or urban centre populations greater than 100,000. Following this there are three rural zone categories:

Large rural centres (urban centre population 25,000 – 99,999; Small rural centres (urban centre population 10,000-24,999; and Other rural areas (urban centre population less than 10,000. Remote zones include remote centres (urban centre population greater

than 4,999) and other remotes areas (urban centre population less than 5,000). (DPIE and DSH, 1994)

The Australian government replaced the RRMA classification with the Australian Standard Geographical Classification – Remoteness Areas (ASGC-RA) in 2009. McGrail and Humphreys (2009, 1) note this “decision highlights the ongoing significance of geographical classifications for rural health policy, particularly in relation to improving the rural health workforce supply.”

Freebairn (2003, 390) noted, “Contentious areas for inclusion in rural and regional areas are large country cities, such as Ballarat and Toowoomba, and coastal resort towns, such as Bateman’s Bay and Lorne.” Despite this, it must be recognised that country cities such as Toowoomba provide important links to the smaller nearby towns and areas involved in agriculture and, in the last decade, mining. Definitions of which areas are regional or rural will always be contentious because areas can grow and change – in population and role. For the purposes of this research, a broader definition of areas outside the capitals and larger cities is sufficient and there is no need to establish strict distinctions or boundaries, as the focus of the research is on Australia’s primary industries. However, the geographical definitions have been mentioned above as a journalist may refer to classification systems when covering issues such as rural health or education services.

The guidebook content is designed with a view to encouraging journalists to take a more sophisticated approach to journalism, with the project being informed by selected elements of the theoretical framework of public journalism. While the accompanying guidebook does not explain the term ‘public journalism’ to journalists, the theories of public journalism are embedded in certain elements of the book. For example, scattered throughout the guidebook are TOP TIPS and recommended online readings given for consideration. Public journalism promotes news that can help people to develop a deeper understanding of issues with a view to helping them deliberate and reach decisions on how to act about problems and issues. According to Romano (2010, 3) the news media are not merely mirrors of society or passive, impartial conveyors of information about social and political

affairs. “The News media’s influence on public agenda setting and communities’ understanding of issues and events makes them a major social power in their own right” (Romano, 2010, 3).

Proponents of public journalism therefore focus on how the media’s power can be used to help improve issues and outcomes for societies. While public journalism used to the full extent can involve time-consuming practices such as journalists facilitating and organizing community forums, the ideals of public journalism can be used in general reporting. For example, the media can consider its agenda-setting power and ask whether different angles in issues have been fully considered. Hence, knowledge in the fundamentals of economics can give journalists the ability to consider the wider cause and effect that economic issues may have on communities.

1.2.1 Significance

Kitchener (2005, 42) noted “despite its rapid expansion since the 1980s, business reporting remains an under-researched site of journalism studies.” Similarly, Ludwig (2002) also argues the academic literature on training of business journalists is “somewhat scant”.

The complexity of business, finance and economics requires a level of sophistication not typically taught in journalism school. This situation raises several questions: Are readers being adequately served by journalists? Have journalists received the proper training, whether in college, in professional seminars or on the job? There is a broad argument within journalism that business and economics reporting is lacking. (Ludwig 2002, 129)

Arguably, no research has focused on financial, business (incorporating economics) journalism about or affecting Australia’s major rural and regional industries. With commodity exports, environmental issues and weather phenomena regularly

leading news stories, this exegesis and the accompanying creative work focus on identifying what background knowledge of economics relevant to the primary industries (broadly agriculture and mining) that journalists need, and creating a guidebook that provides such information and insights. However the aim of the research for the exegesis and creative work is to help journalists to develop a more sophisticated approach in their journalism, in a way that theory indicates would generate stories that provide information that is of greater benefit to society. The guidebook serves as a professional development tool that can be used on the job as journalists build their experience and portfolio of work.

Business journalism is a broad term used to cover reporting about businesses and the economy. According to Roush (2012, 9) business journalism “commonly includes other beats such as labor, workplace, technology, personal finance, investment, and consumer reporting, in addition to investigative reporting focusing on these topics.” However Greenfield and Williams (2002, 1) further define the concept of ‘finance journalism’ focusing on financial institutions and shareholders, noting that “finance journalism sits as a specific focus within economic reporting and alongside business reporting.” As this exegesis and accompanying guidebook is aimed at general journalists the broader term ‘economic reporting’ or ‘economic issues’ is used. The term ‘economy’ is used to refer to the working of economic systems as shorthand throughout the thesis for the sake of brevity. This can include the economic theories and tools available for government and business leaders. There is a focus in the guidebook on macroeconomics and microeconomics and how journalists can apply this knowledge to stories covering primary industries issues, this includes additional analysis of business and finance issues that are particularly significant to the overall economy.

Once this thesis has been examined and final corrections are made, I aim to submit the guidebook to the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA), the ABC, or the Journalism Education Association of Australia (JEAA) to be uploaded on their

websites as a freely available resource for publication. If this is not possible I plan to create a webpage in order to make the guidebook available online. It will be the first online guidebook combining the research topic and practical tools specifically relating to rural and regional journalism training.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction of the Theoretical Framework

Aim of the research

The ultimate aim of this exegesis and accompanying creative work is to promote a wider understanding of the economic implications of rural and regional issues for journalists in the Australian media. This includes all journalists, whether rural ‘specialists’ or general journalists that are assigned a story with a connection to rural or regional Australia. Improving journalists’ understanding of the background, implications and nuances of issues affecting primary industries in rural and regional Australia creates the potential for higher quality reporting. This can contribute to better economic outcomes for audiences (the public) who use the news to inform their decision making about business, finance and economic choices.

My exegesis and creative work focus on the fundamentals of economics relating to Australia’s commodity production. This focus was chosen due to the economic significance of agriculture and mining in Australia’s exports. Together, agriculture and mining comprise the “largest proportion of Australia’s export earnings, at 68 per cent in 2009” (Lewis, Garnett, Treadgold and Hawtry 2010, 104).

This in no way dispels the need for a ‘liberal arts offering’ in journalism university education, rather, primary research for this exegesis supports the need for a wide general knowledge for journalists (see Chapter 4). While a background knowledge of economics for journalists will not necessarily create ‘experts with the answers’, journalists should however, gain deeper insights, to know more what the appropriate questions are to ask. To fulfill the ultimate aim of the exegesis and creative work (referred to hereon as the research aim), the research also combined a focus on the fundamentals of economics with theories of public journalism that

recognize the potential of journalism to contribute to the public's ability to identify issues of public importance and to deliberate and make decisions about them.

From any single news event, there will be links to other issues or networks.

Journalists must not only report on the event at hand, but consider ramifications and other angles surrounding the issue. These links may be within the same region, or they may be half way across the world. The links may be the effects of the news event and the ramifications on a variety of people and industries, which then leads to further effects and ramifications. Networks are formed linking people and issues throughout the world, Barabasi (2003, 6) noted, "each of us is part of a large cluster, the worldwide social net, from which no one is left out (Barabasi, 2003, p 6)."

Barabasi's book *Linked* explains, as the subtitle of the book suggests, "how everything is connected to everything else and what it means for Business, Science and Everyday life". "Networks are everywhere. All you need is an eye for them" (Barabasi 2003, 7).

The links to economics and what that means for people's welfare are in all news stories as quoted by Krueger in Chapter 1.1 of this exegesis. In order to achieve the research aim, the theoretical framework of the exegesis draws on scholarly works in a number of theoretical areas:

1. Constraints on journalists
2. Journalistic construction
3. Public journalism
4. Transdisciplinary theories.

2.2 Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.2.1. *Constraints on journalists*

In order to improve the quality of reporting of issues and events affecting the economic fundamentals of rural and regional Australia, the theoretical framework addresses the institutional norms that journalism practice operates within. In covering a news item a journalist must choose what information to include in the story and what information they will exclude in the news story. The selection of information by the journalist affects how the public view or perceive an issue. This is a concept known as 'framing'. As Ben-Porath (2009, 619) states, "Framing is a concept that refers to the selection of words, topics, and ideas in communication and the effects of these selections on public opinion." Framing enables a journalist to efficiently report about an issue in a manner that builds on public knowledge:

The underlying implication of the frame concept is that a story has more than one way of being told and that editorial decisions affect the way reality is transferred from its actual occurrence to its symbolic representation in the news. Reducing news occurrences into narrow frames allows journalists to deliver the news efficiently to their audience. (Ben-Porath 2009, 619)

When attempting to frame a story appropriately and efficiently, journalists themselves are affected by other considerations in their workforce such as demands on time and resources. "There is much evidence that the media operate under conditions of considerable pressure and constraint" (McQuail 1999, 81). As Bowman (2005) noted, critiques of journalism often focus on how commercial pressures often disrupt or hinder journalism inquiry processes:

The resultant temporal and spatial constraints within which journalists work, force them to render trite accounts emanating from a small group of elite sources situated at the centre of the "news net". Such an

approach has left their methods of inquiry decidedly underdeveloped and such a situation leaves them beholden to the views of the powerful sources that they interview. (Bowman, 2005 p 29)

Schlesinger (1987, 83-84) noted an acute awareness of the time and working within strict time periods an underlying structure in the daily routine of newsrooms. “In general, journalists are among those occupational groups in industrialized societies for whom precision in timing, and consequently an exacting time-consciousness, is necessary” (Schlesinger 1987, 84).

Constraints of working within production deadlines effect journalists’ process of finding suitable sources to quote in an effort to give credibility or authority to the story. Working with time constraints journalists aim to be efficient and will seek sources that are easy to access and provide fast responses. In this case public relations departments of official government agencies or businesses provide easy access to direct quotes from those in authority, leading to dominance in news coverage by such sources. In practice, more often than not, the responses are prepared by the public relations agents and sources of further information and contact numbers will be offered by the same public relations agents. This provides little incentive for journalists to search for more time-consuming alternative sources. As Bowman states:

Such an understanding of the primacy of the deadline indicates that journalists often will tend to concentrate on official accounts in preparing the news, rather than search for alternative accounts that might have significantly altered understandings of the story. (Bowman 2005, 31)

Decades ago, Tuchman (1978, 80) noted how reporters were required to be capable of covering any topic, issue or event within strict deadlines. Tuchman (1978, 81) noted this required journalists to be able to get the information they need for a report as quickly and efficiently as possible. This pressure however, limits the range of sources used by journalists and therefore affects the information uncovered and communicated to society.

Bureau reporters seek out centralized sources, politicians, and bureaucrats... I never observed these reporters contacting the leaders of social movements. Nor did they search out grass-roots leaders, preferring instead the leaders of local political clubs. They distinguished among political clubs by pointing to the actual power each wields. They contacted the powerful, the politician with the resources to accomplish his or her ambitions, not the merely dissident or dissatisfied. That people with power serve as sources bears consequences for the information newswriters uncover... (Tuchman, 1978, 81)

With new technology and budget constraints on media organisations, journalists spend less time out in the community gathering sources face to face. According to Keeble (2012, 7) reporting is an increasingly desk-bound job:

One of the consequences of new technology and the staffing cuts has been the increased amount of newsroom-based work by reporters. Many local reporters say as much as 90 per cent of their work is done by phone; national reporters can spend 70 per cent of their time and more in the office. Journalism is an increasingly desk-bound job. When a story is completed journalists no longer carry the copy to a file on the news editor's desk. It is routed through the computer system. They often don't get up and talk to each other. Instead, they send (both serious and un-serious) messages through the computer. (Keeble 2012, 7)

In these attempts to work efficiently, journalists are therefore using a smaller range of sources from public institutions rather than a cross section of the public. This encourages journalists to use sources from such institutions on a regular basis, which affects the news agenda:

Innumerable sociological studies have shown that, to a large degree, news agendas revolved around the agendas set by public servants, politicians, and business leaders, rather than those of the ordinary person on the street. This is because most news organisations base their journalists at the centres of political and economic power, where they can guarantee that authoritative sources will provide regular flows of information. If the information comes from sources seen as credible experts in their given field, then their statements require little labour-

intensive fact-checking before they are crafted into news stories.
(Romano 2001, 169)

Journalists draw upon institutional structures as a means of efficiently locating sources and gathering information. Tuchman (1978, 210) stated, “by identifying centralized sources of information as legitimated social institutions, news organizations and newswriters wed themselves to specific beats and bureaus.” This then reinforces the institutions as a regular site for journalists to automatically turn to for future legitimate information gathering rather than consider other possibilities. The effect, as Tuchman (1978, 210) noted is that “those sites of news gathering are objectified as the legitimate and legitimating sources of both information and governance.” While drawing on institutional sources is efficient for journalists, Romano (2001, 169) noted “this enables the news organisation to satisfy their unremitting need to find constant supplies of fresh news in a cost-effective and efficient manner, it also means that news agendas more commonly reflect the interests of the government and economic élite than the ‘average Joe’ in the audience.” However if journalists can use the background knowledge of economics given in the guidebook to build up and consider alternative sources. This does not necessarily need to be time-consuming as the background knowledge would help journalists consider what other sources to seek out. These sources can then be added to and a list of contacts can be built over time.

The constraints on journalists also make it easier for journalists to report on ‘events’ as they occur, rather than follow through on stories or issues. Linksy finds that journalists are obsessed with covering formal “events” rather than “truth” (Linksy 1988, 214).

A big fire is news; the continuing debate about the causes of fires is not. The event orientation of news is a particular problem, for it steers coverage away from ideas and context and does nothing to encourage the drawing of connections between stories. For example, the significance of a fire depends on whether it is one of a series or an

isolated instance; whether it results from arson or some other cause; whether the loss is insured or not; and whether it fits within or outside of some current or needed dialogue about public purposes. Though fires do not occur out of context, they are reported that way. (Linksy 1988, 214)

These critiques suggest that time constraints (brought about by the need for journalists to rush to meet organizations' news deadlines) and cost constraints to work within organizational staffing levels and budgets greatly affect the journalistic process.

Iyengar (1991, 2-3) speaks of "episodic" versus "thematic" frames. Episodic coverage explores an event, whereas thematic framing places issues and events in a broader structural and social context and is perceived to encourage an audience understanding of issues at a societal level both in terms of cause and responsibility for solution. "The predominance of episodic framing in television news affects not only the (television) networks' selection of news items, but also the public's attribution of responsibility for political issues (Iyengar 1991, 2)."

The episodic frame is an efficient fit for the majority of daily news reports. As Keeble (2012, 135) notes, while journalists stress the "newness of the news," sociologists often highlight its "endless repetitiveness".

Coverage of transport accidents and fires falls within a dominant genre which presents news as a series of disconnected "bad" events and individuals as victims of forces beyond their control. Ideological, economic, cultural, religious factors are more difficult to identify and report though their historical impact is considerable. An accident, in contrast, can be reported as an isolated event with a beginning and an end. Coverage can slot easily within the dominant routines of journalistic research. (Keeble 2012, 135)

2.2.2 Journalistic Construction

This exegesis now explains methods that journalists can use to help address the daily organizational and commercial constraints that they must work within. Primary research for this exegesis found that stories may not be able to contain all facets of information at once that lead to public debate, but 'follow up' stories can play a role. The layers of the story must be considered appropriately and the timing of the follow up report can be important. These findings are supported by the work of Bowman and McIlwaine who state:

Because of the temporal and spatial constraints that are key to the commercial viability of modern news production, it is not always possible for a journalist to tell the whole story in any one report. Journalists can tell the story up to and including the deadline using the information they have been able to discover. They most usually develop the fuller story over time, if given the opportunity (Bowman and McIlwaine 2001, 104).

Bowman's approach to story development

Bowman outlines three levels of construction typically used by journalists and editors in reporting. Bowman (2005, 36) notes within these levels of construction, journalists give "the best explanation of events available at the time."

Bowman's "three levels of construction are the 'reactive stage' at Level 1, which gives way to the 'analytic stage' at Level 2, and a broader and deeper 'reflective stage' at Level 3 (Bowman, 2005, 36- 37)." Bowman states that journalists must use all three levels of construction in their reporting and writing, but Bowman does not expect that all levels be used in each report, rather the three levels can be presented in reports over time. First is the reporting of the event where the journalist reports on the facts of what has occurred and the immediate effects; this is Level 1, the "reactive stage". Bowman states as the "reactive stage" lessens, journalists need more understanding about what happened – this is the level 2

inquiry and analytic stage. Level three then considers the deeper societal issues, patterns or trends and begin to uncover some reasons or explanations that lead to the news event. “This stage looks at the more deep-seated societal trends and approaches that might have set the stage for the occurrence of the particular event” (Bowman, 2005, 37).

This exegesis argues that for the Level 3 reflective stage to truly develop, journalists must use a higher order of thinking beyond the ‘objective’ stage at Level 1. Journalists require a general knowledge of the event and main subject/discipline it relates to in order to know what questions to ask in Level 1 and 2. Journalists should then use this background knowledge to think of and find layers and links from different but related angles that make up a bigger story. This can help facilitate positive change in society by raising the awareness and empowering people to act.

In keeping with Bowman’s levels, as each new link is found, journalists should continue to cycle through the levels. This draws on the work of Denzin and Lincoln’s (2000) concept of triangulation. “Triangulation is the display of multiple, refracted realities simultaneously” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, 6). Sharon Iorio states that triangulation occurs in several forms:

It may refer, for example, to method – that is combining document analysis, with unstructured interview with unobtrusive observation, and combining this mixture in order to improve perspective. (Iorio, 2004, p 49)

The following practice-based example of reporting during what is known as the Black Saturday Victoria Bushfires in 2009, is used to illustrate this exegesis’s theoretical framework of Bowman’s levels of construction and Denzin and Lincoln’s concept of triangulation to pursue a better understanding and public debate. I kept copies of the news transcripts (hard copy and soft copies) from my weekend news shifts. I kept these copies as I knew I would need them for reference as my role at *Landline* was about to resume for the year. I also made notes which included

sources of extra information (including scientific), this formed a type of work diary. I expected this story would be one I would monitor and do follow-up reporting on throughout the following weeks and months. I have reflected on the work notes and transcripts and written this in italics in the following section:

Practice-based example: “Black Saturday bushfires, Victoria, February 7, 2009” Observations and reflections of 3 journalism stages

I arrived early Saturday afternoon on February 7, 2009 for my news reading shift of the main news bulletin at ABC TV Queensland. As part of this shift I also wrote news updates, desk-top edited the video, and later presented the updates that are broadcast in the hours leading up to the reading of the main 7pm news bulletin. As soon as I arrived, I knew it was going to be a case of following a ‘live event’ that was continuing to unfold. A series of fires were burning across Victoria and there were initial reports of lives lost, but the exact toll was not yet known. In the end, 173 people died and more than 400 were injured that day.

Level 1 reporting focused on the event – the what, where, who and why. Reports throughout the day gave information about the extreme weather conditions of high temperatures and strong northwesterly winds. During the afternoon of the news shift was when the majority of the fire activity occurred. Reporting focused on Level 1, updating news from emergency services and the rising death toll.

By the following weekend I was reporting and interviewing for Landline. The interview “Between Hell and High Water” (See Appendix 1) is an example of level 1 and more level 2 reporting. It began with my conducting an interview where I crossed to Landline reporters at the locations of the events. The focus for the Landline programme is the ramifications on rural communities and businesses from the bushfire. Level 1 question and answers discussed before the interview recording focused on where the fires were and the losses to agriculture. It moved to Level 2 asking questions about help and assistance including issues surrounding medium

term and longer term assessments. The interview then moves to the then (2009) Federal Agriculture Minister, Tony Burke. There was less time for 'editorial' discussion with the minister, and it was obvious to me that he was visibly shaken by what he had seen in Victoria. By this stage questions for him were level 2 – the role about government assistance with a view to answering deeper questions. Due to the nature of the tragic events, the interview focused on what could be done to help and as emotions were raw, I decided not to embark on a 'blame game', but draw from the minister information about relocation efforts and practical help from government authorities, the community and how city-dwellers could help the rural community (such as buying 'blemished fruit').

Shortly after this interview, there was much level 2 inquiry in the mainstream media, dissecting the events of the day and the role the authorities had. There were many questions about leadership and what could have been done by those in authority/government to take preventative measures.

As I watched the mainstream interviews and information come out over the following weeks and months, I also did my own research and spoke to scientists about the bushfire events. From then I pursued a more Level 3 interview "Bushfire symposium" which was broadcast on Landline on 28/09/2009 (see Appendix 2). Landline was attending the Bushfire symposium event at the Gold Coast. I didn't want to use a simple 'Level 1' report about the event of a conference. Rather I used my own research to convince my editor to allow me to conduct an interview looking at deep-seated societal trends and approaches and new information that could help prevent the occurrence of such an event, at least to such a tragic level (bushfires are part of the Australian environment, so the question is not necessarily how to stop them, but how to manage bushfires and people's behavior).

While the mainstream media was asking questions about government accountability, from my own discussions with scientists, I discovered there was a need for a more 'social-science' understanding. That is, how do people behave and

respond to information regarding an emergency, and how should government departments best prepare and manage for bushfires in particular? While the 'blame game' is an important role of questioning from mainstream media by this stage, as I was working on a rural programme I took the view of finding some practical help from science to better manage society (in this case the rural community and towns in the vicinity of the bushfire prone area). The interview discussed the need for warning systems and for the public to consider a much stronger approach of mass evacuations over the traditional 'stay and defend' approach.

The "Bushfire symposium" interview is by no means the end of discussions, but rather the beginning for public debate. The cycle of reporting should continue to roll through follow up interviews by reporters with relevant experts, leaders or people from the community as more information is gathered about the topic. Follow up reports could then work through all the levels of reporting to inquire as to whether suitable programmes are being drawn up and implemented to change societal behavior for future events. Public forums could be organized for the same interviewees to discuss the issues in a relevant public space. The 'behavioral science' approaches described in my interview by scientists has significance and possible future positive outcomes for communities not only in the State of Victoria, but also nationally and internationally. On reflection I can see that public journalism techniques could be further used by having the strategies suggested by scientists discussed and explained on each community's local radio station.

2.2.3. Public journalism

This thesis is underpinned by a premise that a thorough general knowledge of a news event and related subject matter, combined with the kinds of higher goals promoted by public journalism, will better equip reporters to serve society. Public journalism expands the traditional role of journalism and the way that journalists can serve society. Public journalism supplements journalism practices with new strategies to increase the capacity of journalists to represent the concerns of

ordinary citizens and to provide the type of information that citizens need to be able to understand and make decisions about topics of importance. Kingston described the developers of the theory and practice of public journalism as:

Apostles of a cause... for them the challenge was not merely to tell what had happened but to open the way to what could happen – and the role that the public, their readers, might play if they assumed their responsibility as citizens of our democracy. (Kingston, 2009, 5)

Public journalism can place journalists as facilitators for positive change where they not only report on 'problems', but help the community come together to find their own solutions or at least a positive compromise. Meyer and Thorson (1998, 17) argue the values observed from public journalism advocates and practitioners, significantly expands traditional journalism. According to Meyer and Thorson's observations, public journalism seeks to:

1. Listen systematically to the stories and ideas of citizens even while protecting its freedom to choose what to cover;
2. Examine alternative ways to frame stories on important community issues;
3. Choose frames that stand the best chance to stimulate citizen deliberation and build public understanding of issues;
4. Take the initiative to report on major public problems in a way that advances public knowledge of possible solutions and the values served by alternative courses of action;
5. Pay continuing and systematic attention to how well and how credibly it is communicating with the public. (Lambeth, Meyer and Thorson 1998, 17)

Public journalism was developed in the United States during the 1990s in response to a growing public dissatisfaction with output from the media. In particular politics was being covered as a continuous scandalous debate between the major political

players of the time with little reporting on the deeper issues of the times. Davis Merritt of the *Wichita Eagle* newspaper and his staff, are credited with pioneering the development and use of public journalism methods within a newsroom (Lambeth, Meyer and Thorson 1998, 17). No longer was it merely enough to report objectively, giving both sides of the argument, they wanted to address criticism of endless 'horse race' style of coverage of elections and political processes and be more accountable to citizens by analyzing and finding other links or issues of importance to democracy (Lambeth, Meyer and Thorson 1998, 18).

Public journalism proponents argued that mere information was not enough for citizens of a complex democracy; journalists must consider what other angles, links and related issues or follow-on effects and opportunities there may be. Public journalism also tries more explicitly to activate and elevate public deliberation on community issues (Lambeth, Meyer and Thorson 1998, 19). The greater demands public journalists put on themselves can be seen in the techniques their more ambitious projects deploy:

They include, but are not limited to, citizen polling to identify major issues on the public's mind; resource panels of both citizens and specialists to help journalists understand the basics of an issue before they immerse themselves in reporting; focus groups with citizens to deepen and give reporters firsthand knowledge of key facets of an issue; open forums to allow the public to begin to engage and work through public issues; and, finally, studies to discover how well media performed. (Lambeth, Meyer and Thorson 1998, 18)

Other journalism scholars – not just public journalism proponents – believe that there are concerns about journalism's intellectual content and ability to contribute to public debate. For example Bowman (2005, 26) noted with the need to focus on the technical aspects such as teaching journalism students how to use media technology, some academics may think this gives the appearance that there is less need to emphasize the theoretical components of journalism. "...The main concern of most journalism academics is not with industry perceptions of their courses but

with the primarily academic belief that journalism practices lack the necessary intellectual content and focus to contribute to public debate.”

Despite what appear to be good intentions, public journalism had its critics. The philosophy and associated journalism techniques have attracted stringent criticism, most particularly from US journalists and theorists (Romano 2001, 180). A perceived weakness of public journalism is that journalists can no longer report objectively if they get too involved with a community and journalists begin to ‘champion’ a cause. Such critiques have commonly been based on conservative liberal philosophies that the concept of loyalty to the community can conflict with the duty of journalists to serve the truth (Barney 1997, 82-6). Public journalism has been criticized where journalists have appeared to be too upbeat in their reporting of an issue, focusing on the positive aspects while ignoring negative aspects in an effort to create the impression of consensus or to rally citizens to action over a cause (Hoyt 1995, 27; Lichtenberg 1999, 343).

However, rather than expecting public journalists to abandon the concept of objectivity, Romano (2001, 232) noted instead that such deliberative journalism requires a reflection on how high standards of objectivity might be balanced with fairness and ethical considerations:

Mainstream journalism often provides technically accurate but knee-jerk reports about the specific facts about any dramatic event or issue that rises to the reporters’ attention. Philosophies like public... journalism encourage greater consideration of the subtle nuance of the visible facts, and how the manifest and obscure details fit into a bigger picture of ongoing trends and issues. (Romano 2001, 232-233)

Knowledge from my guidebook is aimed at helping journalists to recognize and further address subtle nuances and the bigger picture.

Rural reporters’ links to the community should be valued rather than viewed with suspicion as being inherently subjective. A thorough knowledge about the issues of a local community being reported on and the concerns of its readers is an essential part of the job (Batten 2010, 18). Such links to the community can help avoid situations where journalists have little ownership of the issues or ‘event’ based stories they are reporting on as Batten (2010) noted:

Newsrooms too often are over-stocked with journalistic transients who care little about the town of the moment. Their eyes are on the next (and bigger) town, the next rung up the ladder. They know little about their community's past and make no effort to learn. Worse, nobody insists that they do. And there is always the temptation to make their byline files a little more glittering at the expense of people and institutions they will never see again.

This exegesis and accompanying guidebook aims to provide a background knowledge in economics so that reporters can value a more strategic and thoughtful approach to rural and regional issues. Whether journalists are writing from a metropolitan office or a rural base, reporters can consider issues from a wider and strategic perspective.

It should be noted that this exegesis is not a guide on practising public journalism, but rather, the exegesis adopts some of the higher aims of public journalism. As Rosenberry and St. John (2010, 2) note, early proponents of public journalism “drew on the ideas of educator and press critic John Dewey, who in the 1920s said newspapers needed to move beyond purely reporting events to become vehicles for public education, debate and structured discussion of public issues.” The guidebook accompanying this exegesis builds on traditional journalism in its consideration of how to report issues rather than just covering news ‘events’.

The guidebook does not involve activities or approaches that might compromise journalists' independence. Rather, the guidebook builds journalists' knowledge about where to look further for consideration and information into issues to better inform the public. This knowledge can be related to some of the philosophies of public journalism. As Jay Rosen (1999, 298) noted:

When a discussion that is needed does not materialize; when the missing voices outnumber the noisy ones in an important debate; when there are possibilities to be glimpsed but not many of us see them; when common opinion, thinly grounded, needs to mature into public judgment, on which stronger decisions can be made; when our public institutions fail to meet their task – when conditions like this appear, journalists who stand with citizens will not stand by in the belief that there is nothing to be done.

It is well documented that local news media in non-metropolitan areas reflect, encourage and support the community that the media outlet reports on. For example, Bowd (2003, 117) found that coverage in Australian country non-daily newspapers emphasised “local news and the promotion of local concerns, individuals and achievements”. This is not necessarily problematic, if one considers the arguments of McNair (2006), who argues the vital role that such “parochialism” plays in society:

If news is our window on the world, local news is our window on that part of the world we actually inhabit ... Parochial by definition, local journalism is part of the social cement which binds communities together and is widely and rightly viewed as an essential element in the construction of local identity. (McNair 2006, 37)

The challenge then is for journalists to find important themes from the ‘parochial’ community and present these themes to a wider audience. The aim of this research project is to provide a resource to help journalists to be aware of wider ramifications of issues and to not just dismiss rural or regional stories as parochial, or only important to that particular location. For example, during the interviews conducted for this thesis Schnitzerling (2011) noted Channel Ten’s state-wide nightly television news service will include “nostalgic” stories as about country life. But these ‘nostalgic’ themes could move to show other considerations of ‘country life’, that is journalists can use output from my research to think more strategically about issues. For example when governments change trade policies what are the ‘downstream’ effects on communities. Journalists can use questions to challenge government leaders to consider more aspects or ramifications of policy changes. The example was noted on page 17 of the guidebook where electrical contractors losing large contracts in northern Australia after the Australian Government banned live cattle exports to Indonesia. This gives just a glimpse into the other knock-on

effects that would abound in local businesses and communities in and linked to northern Australia at the time.

2.2.4 Transdisciplinary theory – combining journalism and economics

While this exegesis argues that economics should be part of journalism training, this should be done not only as an isolated subject, but rather to use higher goals of journalism theories from a transdisciplinary approach. Greg Hearn and Ruth Bridgstock (2010) call for greater synthesis of knowledge across disciplines in universities. They describe transdisciplinarity as:

The interaction, translation and the synthesis of knowledge between and among scientific/technical, creative/cultural and business/entrepreneurial disciplines and also between different sub-disciplines within each. (Hearn and Bridgstock 2010, 106)

Transdisciplinarity is a useful approach for journalists wishing to gain a wider understanding of the world they report on. Journalists can of course narrow this knowledge into greater detail of the disciplines most applicable to their areas of reporting. As Corner (1998, 55) noted, “economic news is highly relational, in that the significance of ‘what has happened’ is closely (and indeed often densely) related to other factors, some of which may be long term, and some of which may be undergoing simultaneous change with the event which provides the story’s main focus.” As journalists cover ‘events’ in news stories, they need an understanding of how events can be part of a cause and effect situation. An event may contain a cause and effect, which may in turn have affects or ramifications on a wide range of different networks and links. Journalists use transdisciplinary skills when they apply economic knowledge with journalistic practices to ‘triangulate’ links and angles which may include yet other domains and disciplines such as science as well as economics when covering, for example, the environment.

Transdisciplinarity is more than multi-disciplinary study (that is the separate study of another discipline or domain such as business at a similar time to the separate

study of another discipline or disciplines such as a major in business and journalism in Bachelor of Arts courses). Hearn and Bridgstock (2010, 106) note that it is common for problems to require solutions that draw upon knowledge from multiple areas. Transdisciplinarity brings together useful elements of different domains. The aim and goal of the research require the transdisciplinary approach, with theories of journalism and economics both used to develop the guidebook in ways that makes economics information relevant for journalists who report on regional and rural Australia.

Economic theories are based on a moral philosophy, that, as Frijters, Dulleck and Torgler (2010, 5) note, presupposes that a government's policies must consider the combined welfare of all people living in the society. Mirroring this, is the journalism practice which traditionally aims to inform the public, combined with public journalism that seeks to help be a catalyst for positive outcomes in communities. This can be achieved by journalists being aware of the three levels of construction and looking for opportunities of 'triangulation' (looking for other realities, links and or contexts) over time. But the journalist must use a wide knowledge of the story or event (or know where to turn to in order to build this knowledge) to discover how to best develop the story in an engaging and meaningful way.

This thesis particularly focuses on journalists being able to find the economic and financial 'layers' of an event regarding Australian commodity production. Economics is a theory that in practice permeates society. In an address to journalists, the former First Deputy Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, Anne Krueger noted that people are constantly making economic decisions:

Every time you use your credit card, take out a loan, decide whether to rent or buy a home, think about refinancing your mortgage, you are making an economic decision – and one which will affect your future financial health. Every time you cast your vote, whether it be in a Federal, State or local election, you are making an economics decision

– even if you don't always recognize it as such. Which candidate will raise your taxes, and what will you get in return for those taxes? As an individual the only control you can exert over decisions that will have a significant impact on your life – on your health and wealth – is your vote (Krueger, 2003, 30).

These are the very items that make up a large chunk of a daily television news bulletin or the front 'news' pages of a paper or online news site, yet as has been noted in this research project, there is little academic literature regarding economics, business or finance education for journalists (Kitchener 2005, 42). Reporting on business and finance is not an easy task and some risks can dissuade journalists to cover business stories. As Murphy (2013, 21) noted, people representing a business are the most likely to sue for defamation. Instruction in how to report business and financial concepts has not traditionally been included in comprehensive journalism training (whether at Universities or on the job) unlike other areas such as media law (Murphy, 2013, 21). Instruction in business and economics concepts for journalists should include how to read and interpret government and business reports. This could help to alleviate hesitation noted by Murphy (2013, 21) from general journalists towards “interpreting statistics and figures.”

Greenfield and Williams (2002) noted a decade ago that finance journalism has been the subject of limited analysis in Australia. “Analysis of business, economic and finance journalism in Australia is either incidental, confined to a particular period, published outside the mainstream of media or communication studies, or conducted within frameworks which, while having their own merits, limit analysis of the significance of finance journalism” (Greenfield and Williams 2002, 2). They also noted most of the Australian analysis of business, economic and financial reporting focused on the spectacular elements of the “1980s decade of financial deregulation and speculative boom” (Greenfield and Williams, 2002, 2).

Greenfield and Williams' subsequent scholarly collaborations in 2007 have documented the increase in business reporting in Australia since the 1970s (from the space and significance given in newspapers to business issues, to the emergence of populist television business presenters). Yet research that has been done focuses mainly on specialist business reporters (for example, Kitchener 2005) rather than how to teach general journalists the fundamentals of business, economics and finance and how to apply this knowledge as a reporter.

The aim of this thesis is to raise general journalists' knowledge of economics and apply this when covering rural and regional issues – first by determining what information and principles they need to know and then by creating a guidebook that provides the necessary insights. Although a background in the fundamentals of economics is rare in journalism, it is increasingly strategic in rural and regional journalism as governments draw up new policies and taxes such as those concerning the environment, mining permits and farming land. Such knowledge is also relevant outside the realm of human politics, because 'mother nature' hands out drought, floods or plague – where journalists will similarly benefit from knowledge of how to gauge the economic implications when they report on the initial events and ramifications of the events.

2.2.5 Economic journalism education and research

The need for a transdisciplinary approach became apparent after my various scholarly searches for 'business journalism education' brought up few results. My search aim was to locate research regarding the education of journalists in business, economic or financial information for the purpose of reporting. There were few results and of those, some were very old. For example a scholarly article titled "Economic Analysis in Plain English: A course in Economic Journalism" by Lori

Grunin and David L. Lindauer, dated back to 1986, discussed an economic journalism seminar offered as an experiment at Wellesley College in 1984.

A more recent article “Investigative business journalism in the age of the Internet” in 2005, did not address how to education journalism about business reporting but did briefly list the qualifications of the journalists in its study:

Half have tertiary qualifications relevant to their work, having completed majors in economics and/or accounting and law as part of their university degrees...

However, only two have relevant, although not recent, corporate experience.

(Kitchener, 2005, 44)

Mark Donald Ludwig wrote “Business Journalists Need Specialized Finance Training” in 2002, identifying the need for better training for journalists, stating “arguably, the complexity of business, finance and economics requires a sophistication not typically taught in journalism school.” Ludwig questioned whether “readers are being adequately served by journalists?”

A range of other texts are used by educators. ‘Understanding Financial Statements – A Journalist’s Guide’, by Jay Taparia (2003), is a guidebook written specifically for journalists and focuses on the financial statements of companies. ‘Show Me The Money’, (2004) by Chris Roush is also written for a journalism audience and includes broader topics of real estate, the economy and finance. However no guidebooks dealing specifically with the Australian context of economics and primary industries for a journalism audience were found.

It is not uncommon for journalism text books discuss business reporting as a chapter or ‘beat’ as part of the general journalism discussions. For example, *Specialist Journalism* (2013), edited by Barry Turner and Richard Orange, contains one chapter on business journalism as a reporting specialism among other specialist areas such as sport, international, fashion and food journalism chapters. In the business journalism chapter, the author noted a number of US and British

universities incorporating a focus on business education within their journalism courses. "News Reporting and Writing" (2008) by Melvin Mencher also includes a chapter on business journalism that serves as an introduction for journalism students. However there is limited sustained information and little or no definitions regarding economic theory or business terms.

CONCLUSIONS

The goal of the research project does not require journalists to become economic or finance 'experts', but rather to gain a wider understanding of where news events fit in to Australia's rural and regional economy. With the relevant background knowledge of economics, journalists can then apply such knowledge for greater authenticity in any reporting involving Australia's primary industries. Journalists will not necessarily know the 'right economic' answers, but the background knowledge should help journalists know what questions to ask of governments and business leaders.

The research aims to contribute to what Iorio calls a shift in the paradigm of reporting where journalists focus on objectivity, which focuses on representing both sides of a story, to a "triangulation" (Iorio 2004, 41-48). Much emphasis is traditionally given to 'objectivity' in journalism courses in an effort to avoid criticisms of bias in reporting. "When journalists talk about objectivity, they mean that the news story is free of the reporter's opinion or feelings, that it contains facts and that the account is written by an impartial and independent observer" (Mencher 2008, 50). However the aims of the exegesis are not to simply stop at an 'objective' report in journalism, with a fair balance of facts, but rather to seek out other links and issues to include in the report that otherwise may not have been considered. Via triangulation, journalists can build upon and develop their objectivity to look at what other possible links or angles could be involved. Journalists provide citizens with information in a wider context, so that the public

can be better informed and make better decisions that can lead to better welfare and business outcomes.

The theory of public journalism promotes the perspective that journalists will provide citizens with information in a wider context than event based stories and look to possible solutions for the problems faced by communities. As Kingston (2009, 5) described, an aim of public journalism is where “the challenge was not merely to tell what had happened but to open the way to what could happen.” Taking the example of the Queensland summer of 2010/11 floods, this could involve initially reporting the flooding disaster, but looking for other links such as what other businesses may be affected. For example, the guidebook directs journalists to consider what the effect is on owners of a local store if trucks are unable to transport goods and customers are cut-off from flooded roads. Consider then what happens to the livelihood and morale of the community. The Queensland floods came after a period of prolonged drought, so journalists can look for links into ongoing economic and welfare ramifications. In turn, knowing these linked events can help a community to ask for appropriate support from governments, and raise the profile of these needs, so that people in the city can be aware of issues they otherwise may not note. This way, people living in cities can consider events and issues affecting rural and regional Australia in their decision-making process, such as during elections or show support for policies promoting regional/rural development.

As Australia is a commodity-based exporter, this research focuses on useful background information for journalists should they report on any matters relating to Australia’s agricultural and mining sectors. The guidebook research outlines the framework of Australia’s economic structures and relates this to Australian commodity production.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Methodology Introduction

Qualitative research methods were used to gather primary data to meet my thesis aim. “Qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected interpretive practices, hoping always to get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand” (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, 3-4). Qualitative research can gather information from informants and the researcher then searches for “patterns, themes, categories and regularities” (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000, 147). In accordance with the aim of this exegesis, the background knowledge in this research does not stop at merely providing foundation knowledge of economics. It found the “patterns, themes, categories and regularities” described by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) and used these findings to create a helpful output for use by journalists in the form of the main creative work (guidebook), as discussed below and in Chapter 6 – Designing the Guidebook.

As has been discussed in the introductory Chapters, my thesis consists of an exegesis and accompanying creative work. The creative work is an instruction manual in the form of a guidebook for rural, regional and general journalists who may cover issues concerning Australia’s commodity production. The guidebook, *In the Field: A Reporters’ guide to Australian Commodities*, draws knowledge from four main sources:

1. Interviews from professional news editors.
2. Interviews from economists and rural industry experts with a financial focus. Note, for simplicity, this second group of interviewees is referred to as ‘Economists’.
3. Formal economics/finance study including enrolment in an economics elective unit at QUT.

4. Practice-based observations, notes and transcripts from my professional career in journalism.

The use of interviews, selection of interviewees and context is explained in Section 3.3, with the findings from both the editors and economists given in Chapter 4. The formal study that I undertook for this thesis is further explained in 3.5. The practice-based creative pieces are observations from my career as a journalist – these are explained in 3.6. At the time of my Masters of Arts study, I was employed at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) in two roles. The first role was as anchor and senior reporter of a weekly rural current affairs program, *Landline*. This is a one-hour, national program with stories averaging 20 minutes and interviews averaging approximately seven minutes. This allows time to explore further the aspects of news events and related issues. My other role was as a news reader in the ABC Queensland headquarters in Brisbane. It involved writing news summaries, editing video and copy editing reporters' scripts to assist the producer as well as writing and presenting the weather reports on weekends. I also wrote and presented weather reports during the week for most of the period, as the main weather presenter Jenny Woodward was on summer vacation during the majority of the time frame. The news reader role involved reading for the flagship 7pm news bulletins, which consists of stories averaging 90 seconds.

3.2 Researcher's Role

While I used qualitative research methods to collect primary data, as researcher I was also determining what quantitative information from economic theory would be of use to journalists who report on issues of importance to regional and rural Australia. Qualitative research can require the researcher to be among the "scene" or scenes and then attempt to make sense and discover meanings about the scene, (Tracy 2012,3). Quantitative research can then be used to list and order quantitative research and transform it into data. This can include "conversations,

actions, media stories, facial twitches, or any other social or physical activity – into numbers (Tracy 2012, 23).”

My formal studies of economics at QUT required me to generate graphs showing quantitative numbers and statistics for microeconomic issues such as consumer spending habits and macroeconomic issues such as GDP (Gross Domestic Product). Consumer spending habits and macroeconomic issues are among the key theoretical economic topics that are addressed in the guidebook.

I was immersed in the research foci already as a practicing journalist covering Australian commodities when I began and completed the formal study of economics as an elective in my Masters of Arts (Research). As a journalism practice-based researcher studying economics, I was learning the quantitative, etc information about economics, yet I was constantly reflecting on economic theory and how I could apply this in a meaningful, useful means for journalism practice. This supports the many areas that qualitative researchers can draw upon to construct meaningful research outcomes:

Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study; personal experience; introspection; life story; interview; artefacts; cultural texts and productions; observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts - that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, 3).

Denzin and Lincoln (2005, 4) liken the qualitative researcher to a bricoleur, where the interpretive bricoleur produces a bricolage – that is, a pieced-together set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation. Tracy (2012) likens qualitative research to quilters, borrowing and interweaving viewpoints and multiple perspectives:

They make do with a variety of data – all of which are partial and mismatched – in order to construct a meaningful, aesthetically

pleasing, and useful research synthesis... This means that qualitative researchers are flexible, creative, and make the most of the information available, whether that includes interviews, observations, documents, websites, or archival material. (Tracy 2012, 26)

The image of bricoleur also matches the day-to-day work of a journalist in piecing together information and often involved in observing and finding meanings from field-work. My role as researcher involved a constant cycle of reflection on work practices which helped to inform what to include in the guidebook. The methodological bricoleur is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks, ranging from interviewing to intensive self-reflection and introspection (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, 6).

Regarding the nature of qualitative research, Tracy (2013, 21) notes, in qualitative methods, “we often speak of emic understandings of the scene, which means that behaviour is described from the actor’s point of view and is context-specific.” Meanings from emic research emerge from the field. As a researcher I was drawing meanings from my observations as a journalist, and drawing meanings from my role as an economics student and constantly reflecting on how I could apply the economics knowledge to journalism practice. The result of the meanings is the crafting of the guidebook accompanying this exegesis.

My work for the ABC (discussed above), a high profile public news and current affairs organisation, gave me easy access to interview news editors from not only my work place but through other news channels. Professional contacts between the ABC and commercial stations were already in place. For example the commercial organisations would regularly ‘swap’ or ‘trade’ video footage with the ABC, because the ABC is a public broadcaster, whereas the commercial stations are in business competition and are most unlikely to swap or trade video footage unless a pool arrangement is in place. These professional negotiations between the ABC and commercial stations were usually between middle management (producer and executive producer positions) and liaising was done in a respectful, professional

manner. My role in the ABC newsroom for the flagship 7pm news bulletins witnessed these professional exchanges and I was able to build on this reputation when approaching news editors for my research interviews (in accordance with QUT ethics procedures as discussed in 3.4).

In my role at *Landline*, I was already exposed to industry finance experts and while none of the research participants were people I had dealt with professionally (i.e. interviewing them for the programme) they had knowledge of the programme or I had met them at industry conferences. While this helped to gain access to the participants I made it clear that I was working through QUT in this research proposal and all approaches were made through QUT channels (email) in accordance with ethics protocols.

My role as researcher therefore began as a professional journalist and observer and developed as a Masters of Arts (Research) student where I learnt about qualitative research practices, theories of journalism and advanced information retrieval for academic purposes. It also involved the transdisciplinarity of applying to rural and regional journalism what I learnt through undertaking classes in the QUT Business School with students intent on making finance and business their main occupation, under the tutelage of economics and finance experts.

3.3 Interviews

Interviewing is a common and useful method used to collect data and is practised by a range of disciplines and professions (Bowd 2004, 115). Written interviews via standardized emails were used in this thesis as a key method of primary research to inform the exegesis and guidebook. According to Iorio (2004, 109) “focused interviews can elicit in-depth responses and identify commonalities among the replies that people give.” The aim was to find out a general consensus from each group to inform my guidebook, so that it would represent the reality of what happens (or ideally should happen) when primary industry issues are reported on.

Focused interviews were used in the research because they are a useful method as noted by Iorio (2004, 109) to “uncover accurately how a group of interviewees understand a problem or what they believe about a certain topic.” This was a helpful method to gather information from my two distinct groups of interviewees.

Two separate groups of professionals each with a different set of questions were interviewed. The first group consisted of News Editors from Channel Ten, Channel Nine and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). The second group consisted of financial or economics experts with knowledge of, or experience in rural industries. In accordance with QUT policy, approval to conduct this research was granted by the QUT Human Research Ethics Committee (see section 3.4). All interviewees (that is the News Editors and the Economists) were informed on the Participant Information for QUT Research Project form that “The purpose of this project is to identify what economic/business and or financial knowledge would help journalists when they report on issues that affect rural and regional Australia.” The interviews were in the form of set questions via email, estimated to take approximately 30 minutes of the participants’ time.

As noted above, the focused interviews were in the form of an email. There was no follow-up email to further discuss the answers. This may appear to be a limitation of the interview, however I was satisfied with the clear and concise answers given by the interviewees and I was able to find consensus and themes among the information so that the need for a follow up interview was not necessary. I was also mindful of the fact that my ‘real-life’ interviewees had already given up considerable time and effort by replying to my questions and filling in the ethics paperwork.

3.3.1 Selection of interviewees and context

Interviewees were chosen for their direct experience in industry. I chose informants (interviewees) who could represent and explain the generally held views from their

industries, and the informants' experience had to have a direct relevance to my thesis aims. The caliber of my informants in their respective professions was crucial for informing my research; "The striking or insightful observation of a relatively few informants may be qualitatively more important than the weight of what most said, if that insight demonstrates a usefulness to better understand the phenomenon at hand" (Vallance and Lee 2005, 5). This section first outlines the selection and context of news editors, followed by economics experts.

My goal was to gather information from real-life news room practices from across a broad spectrum of mainstream television stations to inform my research. I contacted television news editors, rather than editors from print, radio or online news organizations to be able to make direct comparisons in the medium of television as this was my principle medium of practice-based observations. News editors are the highest ranking employees in a television news station that have both journalistic experience as well as final control over the day-to-day news gathering. Five news editors from mainstream, high profile Queensland news channels were invited to participate in the email interview. The following participants were selected to participate in the project because of their experience and expertise in the journalism profession as television news editors of professional mainstream news organizations:

Bernard Bowen, ABC Queensland

Paul Reed, Channel 9 Queensland

Cathie Schnitzerling, Channel 10 Queensland

News Editor, Channel 7 Queensland

Alistair Frew, WIN TV Queensland (retired at the time of interview)

All of the participants who were approached agreed to the interview. However while the Channel 7 news editor agreed, unfortunately the answers and ethics

forms were not returned. For this reason I have not included the name of the Channel 7 News Editor. This particular news editor has since moved from this role and I did not follow up with the replacement editor as I needed to keep the interviews within a timeframe of the end of 2011. This was not long after the widespread flooding in Queensland during the summer of 2010-2011. This period is often referred to in the media as the 'Summer of Disaster'. The news editors participating in the research were working or observing this period of time in Queensland and some of the interview questions related to this event.

I decided to limit the news editor participant invitations to Queensland television stations for uniformity and again also because I had current knowledge working at a Queensland television station where I observed coverage from the 'Summer of Disaster' period (2010-2011). The only exception was Alistair Frew who was a Regional (non-metropolitan) news director. I sought his input as he had many years' experience focusing on regional centers throughout Queensland during his career which included 18 years management for WIN TV. He trained many journalists in the regional centers (such as Karl Stefanovic) who went on to work for the metropolitan stations.

Questions to the News Editors included:

1. When hiring a junior reporter, what general knowledge do you expect them to have of the state's economy and main industries?
2. How do junior reporters develop the above knowledge? E.g. through regular day-to-day reporting of new issues (regular exposure); through feedback/instruction from the news editor, or a combination?
3. Would your journalists benefit from a manual explaining the main economic parameters of Australia's economy and how they relate to Australia's major commodity producers (mining and farming) when reporting in regional and rural Australia?

As well as my own formal study of economics, I chose the support from industry economists for a number of reasons. This included the real-life insights from economists to supplement my formal studies in economics. It also included their expertise in applying economics issues to primary industries and their opinions on how issues were treated by the mainstream media.

The economic experts were not only finance or economics experts, but they had experience relevant to the media and or rural and regional Australia. The invited economics participants were:

Bruce King, Head of Rural Treasury Sales, Rabobank Australia Limited

Miriam Silva, General Manager – Commercial Operations, Elders (2008- August 2012)

Andrew Barger, Queensland Resources Council (mining industry)

Saul Eslake, former Grattan Institute, Economist

During the research period Saul Eslake took up a new position as Chief Economist at bank of America – Merrill Lynch Australia. Miriam Silva left Elders after the research period but prior to this exegesis being submitted.

A fifth expert was contacted and agreed, but answers and ethics forms were not forthcoming. Due to time constraints with my limiting the research period to 2011 I decided not to approach any more experts and I was satisfied that the number of economics experts and their relevant experience matched the number of news editor participants.

Through my employment at *Landline*, I attended conferences where I met representatives of Rabobank and Elders. These conferences gave me insight into the agricultural finance expertise of Rabobank and rural business procedures at Elders. Andrew Barger represented Queensland mining and Saul Eslake has a

thorough understanding of the economics of both agriculture and mining and is often quoted in the media. The participants were all used to working with the media, via attending industry conferences, to giving direct quotes or interviews.

Questions to the economists differed to that of the news editors. While the questions to news editors sought to find what economic knowledge was important, it was essential to also investigate the questions within the context of how a newsroom operates (for example within daily constraints such as time pressure). Questions to the economists sought to find out what fundamental knowledge about economics should reporters have. This was then related to the primary industries. Questions to the economists included:

1. What are the main economic and financial reports that come out regularly during a financial year? What should reporters look for in these reports and why?
2. What effect does a high Australian Dollar have on Australian export farming commodities?

3.3.2 Primary research: interviews in context

Given that interviews were the key primary research for my thesis, I have used scholarly literature to consider the nature of interviews (strengths and weaknesses) as a research tool.

According to Bowd (2004, 117), interviewing is often used as a method of inquiry for academic research into journalism and has been a common method for collecting information from journalists. Yet, consideration in this research project was given to the fact that the news editors are themselves experienced journalists. This could be problematic in the interview process because, as Bowd (2004, 115) notes, journalists are more accustomed to being the questioners rather than the questioned:

This suggests there are three likely responses from journalists to being interviewed for research purposes – that they (journalists) may be:

- Comfortable with the interview process;
- Uncomfortable with the interview process;
- Outwardly comfortable with the interview process, but not with being the interview subject and may consciously or otherwise seek to control the interview. While such responses might not be unique to journalists, they may be intensified by journalists' familiarity with interviewing.

(Bowd 2004, 118)

I am satisfied any potential problems were overcome through the clear explanations when requesting an interview via processes in the QUT Ethics Committee forms to the participants (see section 3.4). The goals and types of questions were made clear that there was no 'hidden agenda' to cause controversy for the interviewees. As the interview was in the form of set questions, I remained in control of what was being asked. However, as the participants each represented high-profile professional mainstream media organizations it was expected that responses were in keeping with company rules and expectations.

Due to the interviews being in the form of an email of set questions, there was no allowance for follow-up questions. However, as I had made the central aims of the thesis were made clear to all participants, the nature of responses confirmed that I did not require further discussion. Also as there were a number of experts being interviewed, I was confident a 'common theme' would become evident if any clarification was sought. This also allowed me to remain in control of the questioning. As Bowd stated:

Journalists should remain in control of the interview – with the focus and line of questioning determined by the journalists, not the subject (Bowd 2004, 116).

3.4 Ethical clearance

I obtained ethical clearance for this research by submitting a form to the University Human Research Ethics Committee (UHREC) that evaluated the risks that might arise from the research and nominated suitable risk management strategies. In all interview research there is an inherent risk that a respondent might say something that other people might be critical of. For example, “other people might consider the comments to be old fashioned, politically incorrect, illogical, ill conceived, etc” (Romano 2011, 6). In answering the question, there was a very minor possibility that my research participants might say something critical of other experts or the views they espouse. The risk was minor and very easily managed. Participants were given the option of being named or not named in their responses. They also had the option of having certain comments being used anonymously. I ensured that all volunteers had time to answer the emailed questions without being rushed and asked for them to elaborate using sentences and paragraphs.

There were no requests for anonymity or confidentiality either in full or in part from any of the participants. The ability to name and attribute the information to the participant and their place of relevant industry employment further enhances the credibility of the research.

I also made it clear to the UHREC that I would also follow standard ethical protocols in my recruitment of participants. I explained to the committee that through my preliminary research, I had identified potential participants. Most were contacts from my professional dealings as a senior journalist/presenter with the ABC. My relationship with these individuals was not sufficiently close that any would feel pressured due to our previous acquaintance with each other.

I had the direct email addresses of the news editors, and most of the industry related executives. The contact details of editors were publicly available through databases such as Margaret Gee’s Australian Media Guide, so there were no privacy

issues involved in obtaining or using their email addresses. Likewise the industry groups had website pages with contact details publicly available, and if direct emails were not available, I could contact the relevant media or public relations departments who would make the approach on my behalf. I advised the UHREC that I would email potential participants, inviting them to take part. If they replied to express interest, I would send them a Participant Information Sheet, Consent Form plus the interview questions.

I made suitable arrangements for secure storage of the data. Data was stored on my own password controlled computer, with documents being backed up to the QUT server.

3.5 Formal study

I have previously worked as a finance news presenter for an international organization (CNN) and also covered financial aspects (trade, Federal budget, rural and regional funding, business aspects of farming etc.) concerning primary industries in my position at ABC *Landline*. However, I undertook study at QUT through the Masters of Arts elective subject, to obtain a formal foundation of the subject of economics. This then allowed me to compare the formalities of economics (including theories and terms) with how journalists can use this information in practice.

As mentioned above, I enrolled in and fulfilled the academic requirements of QUT's Economics unit and sat in on lectures and read texts for Managerial Finance. I also found other readings in consultation with QUT economics lecturer Dr Louisa Cogan regarding my research objectives.

Major Topics covered in QUT's Economics unit included:

- Scarcity and choice
- Microeconomics – demand, production, and market exchange

- Why markets are good – efficiency
- Market failure and the role of government
- Basic macroeconomic concepts
- Macroeconomic and Fiscal issues in Australia
- Taxes and the Australian economy
- Understanding the Australian labour market
- Economics of the Australian environment

The course covered a large amount of information and explained all the economic concepts that I had heard when working in finance areas of journalism. One of the most helpful areas was the explanation of Fiscal and Monetary Policy. I found this particularly useful to understand the options available to government and official leaders and it gave me the ability to think critically about decisions leaders made. The coursework explained the economics of markets and how to apply economic theory. Previously my work at CNN involved using these terms widely without going into great detail– as each country can apply their own particular ‘rules’ to fiscal and monetary policy. The study at QUT put this in an Australian context. The formal study also looked closer at the theory and gave examples of how the policies can work. When working as a finance journalist these terms were referred to from a simpler journalistic angle – reporting on interest rate changes by government leaders, but there was no training for me in my employment (either at CNN or at ABC) in economic theory or cause and effect of decisions. These decisions were simply reported as single events. While naturally the events were reported as being related to other events, there was little explanation, or expectation of a thorough understanding. Instead news editors assumed the more the reporters (including myself) covered such topics, they would gradually pick up meaning and understanding.

This is in contrast to when I was reporting on general world news at CNN during the break of the Iraq war. CNN provided large volumes of historical books and readings

so that all writers and journalists could quickly and efficiently gain background knowledge and have an easy reference point for what was seen as a sensitive issue.

During my formal economics studies period at QUT I also undertook research papers on:

- Australia-China bilateral trade and the benefits of a potential Free Trade Agreement
- Effective Marginal Tax Rate (EMTR)
- Food tax implications
- Economics of the environment

These topics were pertinent to economic issues at the time. The essay on the economic drivers of China's long range growth allowed me to explore articles published by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation (OECD), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and various scholars for a more in-depth understanding of China's exponential economic growth. The research into EMTR and food taxes again allowed me to better understand the tax systems and tools available to government leaders and the problems of distortion and unfairness that can arise from tax systems unless they are well designed. The research essay into the economics of the environment involved reading the Garnaut Climate Change Review (2008) and learning the extent of the environmental challenges and the need for new technology to be part of the solution. This was an area that I saw agriculture would benefit from and I could relate it to my work at ABC TV *Landline* where farmers were already actively involved in projects to benefit the environment while still being economically viable such as using technology to maximise water savings.

3.6 Practice-based reflections

The creative pieces are practice-based journalism reports and interviews selected from my professional role for nearly six years at the Australian Broadcasting

Corporation (ABC) (2006-2012). During my Masters of Arts I was employed in two capacities at the ABC: As a current affairs anchor and senior reporter with *Landline*, which is produced in Brisbane, and as a news presenter and weather reporter/presenter in the Brisbane daily newsroom.

As the discussion in Chapter 2 indicates, the practice-based reflections in this exegesis include examples of my reports from roles at both *Landline* and in the daily newsroom. (Join this to the previous paragraph.) Two *Landline* stories that highlight the links between economics and the effect this can have on welfare and also helped to inform my reflection from working in the newsroom were:

1. 'Bushfire Symposium', Broadcast: 28/09/2009, ABC TV *Landline*
2. 'Cyclone Yasi', Broadcast: /02/2011, ABC TV *Landline*

In Chapter 2.2.2 of this exegesis I used my practice-based example of 'Bushfire Symposium' to illustrate this exegesis's theoretical framework of Bowman's three levels of construction and Denzin and Lincoln's concept of triangulation to pursue a better understanding and public debate. Chapter 2.2.2 illustrated how the long-form program *Landline* covered the event of the "Black Saturday Victoria Bushfires" and how the short-form news bulletins covered the same event.

The second practice-based example is 'Cyclone Yasi' which led the coverage of the new season of *Landline* in 2011. I have chosen this as I can reflect on how the weather 'events' during the summer of 2010/2011 were reported in both short form and long form news stories. I was working full time in the ABC Queensland headquarters in Brisbane over December/January. This period of time is used as an annual break for *Landline*, so my *Landline* duties began again later in January. In my capacity as news reader, news summary writer and weather reporter during December/January, I was also noting that the main news events (flooding and Cyclone Yasi) would be focused on for the opening program in February 2011 for *Landline*. With this in mind I began to prepare my research and information as I

would be expected as presenter of *Landline* to conduct an in depth interview of the events of flooding and Cyclone Yasi as these were relevant to *Landline*'s rural and regional current affairs focus. My reflections and findings of Cyclone Yasi are contained in Chapter 5 of this exegesis.

CHAPTER 4: INTERVIEWS

4.1 Introduction

This Chapter gives details of the interview questions, answers, themes and how I then interpreted the answers and themes. The aim was to use the interview answers to put into practice Transdisciplinary theory, which involved the synthesis of information from different domains or disciplines into a relevant form for use in rural and regional journalism. To achieve the aim of the research project, I sought information from the interviewees about real-life practice. This included the work flow and practices in the news room (in the case of interviews to editors). In the case of the editors, this goal was to identify key areas of economics that could (or indeed should) be applied to journalism. In the interviews a goal was to find themes and further develop and inform the Theoretical Framework of this exegesis. Another goal was to uncover any knowledge I wasn't aware of from my practice-based observations, formal study and professional experience as a journalist.

4.2 NEWS EDITORS

4.2.1 Aims of questions

While I had practice-based information from my employment at the ABC, my aim was to identify real-life news room practices given by news editors from the perspective of commercial mainstream television stations to inform my research. I would then compare whether there were significant differences from commercial news gathering to public news gathering in relation to the interview questions. All of the news editors participating in the research were based in Brisbane with their main focus being on the evening news bulletins that are broadcast daily state-wide or throughout the majority of the whole state) in Queensland.

As a researcher a goal was to identify what was happening in the metropolitan Queensland Newsrooms. In particular, my goal was to identify how news editors

were managing their staff in terms of story ideas, scope and expectations when covering rural and regional Australia.

The questions had a focus on economics to find out whether or not news editors valued this knowledge in reporters and if so, to what extent. Part of the aim was to find out whether news editors were interested in stories that showed how events can have economic impacts that affect the well-being of individuals in the community. Another objective was to find out general attitudes from the news editors towards rural and regional Australia and whether they thought their audiences were interested in stories from rural and regional Australia.

4.2.2 Interview answers and interpretation

1. When reporters are covering rural or regional areas for daily news stories, how much focus on wider economic/business implications is required?

Cathie Schnitzerling (Network Ten) stated that the reporters require a broad knowledge about the impact or implications of where that story fits into the broader economic or political landscape. Schnitzerling gave the example that a story about a coal seam gas protest must be reported in the context of the burgeoning liquefied gas industry and the possible cost to agriculture. Schnitzerling noted that the broader economic context will be minimal because a news story only runs for 90 seconds. Bernard Bowen (ABC TV) stated similarly that reporters would be expected to have a basic understanding of the economic factors at play in their regions and a basic knowledge of how the rural/regional economy fitted into the bigger picture. Bowen noted that reporters do not have to be experts, but some knowledge would be beneficial. Alastair Frew (WIN TV) noted that regional news tends to be more focused on business implications than a metropolitan news service. He explained that different regional TV news services could focus specifically on the relevant industries of the viewing area.

The answer by Paul Reed (Channel 9) had the least focus on economic implications. Instead, he highlighted the pressure of ratings on commercial television news. He stated that stories would only focus on the wider economic implications if there were direct “‘hip pocket’ implications for our audience”.

2. Would consideration of the wider economic/business implications lead to follow up stories in the regional /rural areas?

Cathie Schnitzerling (Ten News) and Bernard Bowen (ABC TV) both answered yes to this question. Bowen noted the follow up story gave an opportunity for reporters to ask more informed questions and extract new angles. Schnitzerling gave an example of how a story about the impact of coal mining in rich agricultural areas of Central Queensland led to several other similar stories. Paul Reed (Channel 9) answered “possibly” and qualified that the follow up story would only be conducted if it was considered a “promotable ratings winner”. Alastair Frew (WIN TV) noted that regional journalists look for local angles even in National news. He stated there are local angles (implications) in everything from the national budget, to a national airline strike to cuts in education funding.

3. Is your audience interested in the economic impacts of mining for the state? How often would these stories be included in your bulletins (daily, weekly, monthly, or on what type of occasion?)

All of the respondents stated their audiences were strongly interested in mining stories, particularly as this either generated wealth for the state or employment opportunities. Cathie Schnitzerling (Ten News) noted the station uses daily minute by minute tracking of audience ratings and that the graphs reveal no fall off in audience when mining stories are run. Schnitzerling also noted that viewers

enquire how to find work in the mining industry after the stories go to air.

Schnitzerling stated mining stories are generally part of the daily news agenda and that Network Ten has commissioned stories in mining areas like Emerald and Surat.

Paul Reed (Channel 9) noted mining stories hold an interest to the commercial audience particularly if the story includes impacts on the Queensland economy or impacts on superannuation and the Share Market. Alastair Frew (WIN TV) noted mining stories were very important to regional audiences, however he noted that it depended on relevance in some regions – he gave the example that the Bundaberg news service would only run a mining story once every 12 months as that region’s industry was more dependent on tourism. Frew contrasted this with Central Queensland’s greater dependence on the mining industry. The Central Queensland news service would include mining stories at least 3-4 times a week. I noted that none of the participants mentioned if angles/links were made about concerns over the environment or lost fertile farming land.

4. Is your audience interested in the economic impacts of agriculture for the state? How often would these stories be included in your bulletins?

The majority of answers focused on the retail end of the cycle – that is the pricing of food and product availability. Cathie Schnitzerling (Ten News) noted agricultural stories are not generally of interest to what is a largely metropolitan or urban regional audience, other than how changes in farming (due to overseas competition, natural disasters etc) will affect the cost of food. Schnitzerling did note that the audience is interested in ‘picture’ stories (that is colourful, interesting video footage) from regional areas and those that “strike a nostalgic or heritage chord”. Schnitzerling noted the cost constraints of covering regional/rural stories: “Covering regional stories is also a costly exercise in terms of travel, accommodation and per diems that is not undertaken unless funds allow”. Bowen

(ABC TV) noted agriculture is of interest to the audience but would only be reported daily by the ABC's regional/rural service. This is in contrast to mining related stories that Bowen noted are reported more often on the state-wide 7pm news bulletins.

5. How much general knowledge of rural/regional Australia are reporters expected to have before covering these regions?

Cathie Schnitzerling noted reporters are expected to have a broad general knowledge about most topics but rural and regional knowledge is generally restricted to their own experience working there. Schnitzerling stated often reporters will have little knowledge and require briefing from senior reporters or producers before being assigned rural and regional stories. Schnitzerling also noted that it is a required skill for journalists to have the ability to be "all-rounders" capable of covering any topic. My thesis argues economics permeates everything as noted earlier by Anne O Krueger and a transdisciplinary approach from the theoretical framework would further equip journalists with a wider knowledge and therefore have the ability to better cover any topic. Alistair Frew (WIN TV) noted "new reporters grow into more knowledge if they have not been exposed to rural issues in the past". I argue that this would take many years and still may not reach the level of understanding according to the aims of this research.

While Bernard Bowen (ABC TV) also stated that the more general knowledge reporters have the better, he also noted reporters need the ability to find out information they don't know and then communicate it effectively to the audience. Bowen stated "but as a general rule, the more knowledge, the better the reporter". I argue if journalists have the knowledge already they can draw links/insights more efficiently. Bowen is referring to the general skills of a reporter to get a story done efficiently within time constraints which includes finding out information and clearly

communicating it. Paul Reed (Channel 9) noted that a good general knowledge is adequate but he did not elaborate further.

6. Would a manual covering economic/financial implications for day-to-day journalists covering general news (i.e. not business specialists) be useful?

Bernard Bowen (ABC TV) stated that a manual would be useful, in particular to younger or junior reporters. Cathie Schnitzerling (Ten News) noted strongly that a manual would be useful but suggested it be kept up to date. Schnitzerling stated the manual would need to be brief and to the point and suggested it be delivered electronically on a quarterly basis. Paul Reed (Channel 9) stated a manual would gather dust on the shelves with the other reference books in the newsroom. I suggest that 'guidebook' would have been a better use of word than manual as Alastair Frew (WIN TV) noted use of a manual is only in the case of a style guide for the newsroom or when the subject is sensitive, for example before the law courts. I'm particularly struck by the time constraints evident in the replies to this question, but I argue the online version of the guidebook would appeal more to reporters as journalists now use online for checking facts rather than 'old fashioned' reference books as alluded to by Channel 9.

7-8: Questions 7 – 8 asked specifically about coverage of the 2010/2011 Queensland floods and Cyclone Yasi. The questions asked what economic implications/links reporters made; whether reporters considered business effects on farms, mines and businesses in smaller communities; the use of follow up stories; whether stories take into account the 'human' welfare effects such as depression after such events; how was the increase in the price of bananas reported after Cyclone Yasi?

Paul Reed (Channel 9) noted that his network's flood stories had a strong emphasis on insurance anger – this relates to the Brisbane and Ipswich floods. Reed noted there were minimal stories on flooded coal mines and that stories focused more on the impact on the retail sector from disruptions to agriculture. Reed also noted the Cyclone Yasi coverage again focused more on the impacts on the retail sector (the rise in the price of bananas). But Reed noted the stories usually included pictures of devastated farms and quotes from farmers or farm workers that are 'out of work' due to the interruption of routine from the cyclone. But there was no elaboration on whether or not these 'out of work' people were followed up, or whether other reports were used to explore this issue.

Cathie Schnitzerling (Ten News) noted reporters covered the economic impact of the floods, not just within Brisbane but also regional Queensland. But she noted the stories about the impact on agriculture were only in those areas where they could gain access, for example in the citrus growing region of Gayndah.

Schnitzerling noted it was difficult to cover television stories if they can't get the pictures of flooded paddocks or interview the property owners who have been affected. She noted that despite the availability of a helicopter, the lack of aviation fuel in regional areas made it very difficult to get to those areas. Regarding welfare, Schnitzerling (Ten News) noted counseling service numbers were also provided during the worst of the crisis and interview with experts were undertaken regarding depression. Schnitzerling (Ten News) and Reed (Channel 9) both noted there have been follow up stories throughout the year about the emotional upheaval and in some cases the suicide of flood victims, but they did not specify if this related to regional/rural areas. Alastair Frew (WIN TV) did note that the stories on welfare can add a sense of drama to a report, which would capture the interest of viewers.

I would suggest that where access can't be specifically gained, stories could interview the agricultural representatives easily available such as rural lobby group AgForce which has its headquarters in Brisbane, Queensland and use 'generic'

flooded pictures of the state over this. Once links and contacts are made in regional and rural areas technology such as Skype to conduct interviews is becoming an acceptable means of broadcasting (even if only for short amounts of time to avoid poor picture quality). I surmise that because bananas are a favorite fruit this is why it was reported by 9. The video used by Channel 9 of wiped-out farms have a direct correlation to the retail impacts of interest to Channel 9's audience and therefore are focused on. Whereas the impacts are not so immediately obvious from the general flooded wheat fields and coal mines and there was little or no emphasis on the answers about this from Channel 9.

Cathie Schnitzerling (Ten News) however noted the station found an audience fatigue with flood stories and follow up welfare stories after about six months since the floods. "We then were more selective in covering those stories or indeed even stopped covering them for a while". Schnitzerling noted that during the station's daily audience tracking (ratings) research that people would turn off when flood stories came on. Schnitzerling stated "I can only speculate on the reasons why; victims didn't want to be reminded, non-victims found them irrelevant, others wanted to move on". I would suggest this is because relevant links have not been made – for example if mines are flooded questions about whether there is a slow-down in mining employment could be posed by journalists, particularly as respondents have noted that employment in mines is an area of interest from their audiences. Further links about the large effects on the national GDP (as shown in the ABARES quarterly reports) arising from vast flooded areas of Queensland could also affect state/federal budgets? Journalists should find out what the ramifications are from this situation and communicate it to the wider audience.

Cathie Schnitzerling noted that the increase in the price of bananas due to crop devastation was covered with the broader view of what had happened to farmers, particularly since many had only just recovered from Cyclone Larry. Schnitzerling also noted that the audience was interested in the wider impact on farmers and

others in the supply chain culminating in the consumer, but only early on in the story. She noted after the initial stages of reporting on the event, it was not until the first crops were being harvested and predictions of banana prices decreasing was the event reported on again.

Bernard Bowen noted the financial impact of the floods was central to ABC reporting – both on a local/regional level as well as more broadly. The impact on all industries was covered, from mining to agriculture to small business. The effect on people and communities was also a key angle. Bowen stated, when the floods were happening and immediately afterwards, these issues were covered on a daily basis. He noted some issues, like depression emerged afterwards. My own observations from practice-based notes would dispute that this was so widely covered on the 7pm bulletins, so I assume Bowen was referring to the ABC-wide platform basis where stories were covered in longer-form current affairs programs or on local radio. But this does not bring the issue to the state-wide Queensland audience in daily news bulletins shown to combined metropolitan, regional and rural audiences; therefore it is not representing the issues to a state-wide community.

9-10: Questions 9-10 focused on how reporters validate the true extent of what politicians are claiming in particular to when politicians make statements on any financial/economic matters. The questions asked whether reporters only seek the opposing political view on the subject matter or if they are expected to go to another source (and if so, what type of other sources).

Bernard Bowen (ABC TV) stated an opposing view is always good for balance, particularly in political stories and if they (reporters) have time an independent source would also be good. Bowen suggested an independent source such as a university academic in a relevant field or a person in the industry affected. Cathie Schnitzerling also noted a similar approach by Ten News reporters. Bowen noted

the more sources the better, provided they are credible and the reporter has the time to run the checks. I noted the strong theme regarding time constraints again in these answers.

However, Channel 9's Paul Reed noted only if they were suspicious about claims from a politician would they normally cross reference with an industry organization, union or informed party. Reed stated "only if it were crucial to a story would they present any other confirmation from another source." I noted this is very event-based focused reporting criteria and I explore this further in the findings below. Paul Reed noted at the start of his answers that there were time pressures on himself in his role as news editor to manage the newsroom and that the telephone was constantly ringing.

4.3 INTERVIEWS TO FINANCE EXPERTS

4.3.1 Aims of questions

As well as my own formal study of economics, I chose the support from industry economists for a number of reasons. This included the real-life insights from economists to supplement my formal studies in economics. It also included their expertise in applying economics issues to primary industries and their opinions on how issues were treated by the mainstream media.

The overall aim of the questions was to identify what economic knowledge would help journalists when they report on issues that affect rural and regional Australia. Another aim was to identify any mistakes or areas of improvement that these industry specialists have noted from in general media coverage concerning reporting of primary industries.

4.3.2 Interview answers and implications for the guidebook

Responses from economic experts were particularly helpful in informing the contents of the guidebook as the participants related economic theories directly to scenarios in primary industry.

1. Regarding monetary matters, how can reporters validate the true extent of what politicians are claiming? For example, what websites or people should reporters be seeking out?

All of the respondents noted facts can be easily verified by checking against authoritative sources. Suggestions of sources from the respondents included the ABS, Reserve Bank, ABARES, OECD and IMF. Miriam Silva also noted that journalists need to consider 'volumes'. For example if prices have increased, the economic impacts are not as positive as they may appear if the volumes (the amount) of stock being sold are down.

Andrew Barger noted if a reporter is working on financial issues or on the fringes of financial issues regularly, then a running file of recent announcements will be invaluable for tracking how key parties have reacted to past announcements. The aims of the thesis and guidebook are for general journalists to gain a wider understanding of economics; however Andrew Barger's suggestion is useful also for general journalists to keep on file the key reports by government departments so that journalists are aware of the general status of the economy. These reports are listed clearly and explained in the guidebook.

2. Are there any stand out 'mistakes' or oversights that you regularly notice in the general media regarding rural/regional economics? If so, how can this be improved?

Andrew Barger noted that common mistakes are to get units of measurement wrong, for example, *milli* litres rather than *mega* litres or millions rather than billions for dollars. He noted an experienced journalist should have a rough idea of the magnitude for an issue and so be checking their expected number against the actual numbers used. This is a very quick check that a journalist can make, but it is significant for producing a credible report.

Miriam Silva noted that understanding supply and demand constraints on global commodities markets is beneficial. The guidebook explained macroeconomic policy tools, supply and demand, the effect of exchange rates, tariffs, quotas and international prices on commodities trade.

Saul Eslake also noted a tendency for journalists to always look for ‘bad news.’ He noted that reporters use terms such as “struggling”, “battling” or “doing it tough” which he said has the tendency for city-dwellers to consider that people in the country always have something to complain about. Miriam Silva also noted that this representation of the “down trodden” farmer may be starting to grate on the Australian psyche. She noted that this use of language reinforces the victimization culture rampant in agriculture and suggested that greater care needs to be taken to bring out the human elements in reporting so that it generates understanding and compassion for those affected – not apathy.

Saul Eslake also noted that reports sometimes don’t give much historical context. He suggested for example short-term fluctuations in commodity prices, the exchange rate or petrol prices should be given in the context of where the prices fit into a longer-term timeframe.

3-4: Questions three and four focused on what economic/financial reports journalists should be familiar with and what reporters should be looking for in these reports.

The respondents all listed similar reports and offered similar reasons for doing so. Saul Eslake gave the most thorough answer and this was directly quoted in the content of the guidebook. It included the Federal Budget, the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, the Reserve Bank's quarterly Statements on Monetary Policy, state or territory budgets and ABARES. Saul Eslake noted the usual time and dates the reports were released and the key information the reports give such as decisions to raise or lower interest rates. Saul Eslake also noted where more detailed information was available after the initial handing down of reports such as the RBA's statements. Again, this information was all used to directly inform contents of the guidebook and many of the suggestions from the respondents included reports relevant to primary industry.

5 – 7: Questions five to seven focused on hard commodities (mining). Questions asked how mining has contributed to the Australian economy and how this has changed in the last decade when compared to the previous decade. Question seven asked which countries are Australia's major trading partners and question eight asked about the expected financial outlook for the mining sector.

The majority of the respondents gave information and statistics that are supported by government and industry statistics (many of which are available online). These details help to inform the guidebook Chapters which explain the important, but different roles that soft and hard commodities play in Australia's economy. The formal study of economics also involved research into the economic growth of China and the economic importance of trade between Australia and China (see Chapter 3.5 of this exegesis and Chapter 3 of the guidebook). The economic respondents also gave numerous websites that detailed information about

Australia's trade focus and mining/minerals outlook. Information from these websites has been used to inform the guidebook content and many of the websites have been listed in the online resources areas of the guidebook for further reading for journalists.

Saul Eslake gave a useful explanation regarding mining production, prices and volume. He noted that mining production actually hasn't increased all that much over the past decade – by an average of 1.8% per annum compared with real GDP which has grown at an average annual rate of 3.0% over the same period. But Saul Eslake explained that calculations refer to a large degree to the volume of mineral production, and doesn't reflect the huge increase in the value of mineral production over the past decade driven by the enormous increase in the prices received for each tonne of minerals exported.

Saul Eslake explained that the additional income received through the export of commodities at the higher prices has circulated through the broader economy in various ways that have boosted national income and spending quite considerably. Saul Eslake noted there will be a substantial increase in the volume of mining production over the coming decade as the large number of projects now underway come into full production. I used the distinction made by Saul Eslake between volume and prices to inform the guidebook. It also gives historical context about Australia's mining industry and explains to journalists the potential increases to national income as the large number of mining projects under construction come into full production. I then used this information to further research Australia's key trading partners to document the demand needs of these countries (and Australia's ability to meet the demand for resources, see Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 of the guidebook).

9-13: Questions 9-13 focused on soft commodities (agriculture) including how agriculture has contributed historically to GDP and expectations for the future.

Statistics and information given supported what I have also found in my formal study. Miriam Silva noted that Australia's core competitive advantage in both hard and soft commodities is the ability to supply in bulk. The guidebook has written about the vast quantities of Australian resources. For example the guidebook explains that Australian soft commodity production can meet the majority of the nation's food needs and there is still a huge surplus supply for export which brings in a significant income to the nation. There is also a great future potential of increasing export income from agriculture developing economies create more demand.

14-16: Questions 14-16 focused on the 'seasons' of agriculture and asked respondents to describe some typical business scenarios relating to the finances of agriculture.

A practical example that I used in the guidebook was a full description by Miriam Silva of the business cycle of a grain farmer. The example described a typical month-by-month scenario for the farmer over a year. It represented the business risks the farmer must take and how for much of the year the farmer is cash negative (that is, money has flowed out from the farm to buy seed, fertiliser, pay debts, replant if there was unfavourable weather, all while there is no income or return on investment). It also described how the farmer had to determine how to market the grain (for example sell small amounts at the given price, or wait and hope for higher prices but run the risk of further price drops). This scenario was used as content in

the guidebook to explain how seasons affect a farmer's income and that farmers do not draw a weekly or monthly wage.

17. The final question asked whether there were any areas of agriculture and mining that need to be wound up for more efficient technologies to take place.

This question was in relation to the economic theory of 'creative destruction'. I have observed that many general news stories covered by journalists are in fact related to the theory of creative destruction. These stories are often controversial with the talent being interviewed passionate about their cause. Responses confirmed there are many scenarios when creative destruction is required in agriculture and examples are given in the guidebook.

4.4 Conclusions

The responses from the news editors provided real world accounts relating to this exegesis's theoretical framework. These themes came through strongly in all of the answers. Regarding constraints on journalists, responses from Paul Reed (Channel 9) gave a repeated theme about the pressures of meeting a ratings-driven news perspective. These are commercial (business) pressures as commercial stations compete for ratings in order to attract high advertising revenues. Reed used terminology such as "only if it was a ratings winner" to qualify whether or not reporters would follow a particular angle in a story. Ratings are also a consideration for public broadcasters (although not for advertising pressures) as the public broadcaster must still be accountable for how its resources are used. In my own previous work in 2006 as a regional radio producer at the Australian public broadcaster ABC Radio in Southern Queensland at the time, I was also directed that any stories affecting the 'hip pocket and the heart' were popular with audience, therefore it's not only a commercial station ratings priority for 'hip pocket' stories.

With the effects on the consumer being such a high priority reporters with a true understanding of the broad fundamentals of economics could make links from regional and rural areas to metropolitan areas more often.

The issue of time constraints on journalists was also a very strong theme in the answers from all of the editors. Editors responded numerous times about the pressures of deadlines and time, even though the email questions never specifically asked about this. Bernard Bowen (ABC TV) noted that the deadline pressure to get to air is intense. Regarding finding alternative sources, Bowen stated if reporters have time, an independent source would also be good. Bowen also noted that due to time constraints reporters often take politicians' word at face value and attribute the comments to the politician in case the claims are not accurate.

The responses also reflect the theoretical framework's analysis of story construction. The responses portray that Iyengar's (1991) episodic frames are used and the editor's answers reflect a strong examples of what Linksy (1988) describes as television's "obsession" with event based reporting. In Chapter 2 of this exegesis I noted Iyengar's (1991,2) explanation of episodic versus thematic frames: Episodic coverage explores an event, whereas thematic framing places issues and events in a broader structural and social context and are perceived to encourage an audience understanding of issues at a societal level both in terms of cause and responsibility for solution. Responses from editors showed a strong working-practice in the newsrooms to follow 'event' based issues such as a flood, without much consideration for the cause and effect and ramifications on people in rural and regional areas. As Linksy (1988, 214) noted, the event orientation of news is a particular problem, as the focus of the coverage is on the 'action' therefore there is less time for the coverage to focus on context and to draw links and meanings between the events and issues.

While all of the editors strongly reflected time constraints and business (ratings) constraints as reasons for the tendency toward event based reporting with little

transdisciplinary links made, the editors did show an interest in using follow up stories to further enquire and reflect upon news stories. In Bowman's (2005) levels of reporting (see Chapter 2.2.2 of this exegesis) Bowman states that journalists must use all three levels of construction in their reporting and writing, but this "can happen over time." Bowman states as the level 1 "reactive stage" lessens, journalists need more understanding about what happened – this is the level 2 inquiry and analytic stage. Level three then looks at more "deep-seated societal trends" and considers other patterns and trends, this can be used to discover causes or responsibility for the events. Regarding using follow up stories, Bowen (ABC TV) noted this would be beneficial as the reporter could ask more informed questions and extract new angles.

In conclusion, I find that while the majority of the editors agreed that journalists require a broad understanding of the basics of economics, there is very little explanation or examples from the editors of what that would constitute. The only example given was from Cathie Schnitzerling who noted that a story on a coal seam gas protest should be put in the broader context of the burgeoning liquefied natural gas industry. I argue an online guidebook would also be beneficial to the News editors in guiding journalists under time and budget constraints. It would help both news editors and journalists in the field consider new angles for follow up stories or how to add a brief statement alluding to the wider economic and welfare implications, even within a 90 second news story. Cyclone Yasi offers the example of how 'event' based reporting can over time lead to a build of information, this is a very gradual process and it was only because of the previous large cyclone event in 2006 of Cyclone Larry that reporters began to make links to economics in rural areas. Yet in the case of the flooding event over the vast majority of Queensland, from my practice-based observations these links were rarely made. Reports from ABARES showed the Queensland floods were so significant it led to a down-grade of economic growth but there was no reference made to this in the responses from editors or in any of my practice-based observations of ABC TV news coverage.

Economic links regarding the flooding focused more on insurance issues in metropolitan areas with very little mentioned about the effects on farmers.

I argue that from my formal studies and the information from the economics experts, a 'broad' understanding actually requires more information and background knowledge about economics. An investment of time in learning about the fundamentals of economics would help journalists work in an efficient manner (meet deadlines) yet do more to help society better understand the cause, effect and ramifications of issues. This guidebook provides a means of improving this knowledge. I am confident the style of the guidebook gives many options for journalists to consider various angles and avoid the guidebook becoming formulaic. Stories and follow up stories can include links so that some the aims of public journalism can be achieved in allowing society to make informed decisions and help to be part of solutions to problems.

The economic experts provided relevant information such as reports (including general economic reports and primary industries reports). The experts also listed how reporters can access the reports and how often. Other information from the experts included scenarios relating how the seasons affect the finances of farmers. The experts also related macroeconomic issues such as interest rates and trade to primary industry scenarios. Terminology was also explained. The information helped to inform the design and contents of the guidebook.

CHAPTER 5: PRACTICE-BASED OBSERVATION

5.1 Introduction

In many ways, the process of this research began before I was officially studying the Masters of Arts (Research). In my research I have gathered together a number of experiences, knowledge and observations, transforming them with the aim to collate them into a useful journalism output, just as Tracy (2012, 26) noted “a qualitative researcher using the concept of bricolage makes use of various data in order to create an interesting whole.” The research was born from my constant process of observations, reflections on practice and building of knowledge from other disciplines (such as economics, finance and primary industries).

In this Chapter, I focus my practice-based reflections on the ramifications to the two major industries involving rural and regional Queensland: Mining and Agriculture. In this Chapter I analyze the reporting into the economic and financial effects from the ‘summer of disaster’ and the far reaching effects, implications and ramifications on the people whose livelihoods depend on these industries.

5.2 Practice-based reflection: Why reporters need economics

As noted in Chapter 3.6 I worked at ABC TV Queensland, as the full time News Presenter for the summer of 2010-11 (December 2010-February 2012) and combined this role with that of fill-in weather writer and presenter. The daily newsroom roles require hours of preparation work behind the scenes before the broadcast of the 7pm 30-minute news bulletin which is made up of news reports of approximately 90 seconds duration, , sport and two- to three-minute weather report.

The period of time of this observation was a particularly busy one for news managers, due to the occurrence of constant rainfall over Queensland and a

shortage of staff due to many being away on annual leave. Separate but prolonged rain systems from December 2010 to January 2011 led to over three quarters of Queensland being declared a disaster zone. Regional and rural river systems, along with the Brisbane River witnessed historic flood levels displacing thousands of residents. Whole towns such as Theodore were evacuated in the central and southern interior of the state. Some towns such as Condamine and Chinchilla the floods revisited twice, even three times as the rain continued relentlessly. Other cities and towns that flooded included Rockhampton, Emerald, Bundaberg, Dalby, St George, Mundubbera, Gayndah and Warwick, with many centers in between. Mines were also flooded. During this period, Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley experienced a natural disaster in the form of deadly flash flooding events described as an “inland tsunami”. Wivenhoe Dam reached 190% of normal storage capacity and water releases swamped Ipswich and Brisbane. One of the largest and strongest cyclones in Queensland’s history (Bureau of Meteorology, 2011) would bear down on north Queensland on February 3, leading to the death of one man and wiping out the majority of Australia’s banana crop.

On the advice of emergency services, the Premier Anna Bligh declared 78 per cent of the state a disaster zone (Queensland Government, 2011). 35 people died in flood-related incidents across Queensland between November 30, 2010 and mid- January 2011 (Queensland Police, 2011).

From my practice-based reflections, I will show that a background understanding of economic and financial parameters applicable to the agricultural and mining sectors involved in the Queensland floods is a useful starting point for any reporter covering major weather events. During the ‘summer of disaster,’ the ABC flew in reporters based at its News 24 Channel in Sydney to support ABC reporters already ‘on the ground’ in Queensland.

From this, the lesson can be drawn that background knowledge of economics and economics or finance fundamentals relevant to the primary industries is not just useful for reporters who are based in rural or regional centers. It is also useful to reporters from the city who may be flown in at a moment's notice to help cover the events.

The presenter's role at ABC TV Queensland required me to write news updates, edit the video pictures on digital software for broadcast, help the chief of staff with scripts and editorial decisions as well as research stories for the 'live-crosses' where the ABC conducts interviews during the news bulletin from the studio, to talent or correspondents in another location. Traditionally the 7pm news bulletin style only used these crosses a few times a year, for major events. However in the main Queensland studio, based in Brisbane, I was conducting live crosses each evening, sometimes with three different talent (or on-air interviewees) made up of reports in the field or emergency authorities and government leaders. This highlights the time constraints on journalists when such an 'event' is being covered by news crews. As reporters use their journalist training to research the stories, background knowledge in economics is useful so questions could be asked about what industries may be effected and the potential downstream economic effects within the community. The guidebook accompanying this thesis could be used as a quick reference in this case.

My presenting duties included writing the weather report. Due to the nature of the rain and flooding event I deviated from spending time giving temperatures, to following the direction of pending floods and rainfall. I relied on speaking directly to Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) specialist hydrologists (and later BOM professional cyclone trackers) rather than simply gather information from wires and the BOM website. The weather summary was filled with multiple and changing weather warnings.

My aim was to forewarn the community as best as possible where the river rises were running to next and document those that had already been flooded. This is because as a *Landline* journalist I had met with farmers in this region and I had insight into issues such as bank debt, paying workers, cost of replacing infrastructure and planting new crops. These issues further affect farmers' ability to compete in business – for example the high Australian dollar already made their crops more expensive to buy when compared to countries with a lower currency conversion. If farmers have higher debts as a result of damage to crops and equipment, they are less able to reduce prices to compete on a world market. There are considerations not only for farmers, but for the surrounding community (made up of small businesses, families and schools). If roads are blocked, trucks are unable to transport goods and services into or out of the community. Small businesses lose money in these situations as they either have no stock to sell, or are unable to send products out to be sold.

5.3 ABC TV 7pm News Coverage

In December and January, repeated the ABC TV 7pm news bulletins mentioned that crops were washed out but very few direct reports on the news explaining exactly what this meant in dollar terms to any individual farmers or the ramifications. This changed once Cyclone Yasi crossed the North Queensland coast on February 3rd and reporters focused more on economic impacts. Background knowledge of the economics of agriculture and mining would help reporters to ask key questions and report the wider context of economic implications arising from the flooding event. As television news reports are brief, I also identified ways to provide pertinent information in just a few seconds of that allocated scarce time resource. For example if a reporter is interviewing a town's mayor, they could include a question and answer regarding the downstream effects relevant to that particular community. Additionally, in reports about what are typically described as 'huge

damage bills', a journalist could ask "how long will it take to pay this off?", or "what will be sacrificed in order to recover costs?"

In monitoring the ABC TV Queensland 7pm news bulletins during the period December- January I found only one such story that is a good example of a reporter using background economic information and triangulations to provide a bigger picture of flood impact. This report titled 'Emerald', written by Kerrin McKechnie broadcast on the 7pm ABC TV Queensland bulletin on December 12, 2010 told the plight of a farmer in Emerald where the floods had covered 350 acres of cotton. It reported \$1.5 million damage to crops and infrastructure. The report mentioned that this damage in the summer months followed a poor winter crop due to rain and the 2008 floods. There were calls for government assistance. The report mentioned that Cotton Australia estimated a \$30 million dollar damage bill to the industry from the 2010/11 floods in Queensland and New South Wales.

This report is a good example illustrating that there is a large damage bill - much more than people may realize when they hear reports typically stating that 'crops have been wiped out by floods'. In addition to this, a follow up story and a more reflective story (level two and level three on Bowman's levels of reporting in Chapter 2 of this exegesis) should have been carried out into the effects on the people involved - such as whether there was any chance for the farmer to recover – and if so, how? Questions could include: What bank debt is carried-over and added to? Who else is involved? What are the 'knock-on' effects for the township that may depend on money being spent by residents at the local supply store? Journalists need to be able to find and synthesize many economic and social welfare links. In my guidebook accompanying this exegesis there is a Chapter explaining the seasons in farming and potential risks involved and economic issues farmers have to manage. My guidebook also explains the effect of the high Australian dollar on commodities, which was occurring at the same time as the floods, compounding the economic issues for primary industries. This is useful background information for

journalists to consider when covering primary industries given the importance of the primary industries to Australia's export earnings (see Guidebook pages 17).

On December 12 2010, the nightly news bulletin documented a bad storm in South East Queensland, reporting that motor vehicle insurance claims of cars caught in the storms totaled \$8 million and house insurance claims totaled \$2 million. On this date there were also finance stories of retail spending concerns for the Christmas period and the Australian dollar then approaching parity with the US. At the time of these stories, I noted there was a lot of economic information given to these metropolitan area stories in comparison to the rural flooding stories.

By December 26, the lead story on ABC TV Queensland's 7pm story began "Queensland is awash". The 7pm bulletin reports in the days leading up to this covered the massive amount of rain and that vast sections of highways were cut between major regional towns. Theodore was isolated and Chinchilla was completely cut off. Families were rescued from Darling Downs towns such as Leyburn and Allora. There were two rain bands over central and southern Queensland, and the BOM stated that renewed river rises were likely. One report stated "new figures show nearly \$8 billion of food is being wasted in Australia each year". Another story that same evening reported that Boxing Day sales were big despite the rain.

By December 27, 2010 the nightly news bulletin reported the "worst floods in half a century for Queensland's South". But again, there were no reports on the 7pm ABC TV Queensland bulletin on the possible ramifications to the towns cut off and the effects that this will have on the future livelihoods of farmers and how businesses (from small local business to farms and mining companies) would manage the financial issues.

Ironically, one report that serves my argument well for the need to focus more on the economic fallout from weather events in the rural sector was actually a 'holder'

story at the ABC. It is typical television newsroom practice to create 'holder' stories in advance for use during quiet times to fill news bulletins, particularly if staff numbers are low due to holidays. The holder story is generally more of a generic 'feature' story that doesn't have to be broadcast with urgency – it is written in a style so that it won't sound outdated. Most news stories are required to be broadcast on the day of writing as the information will be considered 'too old' if it is broadcast a day later. This holder story, 'Burnett Health' by Jackson Vernon, had been ready since mid-December, but was not broadcast until December 23. It focused on the small regional town of Eidsvold, six hours drive north of Brisbane. It reported that the rate of suicide in the town was six times the national average. In the report, Mayor Joy Jensen said: "Years of drought, coupled with the high Australian dollar, is affecting the town's morale. When rural areas are depressed, the town businesses are also depressed because the rural people don't have that income to be buying and purchasing."

The Eidsvold story illustrated the links between economics and welfare. Journalists should picture that story across a mosaic of Queensland. Against a picture of aerial views shown on television of 'Queensland awash', journalists can begin to see how many such 'Eidsvold' situations were occurring that they could take a public journalism approach to. The 2010 Australian of the year Psychiatrist Patrick McGorry toured the repeatedly flooded town of Theodore to lobby the government for long term, sustained mental health programs in regional and rural Australia. Journalists could enquire about how the economic hardships from events such as flooding leads to health issues in small towns, and whether there are further economic ramifications of mental health issues on rural and regional areas.

In contrast to reporting of the floods across rural and regional Queensland, reports on the flooding of Brisbane and Ipswich mentioned economic issues such as costs and whether households were covered by insurance. I found no reports in the ABC TV 7pm Queensland news asking whether farmers in rural or regional areas were

covered by insurance. From my later reporting for *Landline*, I discovered a broccoli farmer who had one million dollars' worth of damage from flooding in Grantham and he was told by insurance company that his flood insurance did not cover the cause of flooding for his farm. There were downstream economic effects from this instance as this farmer employed up to 100 staff and supplied broccoli to the large grocery stores.

Reporting after Cyclone Yasi did draw together the ramifications on nearby communities and illustrated the costs (financial and emotional) to Australia's banana producers. From my analysis of the stories, I argue the 'mother of all storms' certainly got everyone's attention fast as satellite pictures showed a massive weather system that eventually reached well into western Queensland. But as there had been repeated cyclones that wiped out Far North Queensland's banana crops, reporters in capital cities had previously seen the impact in the short-term increase of the price of bananas by more than fivefold. Cyclone Larry in 2006 had a particularly large economic impact after damage to infrastructure and crops. By the time of Cyclone Yasi, reporters were already familiar with a few follow-up issues that would arise and the impact on the hip-pocket of the wider communities. The report 'Cyclone Yasi' by ABC journalist John Taylor (Taylor 2011) serves as an example. It was used for television current affairs, including *Landline*, and had many details and connections about the plight of farmers and ramifications to consumers 'hip pockets' (that is the higher cost of bananas). John Taylor used this background information to inform his reports into the ABC's short 90 second news reports. However, as he is a current affairs reporter, this was no doubt to his advantage, as he broke down the long form reports into shorter ones for live crosses in the news bulletins. This further serves the case for knowledge of economics for journalists. General journalists (and their news editors that assign the stories) are more familiar with the economic effects that 'mother nature' can have on north Queensland due to recent history of reporting these events.

This style of reporting on the economic impacts can be applied to other rural and regional areas and links can be made once reporters have more of knowledge of what to look for as my guidebook outlines.

5.4 Theory and Practice

While the above sections point to how journalists' initial reporting of a news event can include more thought about possible economic effects on businesses and individuals, it is also important to consider how follow-up reporting can allow journalists opportunities to explain further ramifications. In Bowman's Level Three of reporting, journalists can reflect and look for different links to a story (see Chapter 2 of this exegesis). Many of the links can be made by following up contacts from the initial reporting of the event and key reports from a range of agencies, from local government to a national level.

In the case of the 2010/2011 flooding, the extent of the 'mosaic' of flooded farmlands was noted in government reports that collect information about Australia's commodity exports. To gather information about the effect on the whole of the economy journalists covering rural and regional issues can use the resources of government agencies such as the Australian bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES). ABARES offer easy to access and easy to read reports summarizing the main economic issues regarding the contribution of rural and regional commodities to Australia's overall economy, such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP). ABARES documents past performance and forecasts expected growth or loss of commodities. The ABARES reports note the cause and effect phenomena – that is the economic outcomes caused by particular events such as droughts, floods or government policy can cause.

For example, ABARES documented the costs to national income from losses in primary industries caused by the floods in Queensland over the summer

of 2010/2011. In March 2011, ABARES released its key March quarter review of Australian commodities. ABARES (2011, p 16) reported heavy rainfall across eastern Australia from late November onwards had reduced agricultural production by around \$2.3 billion in 2010-11, with particularly significant impacts on the production of winter crops, fruit and vegetables, cotton, grain and sorghum. There were also impacts on livestock due to the disruptions to transport and infrastructure. The report noted it did not take into account the cost of loss of farm infrastructure and assets in the figures (ABARES 2011).

In mining, ABARES estimated the volume cost to Queensland's coal exports to be 15 million tonnes lower for the December 2010 – March 2011 period than expected. ABARES calculated that as a reduction in export earnings of \$2 – 2.25 billion dollars, depending on final price settlements.

The above figures did not take into account the effects of Cyclone Yasi. ABARES reported a further \$300 million dollars in damage, principally to banana and sugar crops, due to Cyclone Yasi (ABARES 2011). For the effect of the summer's weather on the wider community, ABARES reported significant rises in the price of fruit, vegetables, domestic holiday travel and accommodation, automobile fuel and houses.

My guidebook provides websites for reports such as those available from ABARES and provides tips for journalists on what to look for in other key economic reports.

5.5 Conclusion: The Case for Economics Training for Journalists

This Chapter indicates how general journalists can draw the links between different sources of information to report on the financial effect or ramifications on people's welfare of issues reported in the news. As journalists are skilled communicators, it is also their role to convey this

economic and financial information in not only a useful way, but with an engaging manner to encourage viewers to take notice and action. The role of the reporter is highlighted in that while Australia is regulated by government policies, in a democratic government, such economic policies need to be understood – citizens must have the information at hand to make good economic decisions. As then Federal Assistant Treasurer Helen Coonan stated in 2004: “Many of the issues that we face are behavioral ones rather than regulatory ones... we cannot rely on legislation to stop people wasting or mismanaging their money” (Coonan 2004, np). However, journalists must still be questioning of governments as to the regulations employed, as well as communicating the information to audiences.

The significance of this is recognized in a guidebook created by specialist finance news service Bloomberg for its reporters, it states that commodities traditionally have not received the thorough, insightful and well-written coverage given to stocks, bonds and currencies. “Our goal at Bloomberg is to break that tradition, because commodities have a direct effect on people’s wealth, even if they don’t own a single share or bond and don’t travel abroad (Bloomberg 1998, 117). The guide further explains:

If the price of oil rises, for instance, consumers stand to pay more to fuel up their cars and trucks and to heat their homes. Higher coffee, orange juice or pork belly prices can make their breakfast more expensive. And increases in cotton prices can do the same for blue jeans. (Bloomberg, 1998, p 117)

Encouraging for general journalists who do not consider themselves specialist finance reporters, the Bloomberg guide advises journalists not to revert to financial jargon. “This means our commodity market coverage has to provide clear, concise explanations of price moves, and to avoid getting tangled in the jargon of those who benefit from keeping the market opaque” (Bloomberg 1998, 118). Krueger (2003,

32) noted journalists must bridge the divide between the technician and the technophobe:

If you want to show why economic issues are important and you want your story to be given prominence, it is worth the effort to strip away the jargon and sift through the numbers to find the ones that matter most.

Reflecting on my experience at the ABC, there were intelligent journalists capable of covering any topic, yet they hesitated if a story had a strong finance, business or economic orientation for the general news bulletin. The same journalists could cover political policies, police, court and breaking news, but hesitated when stories appeared to be focused on finance or economics. But with a lack of prior training or professional development this will undoubtedly require extra reading and training into an already heavy daily load for journalists. My accompanying guidebook contains suggestions for quick references that can be found easily online.

Journalists do not need to be specialist finance commentators in order to achieve this in general news reporting, but they need to employ that fundamental inner drive of curiosity until they are satisfied with the answers. Krueger encouraged journalists thus:

Do not be afraid to ask the dumb question. Economists can be notoriously unhelpful when it comes to simplifying facts and arguments. Too many of them only want to talk to other economists. Do not be put off, though. If somebody cannot explain their case clearly, it can often mean that they are not wholly sure of their facts. (Krueger 2003, 32)

CHAPTER 6: DESIGNING THE GUIDEBOOK

6.1 Introduction

This Chapter describes the process for finding and gathering information for the guidebook (creative work) that accompanies this exegesis. It explains why I decided to create a guidebook and how this idea has developed from being just an economics guide, to a guidebook that synthesises economics information relevant to journalists reporting on rural and regional Australia.

6.2 Finding content to inform the guidebook

The process for finding information for the guidebook began nearly two decades ago when I commenced employment as a journalist. What began was a process of constantly adding to my general knowledge through research into each story that I covered, enriched by experienced news editors who guided me and imparted their own knowledge. However, I often felt that this was not enough. I had studied economics in secondary school. This was a good start for understanding basic concepts such as GDP and unlimited wants versus limited resources. But I knew this was only a starting point as I covered more complex journalism stories. I am sure many opportunities to explore other links and angles were missed in my daily plight to meet deadlines and efficiently get my copy in to the editor.

When I was working at CNN in 2003, veteran news anchor Stan Grant told me he would read approximately three hours a day to keep informed about current events and relevant topics. This proved to be a good formula for me also. I combined general newspapers, online sites, specialist economics/finances newspapers and magazines, historical novels or non-fiction books and journalism practice books where possible. This was on top of the daily readings of news wires, press releases and general research at the workplace.

From these experiences I often thought how useful it would be to have a more formal guidebook on economics that ‘put it altogether’, that is, gave the important background or theory and made it relevant to journalism. In creating such a guidebook, I had the wider task of finding the economic fundamentals, sifting through information and representing it in a way that would be relevant and quick and easy to understand for busy journalists. Goddard et al (1998, 11-12) noted economics is widely considered to be “difficult technically.. and also a subject notorious for the wide range of views which can be held about the same data.” My goal was to develop a strong foundation of the formal foundation of economics that explained the main economic theories – not so much so that I could join the debate over data, but so I could understand if a source or commentator in a report held a particular economic view, what theory that might be based on.

The combined insights provided by interviews, formal study and my industry experience were fundamental in my ability first to determine what topics needed to be addressed in the guidebook and second to generate the content for the guidebook. A goal of the interviews was to find the general views/consensus of the industry experts (economists and experts). The aim from the formal study was to summarize the important fundamentals of economics and to fill in any gaps/enrich my own knowledge picked up from my own readings.

Regarding this thesis’s primary research interviews, as noted in Chapter 3.3.1, I sought to efficiently choose interviewees who could explain the generally held views from their industries and provide information from the informants’ experience that had a direct relevance to my thesis aims. As was explained in Chapter 3.3.1, Vallance and Lee (2005, 5) noted “the striking or insightful observation of a relatively few informants may be qualitatively more important than the weight of what most said, if that insight demonstrates a usefulness to better understand the phenomenon at hand.” In this case I focused on news editors from mainstream Queensland television news stations rather than news editors of all

media organizations. In the same way, for efficiency and relevance, I chose economics experts with direct interest in or experience in rural/regional issues. These experts also were experienced with dealing with the media or observing their area of expertise's subject area in the media.

6.3 Creating the Guidebook

The guidebook is a modern-day reference or professional development tool for journalists. The aim was to create something that journalists will actually use and fit into their daily work flow. I didn't want to create what would be, in the words of Channel 9's News Editor Paul Reed, "just another reference book that would gather dust on the shelves".

Both my work practice-based observations and comments by the editors who were interviewed confirmed that the guidebook's layout and content had to take into account the practicalities and the pressure on journalists to be efficient in meeting deadlines. In particular this is why the guidebook contains a 'quick start' in Chapter 1 of key terms, strategies and sources of information. Instead of leaving the glossary of terms at the end of the guidebook or as an appendix, I started with it. This is because I didn't want journalists to waste any time when searching for definitions and explanations about economic and financial terms or jargon. I noted from my previous employment at CNN the shift away from using financial jargon in reports. This had previously kept finance stories the exclusive domain of the 'specialists', and my goal was to follow in the practice of opening up issues relating to economics for general journalists so that they can report to the general public. Chapter 1 also lists the key reports that the economics experts listed as the most use for journalists. Again, I put this at the start of the guidebook for easy access and to also highlight the importance of these sources of information for journalists. I am competing for journalists' attention and my goal was to capture it fast.

Chapter 2 of the guidebook explains how important the primary industries are to the Australian economy. Chapter 2 explains Australia's rich natural assets in resources which then lead on to Chapter 3, which is a case study of China's economic growth over the past thirty years. The aim was for journalists to understand why there is so much discussion about China and 'emerging countries' and exactly what this means to Australia. Chapter 3 synthesises the information about China's growth with the opportunities (past and present) that this creates for Australia – that Australia can supply resources to emerging countries which means an increase in Australia's national income. These two Chapters also focus on the importance of agriculture in Australia's economy and the potential for future opportunities. Australian agriculture supplies over 90 per cent of Australia's food needs and still can export huge quantities. With rising populations and emerging economies geographically close to Australia this represents current and future trade opportunities.

Chapter 3's Case Study on China's phenomenal economic growth over the past thirty years explained in detail the economic drivers that lead to massive increases in GDP and improvement of living standards for hundreds of thousands of people. A change in government policy to open the economy up to foreign trade, allow foreign direct investment and build massive infrastructure projects (highways, buildings, ports) were some of the key reasons leading to economic growth. I highlighted China as finance and business commentators as well as government leaders regularly give a brief mention to "China" in the media. Part of the aim was for journalists to understand properly the history and implications of China's recent economic development. This is because China's growth has had ramifications on Australia's national income. Australia and China have become important economic partners in the past 15 years. As Mai et al (2005, 7) explain, the strong development of an economic partnership between Australia and China is due, in the main, to the "complementarity in the dynamics of the two economies" which results in trade between the two countries. In simple terms, Australia has the raw

ingredients (e.g. iron-ore, coal) that are turned into the building blocks or energy used to create infrastructure in China.

From Chapter 1 to Chapter 3 journalists will have read a lot about the economy and learnt about economic issues in an easy to read manner without having studied any 'heavy' or formal aspects of economic theory. I use the background from Chapter 1 to Chapter 3 to introduce the main elements of microeconomic and macroeconomic theories in Chapters 4 and 5. My formal studies informed most of the content regarding the microeconomic and macroeconomic theories, however my practice-based observations and information from my primary research interviews then related that theory to the every-day practice of economics and how this is relevant for reporters covering rural and regional Australia. The guidebook covers economic policies and issues surrounding trade including how tariffs, quotas and exchange rates affect international prices and supply and demand. The guidebook also explains the effect of interest rate changes and the high Australian dollar. Examples were given of how the theory could be applied by journalists covering any issue related to primary industries.

Standard economic theories such as creative destruction and Keynesianism are also explained in detail and included in the macroeconomics section (Chapter 5) and built on with reference to how a journalist would apply these concepts to rural and regional issues. I found the correlation between these theories with many of the stories covered by journalists and pointed out that journalists need to be aware of the 'vested interests' that each side to a story has. While each side will passionately proclaim they are right, or are being terribly 'wronged', journalists armed with information about these theories will be able to ask other sources about the bigger picture and whether what is happening is good for the overall economy.

Chapter 5 builds on the economic concepts further by exploring some specificities of rural financial issues, for example how the seasons, weather and economic tools add to the business risks and greatly affect a farmer's cash flow. The goal was for

journalists to understand that farmers do not have the security of a regular income that most other wage earners do. The aim was for journalists to understand this situation in an attempt to build empathy in journalists for the farmers' situation.

Chapter 7 introduces the concept of the economics of the environment. My work at *Landline* included many stories covering the environment and how that relates to primary industries. This included the technological advances used in agriculture to minimise harm to the environment. My formal studies of economics introduced theories of economics and the environment – that is how economic policies can be used to help mitigate greenhouse gases. The aim was to give a theoretical background of economics and the environment because environmental policies are covered more and more in the media and are often the source of controversial stories as politicians, lobby groups and business leaders have opposing views on policy tools such as carbon taxes.

As noted earlier in this exegesis, it is my aim to deliver the guidebook online. That will further make it accessible for journalists who are used to gathering research on computers and smart phones.

6.3 Conclusions

After working in the industry for more than a decade the aim was to consolidate my experience via a guidebook that would help journalists to cover the complex economic issues that I had witnessed affecting rural and regional Australia. In addition to drawing from my experience, I undertook formal economics training for this thesis to help me to reflect on what I had seen when covering various industries and politics and to enrich that experience. This was further supported by the insights from the economic experts interviewed for this research. I then used information from the news editors to design a guidebook that would be practical and useful for journalists.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

This research project is driven by a premise that both the background knowledge of economics and a regular updating of knowledge of key economic events and reports enable journalists to report with more confidence and authority as well as to draw links between events, cause and effect and subsequent economic ramifications affecting people's welfare. This premise was reinforced by the findings of interviews with news editors and economic experts. The research found practical ways reporters can build such knowledge to satisfy the suggestions of the experts interviewed, without interfering with the day-to-day expectations of a busy newsroom.

As noted in Chapter 1 of this exegesis, the aim of this thesis is to provide a practical outline of relevant economic fundamentals for journalists covering issues and events affecting primary industries in rural or regional Australia. The information gathered from my primary research, formal studies and practice-base observations was drawn together in the creation of a guidebook (creative work). The guidebook was designed so that any journalist (whether a city-based or rural-based, specialist or general journalist) can use the information for more insight into economic ramifications when reporting on any topic that involves rural and regional Australia. For example in my practice-based experiences I witnessed city-based journalists being flown in to help cover news events in rural and regional areas. The city-based journalists could use the guidebook as a quick reference even on the commute to the regional or rural location.

Economic experts noted that the 'down trodden' image of the farmer is often reinforced in the media. The experts noted however that this image is not necessarily an accurate one. This is also something I have observed covering rural and regional issues as a reporter. Many in the primary industries are working to keep updated with the latest technology and provide positive changes, for example

in better environmental practices. This is a positive image that farmers and lobby groups want the nation to be aware of.

This thesis adds to the body of research regarding finance training for journalists, particular with a focus on regional and rural economics. As noted in Chapter 1.2, Ludwig (2002, 129) is among a number of researchers who have argued the academic literature on training of business journalists is “somewhat scant”. No research has focused on financial journalism about or affecting Australia’s major rural and regional industries. Given that commodity exports, environmental issues, weather phenomena and international economics are more and more leading the media reports, such research is relevant and timely.

My research does not stop at merely providing theoretical information. The aim of the research for the exegesis and creative work is to help journalists to develop a more sophisticated approach in their journalism, in a way that theory indicates would generate stories that provide information that is of greater benefit to society. In order to achieve the research aim, the theoretical framework of the exegesis draws on scholarly works in a number of theoretical areas:

1. Constraints on journalists
2. Journalistic construction
3. Public journalism
4. Transdisciplinary theories.

Theories about constraints on journalists included literature from Bowman, Linksy and Iyengar. Bowman (2005) noted a central theme for journalism critiques is that the organizational and commercial pressures of news production stymie an intellectual approach to journalism inquiry. Linksy (1988, 214) noted journalists “obsession” covering formal “events” rather than the truth and Iyengar (1991, 2-3)

noted that television news coverage is largely 'episodic' rather than thematic, thus events are not framed in a broader structural and social context.

Findings and responses from the interviews with News Editors endorsed the perspectives of these theorists as explained in detail the Theoretical Framework. The above critiques suggest that time constraints, brought about by the need for journalists to rush to meet organizations' news deadlines, and cost constraints to work within organizational staffing levels and budgets greatly affect the journalistic process.

Bowman's (2005) three levels of construction in reporting parallels with the above theories. That is level one, the "reactive" stage is most often used by journalists in response to covering what Linksy (1988) described above as a formal "event". Level two in Bowman's theory then noted that after the initial reactive stage journalists can begin to consider the wider context of the issue and what happened. Level three then looks at more deep-seated societal trends and considers other patterns and trends. Level two and level three in Bowman's construction were crucial in my aims towards creating a guidebook that promoted public journalism-style strategies so that journalists' reporting can help to improve society's understanding and facilitate solutions to problems such as considering ongoing ramifications on rural and regional areas after weather events such as repeated flooding or drought. It is in level two and level three that journalists can put the links and different angles of an issue together. Findings from the interviews with the News Editors again supported that this could be a real possibility in newsrooms. All of the Editors noted time constraints, but all were amenable to follow up stories by their reporters.

The Theoretical Framework also introduced the concept of networks. I had noted in my work as a journalist that each story has a 'cause and effect' element. That is, an event may occur (cause) and have an effect (or ramification). But there can be many different effects or ramifications that can stem from events due to different

networks in place. That is one news event in one part of the world can have economic and welfare implications and repercussions in another part of the world. Journalists will need to consider Iorio's (2004) theories exploring triangulation, to consider the possible links and networks associated with an event that is being covered in the news. This leads to my inclusion of the theory and literature on transdisciplinarity. News Editors were amenable to follow-up stories by reporters (that is journalists doing stories at a later date to add more information or angles about the news event) and noted that a 'broad' knowledge about the economy was important. However, there was no suggestion from Editors about how journalists can improve their economics knowledge or consider different links for follow-up stories. The guidebook brings together economic knowledge and relates this to rural and regional Australia in a practical manner for journalists to use. This is an example of transdisciplinarity – combining the domain of economics with the domain of journalism as opposed to multi-disciplinary study which would be the study of the two domains separately.

Many different methods of ascertaining, gathering and collating information were used to meet the aims and goals of the Masters of Arts (research) project. Qualitative research can gather information from informants and the researcher then searches for "patterns, themes, categories and regularities" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000, 147). Four main methods of research were used to achieve the aims of the thesis and inform the guidebook:

1. Interviews with professional news editors.
2. Interviews with economists and rural industry experts with a financial focus. Note, for simplicity, this second group of interviewees is referred to as 'Economists'.
3. Formal economics/finance study including enrolment in an economics elective unit at QUT.

4. Practice- based observations, notes and transcripts from my professional career in journalism.

From the interviews, my aim was to reveal real-life news room practices given by News Editors from the perspective of commercial mainstream television stations to inform my research, and 'real life' information from the economists about how economic theory is applied in the 'real world' with direct relevance to primary industries. As noted above, the responses from the News Editors directly confirmed my theoretical framework as well as giving information about how I could address the constraints on journalists yet achieve the aims of my thesis. Economists were able to identify typical mistakes that journalists make regarding economic reporting and how to rectify these issues. Information from the industry economists directly informed the contents of the guidebook by relating economic theory and literature to primary industries reporting.

As noted in Chapter 3.6 I used practice-based reflections from my employment in two capacities at the ABC at the time of my research period for my Masters of Arts: As a current affairs anchor and senior reporter with *Landline* and as a news presenter and weather reporter/presenter in the Brisbane daily television newsroom. The *Landline* stories highlight the links between economics and the affect this can have on welfare. These stories also helped to inform my reflection from working in the newsroom. My practice-based observations identified areas where transdisciplinarity would be of use for reporters. For example, there was little consideration about the ramifications for rural and regional Australia when reporting on the wide-spread flooding over Queensland during the summer of 2010/11. The practice-based observations identified areas where level two and level three reporting from Bowman's (2005) story construction theory could be applied. The example from my practice-base observations and examples of work include follow up stories into the wide-spread flooding to consider the wider context and effects on society. A creative piece 'Bushfire Symposium' (Kruger,

2009) see Appendix 2, also gave an example of how level two reporting can follow up on the cause of an event such as the Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria and the early stages of level three reporting where experts can offer solutions for society to consider.

The tangible outcome of my research is the main creative piece the guidebook, titled 'In the field: a reporters' guide to the economic fundamentals of Australia's economy'. This guidebook gathers together the real-life information from News Editors, industry economists as well as my formal theoretical studies of economics and application from practice-based observations of the news and current affairs. The guidebook addresses modern-day issues such as the environment and the latest considerations of economic growth in Australia and developing countries. The guidebook is useful to a wide-range of journalists. Rural and regional journalists cover issues relating to farming and mining production on a daily basis, while other general reporters may cover primary industry issues if sent to report on stories such as natural disasters, the environment and sustainability. Regardless of whether the reporter is a specialist rural reporter or a general news reporter, their understanding of the financial frameworks for these critical economic sectors is often weak.

ABC News Editor Bernard Bowen stated, "The more knowledge, the better the reporter." Examples of how the guidebook applies economics knowledge to journalism covering Australian primary industries include:

- Australia-China trade.
- Economic policies and issues surrounding trade including how tariffs, quotas and exchange rates affect international prices and supply and demand, and the effect of interest rate changes and the high Australian dollar.
- Standard economic theories such as creative destruction and Keynesianism.

By applying knowledge gained in the guidebook journalists can practise elements of public journalism, so that reporters can facilitate or direct their audience to draw links about their community as a whole. Public journalism expands the traditional role of journalism and the way journalists can serve society. Kingston (2009, 5) describes the public journalism people as “Apostles of a cause... for them the challenge was not merely to tell what had happened but to open the way to what could happen – and the role that the public, their readers, might play if they assumed their responsibility as citizens of our democracy”. The aim of this Masters of Arts research will truly be achieved if journalists use the guidebook to ‘open the way to what could happen’ via their reporting of issues that affect the economic fundamentals of rural and regional Australia.

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Appendix

Transcript 1

Between Hell and High Water

ABC TV *Landline* interview by presenter Anne Kruger

Broadcast 15/02/2009

Available from ABC Archive:

<http://www.abc.net.au/landline/content/2008/s2490546.htm>

Transcript from ABC Archive:

ANNE KRUGER, PRESENTER: Hello, I'm Anne Kruger. Welcome to the program. In a week when the thoughts of the nation have been firmly focused on the tragic events in Victoria, we've seen the courage of volunteer fire-fighters, friends and neighbours, and the resilience and character of small communities. We'll bring you up to date on the help that's on its way to those fire-ravaged townships and, for that matter, to those in Far North Queensland cleaning up after the worst floods in three decades. Well, joining me now is *Landline* reporter Chris Clark in Victoria. Well, Chris, can you give us a sense of what's been destroyed and where?

CHRIS CLARKE, REPORTER: Anne, the fires in Victoria were in several different places. Several large fires or fire complexes, combinations of fires. We are on the western edge of what became the largest and the deadliest fire. We are about an hour's drive north of Melbourne, just off the Hume Highway. The Hume Highway is just over there; the main road between Melbourne and Sydney and this fire actually began behind me, which is more or less north-west, headed south, and then a wind change late in the afternoon pushed it up to the north-east. The result is well, you can see some of it behind me. That used to be a wool shed. The man who farms this property, Brian Kelly, had 450 Merino wethers ready to put onto a truck, but when the flames came through, there was no way he could get back here in time or safely to get them out, so they were literally incinerated on this spot.

ANNE KRUGER: What sort of losses have there been typically to agriculture?

CHRIS CLARKE: The losses depend a little bit on which fire you are talking about. Up in the north-east, there's a bit of horticulture around the Beechworth area. There's also a lot of mixed farming. There are reports from the Department of Primary Industry, the State Government agency here, of quite heavy cattle losses up there.

There'll also be, one suspects, damage to horticulture in that area. In South Gippsland, as well, there've been stock losses, cattle and sheep. In this area, and the area east of here, it's very heavy hobby-farm country, so we've got a range of things. It's sheep-grazing country here where we are right now, but as you go east, there are a lot of hobby-farms out that way, and so the damage there will involve the loss of stock on everything from horses to goats, poultry, alpacas and, of course, a lot of vineyards have been affected because it takes in sections of the Yarra Valley, as well, which is a big wine grape-growing area down in Victoria. There have been some vineyards literally burnt, but also, in terms of losses, there could be severe damage from smoke taint in the fruit that's only a month or two away from harvest.

So the damage is considerable and widespread, and varies from place to place.

ANNE KRUGER: And what sort of help is needed now? What's been on offer?

CHRIS CLARKE: There have been a lot of things offered. There have already been emergency supplies of fodder trucked in and, obviously, for the stock that has survived, that's an urgent problem because there is virtually nothing to eat on the ground, so an important thing has been to get fodder in from both South Australia and other parts of Victoria. That's been already coming in. That will continue to be a need well into the future because, clearly, a lot of pasture has been destroyed, and the rehabilitation of pasture in the longer term is going to be a big issue here. There are other, more immediate issues, of course; that is, the stock that survived has to be contained somehow, but so many fences have been burnt out down here that that's a difficult task. Not only is it going to be difficult over the coming weeks and months to get fencing materials, because there'll be such demand, it will be difficult to get people to do the fencing for you. All sorts of practical problems like that.

So, a huge range of problems. There have been funds opened by farm organisations and others, donations from people who've been doing stock sales during the last week or so, a lot of help is coming in, but an awful lot of help is going to be needed, not just in the short term, but over quite a long period, Anne.

ANNE KRUGER: They reckon pressure makes diamonds, and no more so than in the case of flood-ravaged North Queenslanders. Instead of feeling sorry for themselves, some have even donated their disaster relief assistance to bushfire victims.

QUEENSLAND FLOOD VICTIM: I'm donating to the Red Cross I heard their number this morning I've written it down at home, and I will be donating my money.

ANNE KRUGER: Well, joining us now from North Queensland is ABC reporter Megan Pailthorpe. Well, Megan, you've spent the last couple of weeks now with the most hardest hit communities. Now, this gesture of kindness towards Victorians is pretty typical of the attitude of people under the pump, isn't it?

MEGAN PAILTHORPE, REPORTER: That's right. It's very much indicative of those people in North Queensland. It's quite amazing. I've spent the last week in and out of Ingham with people cleaning up, dealing with yet another flood, and then to have two floods in six days and turn around and say, "We don't need your Red Cross support. We'd rather give it to the people of Victoria".

ANNE KRUGER: Well, there are a few towns in the top half of Queensland that haven't been affected, if not devastated, by the monsoon and cyclone system, so how big an area are we actually talking about?

MEGAN PAILTHORPE: There's about 35 shires in Queensland that are now disaster-declared, 62 per cent of Queensland is flood-affected, that's an area larger than the size of South Australia. So a massive amount of area dealing with a natural disaster at the moment. And obviously taking in to such a huge amount of area, it's a lot of money, too, that's going have to be spent rebuilding these communities, rebuilding crops, rebuilding infrastructure and roads. Just here in Ingham, we are looking at hundreds of millions of dollars to get this region back on its feet.

ANNE KRUGER: Is it too early to estimate the damage bill to properties, stock, crops, and the lost production yet?

MEGAN PAILTHORPE: As far as cattle goes, it's still very early days. A lot of people are mustering from the air, and trying to get as much of their cattle back on to higher ground, but in the Gulf areas it's way too early to tell. We are hearing stories of some people losing up to 1,000 head of cattle just on a few areas, so that's too early to tell. As far as the cane goes, here in Ingham, productivity losses are estimated at around 20 per cent. In the Burdekin area, we are looking at productivity losses of around 10 per cent, and in the Tully and far northern area, about 5 per cent.

Now, that's the equivalent of 200,000 tonnes of sugar cane lost this season alone, and that amounts to \$80 million to \$90 million of lost production, and we are looking at \$45 million at least to get these people back on their feet again, just with roads and fences and that sort of thing. Another way you can look at it, though, is that the water will be a tremendous boost for graziers this season from one end of Queensland to the other, though, won't it?

MEGAN PAILTHORPE: That's right, and I guess a really prime example of this is the town of Boulia; the cattle kings of Queensland. They were down to nearly destocked by the end of last year.

They've been praying for rain for nearly a decade now. This is a place that ran hundreds of thousands head of cattle. They were down to about 9,000 by the end of last year, so this rain could not have come a second sooner. They are hopeful that actually, quite funny they are hoping for more rain so they continue to get some good

groundcover by the end of March, get into the cooler months, and hopefully start restocking throughout the rest of the year.

ANNE KRUGER: Well, we'll keep following the situation. Megan Pailthorpe, thanks very much for joining us.

MEGAN PAILTHORPE: Thank you, Anne.

ANNE KRUGER: To Parliament House in Canberra now, where Federal Agriculture Minister Tony Burke joins us.

Minister, thanks for your time.

TONY BURKE, FEDERAL AGRICULTURAL MINISTER: Hi.

ANNE KRUGER: Quite appropriately, the emphasis in Victoria this week has been on dealing with the human dimensions to this tragedy, and supporting the families who've lost loved ones and their homes, and those that have been seriously injured, so it's going to take a considerable effort by Federal, State and local authorities to take care of these people, and get them over the next few weeks and months, isn't it?

TONY BURKE: And some of the challenges that you talk about there, Anne, will go much further than that, and it won't simply be families that are affected directly by the disaster, it will be some of the people who have been part of the rescue effort, as well, who, with some of the tasks they are being asked to perform, will be going through some really traumatic experiences.

ANNE KRUGER: So what have you and your State colleagues been able to set in place just over the last few days, to get that process underway?

TONY BURKE: Anne, it doesn't just go to Government authorities. You've got a situation where every Australian is wanting to do whatever they can. For many people, that's been by way of donations. For a whole lot of farmers in NSW, SA and Victoria, they have been donating feed, and there's been a relocation effort of that feed that's been coordinated through the VFF and supported by the Victorian Government. And, beyond that, it goes all the way through to shopping habits. I mean, people who would normally be fussy about blemished fruit or veggies, for the next few months, you know, it's going to taste just as good, and it's a very practical way of making sure that they are actually helping those farmers who have been able to produce some of their produce and get it to markets, simply by people being less fussy than they might otherwise have been over the next few months.

But, beyond that, there is the Government role that you asked, and we are in the process now of looking at how we would deal with those business challenges. Many farmers, themselves, have been dealing so much with the human tragedy that they

haven't turned their minds to the business problems yet. It's a bit hard to focus completely on counting the stock when the rest of the nation is still counting how many friends they've lost.

And, so, that work will be done. Some of the damage isn't as bad as we thought it might be, in terms of stock numbers, but certainly permanent plantings, there's been massive damage, and that will take some years to replace. Some dairies have been destroyed completely, and, thankfully, neighbours have been allowing their farmer over the fence, what used to be a fence, to be able to use their dairy to make sure that they can keep those cows in production. There's a lot of practical work on the ground at the moment before we actually get to the Government stage to help with the rebuilding.

ANNE KRUGER: Agriculture Minister Tony Burke, many thanks.

TONY BURKE: Thanks, Anne.

Transcript 2

Bushfire Symposium

ABC TV *Landline* interview by presenter Anne Kruger

Broadcast 28/09/2009

Available from ABC Archive:

<http://www.abc.net.au/landline/content/2008/s2697684.htm>

Transcript from ABC Archive:

ANNE KRUGER, PRESENTER: Australia's just come out of its second-warmest winter on record and spring is feeling more like summer in many regions so far. Extreme weather conditions this week prompted total fire bans for more than half of Queensland and experts say southern states are also facing an early start to the fire season. International scientists have gathered this week on the Gold Coast to discuss the latest in fire research and I'm joined by Gary Morgan from Australia's Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre. Gary Morgan, welcome to *Landline*.

GARY MORGAN, BUSHFIRE COOPERATIVE RESEARCH CENTRE: Thank you very much.

ANNE KRUGER: Let's start with the current and coming bushfire seasons. What can we expect?

GARY MORGAN: OK, right at the moment Queensland is in a very hot condition. Even today it's a total fire ban and it's expected that in the hinterland it will be above average fire potential this season and that's characteristic right down through the southern part of Australia. In fact, for the last four years, when the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre has been doing season forecasting, this is the worst year, worst forecast in the last four for the southern part of Australia with the exception of Tasmania. Tasmania had wonderful rains, so they are a lot better than what they were last year. However, from the bottom part of NSW through Victoria, South Australia, where the populated area is, and over on the south-west part of Western Australia, are all above average fire potential for this summer. So that's even worse than what it was last year when we had the tragic events in Victoria.

ANNE KRUGER: The National Bushfire Warning Systems has recently been overhauled and there's more of an emphasis now on leaving early rather than staying and defending. What's been the research into this?

GARY MORGAN: It's very interesting. The Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre did do good research for the industry to base their policy and their national position on it. And that was clearly - it's about the emphasis on the preparation well beforehand and as a result of the tragic events, like, in Victoria, the industry has had a reassessment of that and are looking about where to go forwards. And while the underpinning knowledge is still sound and relevant, it's the messaging which we are learning because it was always quite clear that it wasn't meant that everybody should be staying and defending because you had to be physically and mentally capable, you had to have done the preparation around your home. So the messaging is now quite clear to get people to prepare and focusing on the preparing and also being aware that if they are not physically and mentally capable, to leave, and leave early. Now, even for the tragic events in Victoria, the Premier of Victoria made announcements warning the community and people didn't take any action on that, they waited until they saw the flames, which is the - our research is saying it is the absolute worst time and we really encourage people not to do that. But if you take it to the other side and look at floods. Same sort of thing happened with the floods this year in Queensland when there was warnings about the floods, people were given notice that the water levels were going to rise and yet cars were still flooded in underground car parks, where they knew that they would flood. So once again, people in two different types of natural events have heard messages but not responded. So what we are looking at is how do we help the community and how do we help the agencies get the right sort of messaging out so that communities take the right action to safeguard their own safety and the safety of others because, in all this, life is the paramount thing which we are looking at. So that's where we are coming from.

ANNE KRUGER: So what mechanisms are there to alert the public?

GARY MORGAN: Some of the research which we've undertaken - the Bushfire CRC - has been about what people should do and how to. We've only just begun that. Prior to the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre, there was no nationally coordinated research centre. It seems strange for Australia not to have nationally coordinated research on bushfires. That wasn't the case, it's been set up - over the last six years we've gone into it. One of the areas we focused on was the social science, something which - there was no research on the social science of bushfires prior to that on a national basis, and so we've got a wealth of knowledge which goes into volunteerism and about communities and about people who have come in as refugees, such as Sudanese communities - how to get the message to them, but we've only just scratched the surface and we really need to go a lot longer on this. Now while we have only gone for a short time we are being looked at from international areas to say, "What have we learnt and where are we going to and how can we help?" and we are working with people from overseas. So we have workers in the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre who are working with others internationally, such as America. There's a lady here at this conference today from America who's been doing research with one of our researchers in Australia.

ANNE KRUGER: Well, you mentioned the US. In California they undertake mass evacuations but here in Australia the emphasis is on leaving early, sometimes up to two days early, before the bushfire is right upon us. Have we got the actual technology and those mechanisms in place to get the public out?

GARY MORGAN: It's an interesting question and it's one which the Royal Commission is delving into as well. But clearly there's a - in the interim report of the Royal Commission they came out and said that there wasn't a lot of support for the evacuation side and the research which Bushfire CRC conducted indicates that that's probably not the best course of action to undertake. However, we are not saying - that's evacuation from a large scale.

ANNE KRUGER: You mean a last-minute - When the flames are there?

GARY MORGAN: But we do encourage people to relocate at other times, so they are not there if they are not going to take the actions. And also it's not just for a given day. We have different fire dangers on different days and different fire intensities. And someone might be very comfortable about being there for a low-intensity fire and they might have experienced that in the past and be competent to handle it. But as the years go on and a person is getting older and they might not be as physically able to so what they were able to cope with in the past, they might not be able to cope with now and they have to assess that. And what the agency is looking at is the good realisation that there can't be a fire truck at every house, no way known, because we don't have enough trucks. And we know that in Australia we are going to have more bushfires. Bushfires have shaped our environment, we had - the vegetation we have, the eucalypt vegetation, while it's very flammable, it's been shaped by fires and the biodiversity that we have as a result of fires. However, too frequent or not enough fires lowers our biodiversity. We also know that in some places we have trees such as the Eucalyptus regnans, the mountain ash, which around where Marysville area, where Marysville got burnt, that's the tallest flowering plant in the world. That ecosystem needs fires of a stand replacement intensity for the perpetuation of the ecosystem. If that's the case and then we go and insert a house within that ecosystem, at some stage there's going to be a fire that's going to burn through there, and that's going to result in an intensity which puts a high likelihood of consuming a home or whatever other asset we have there. So part of our research goes back to looking at the planning side as well and saying right, not just when the fire occurs, not just in the season, but stepping back earlier on, should we have planning subdivisions in those locations?

If there is houses there and now we have knowledge saying, "Hey, this is a highly risky environment," people then have choices. I mean, I love that environment and I like to live there, but it's a risk and if you live there you have to have the risk. You've got a good chance a house would get burnt.

ANNE KRUGER: So do some people in certain areas simply have to be prepared to leave early and give their house up?

GARY MORGAN: Well, that's a personal decision, it's not something I think I, from the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre, nor would I see any agency telling a person - it's personal choice to make. So people, what we are on about is giving people the knowledge and we have a good web site to get that out. The agencies have good websites for that out there and there's lots of brochures, but it really comes down to a personal choice. How do we get the information out? That's where the social science comes in. How do we make sure - people are going to make choices on lots of things. How do you get your head into that space?

But if someone is going to buy a house, we need local government to be involved in that as well. What we have now - just got - we've got one municipal association, Victorian Municipal Association has joined the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre for ongoing research, so that's a really good step. We've had Commonwealth and state and territories and we've now got the one local government. We'd like to get the other states involved as well. If that was the case, then we can start focusing more on these planning issues and the legislation that goes along with it.

ANNE KRUGER: Gary Morgan, CEO of the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre, thank you very much for joining us on Landline.

GARY MORGAN: Thank you very much.