Banks have pushed our farmers too far. RC must reveal the shocking truth.

Summary:
This coming round of the Royal Commission will reveal many sad stories and the horrific number of cases showing the ruthless and bad behaviour by bankers in the bush. Senator Williams sums it up very well “The stress on families, the marriage breakdowns, the suicides; there’s been a lot of harsh goings-on by the banks for too long and when it involves land, farms and breeding herds that have often been in the family for generations, you never get over (being forced off your land),”

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Farmers’ fury to be unleashed on banks as tragic tales laid bare

Deep anger over farm evictions, unconscionable rural lending and the enormous stress placed on isolated families by heavy-handed banks is set to reignite next week when the financial services royal commission sits in Brisbane for a special hearing on farm financing.

The commission will hear cases involving Rabobank, ANZ, Rural Bank, NAB and Bankwest that include a litany of forged signatures, unauthorised refinancing, missing cattle, hidden documents, devastating “on-paper” land value devaluations, asset fire sales by receivers and farm foreclosures without any loan repayments being missed.

The banks are bracing for a difficult week as many families from outback Queensland are preparing to descend on Brisbane to support the farmers who will appear before the commission, most of whom have lost their properties, livelihoods and — all too frequently — family members in the past five years.

While the details of witnesses to be called is not yet public, many of the cases selected by the royal commission are expected to involve foreclosures of Queensland cattle properties between 2012 and 2015, when the drought was at its worst, cattle prices hit rock bottom and the live cattle trade ban was biting hard.

In late 2014 — after the devastating toll of farm foreclosures, suicides and evictions in rural Queensland was publicly highlighted, including in a series of articles in The Australian — public outrage caused a change of attitude by major banks.

The ANZ bank led the way with a 12-month moratorium on all farm foreclosures, after then-chief executive Mike Smith said he was sorry for the way his bank had treated 80-year-old Winton cattleman Charlie Phillott.

Mr Phillott was thrown off his Carisbrooke Station nine months earlier after the banks devalued his land, despite the octogenarian and his wife Anne never having defaulted on their loan nor missed a debt repayment.

Mr Smith later personally returned the title deeds to rugged Carisbrooke to Mr Phillott, in a public act of contrition.

Mr Phillott, who became the public face of the farm foreclosure tragedy, said yesterday that while he had declined to personally appear before the royal commission’s hearings on rural debt and farm loans, **he expected the week to be torrid. “(The banks) will really be starting to shiver and so they should; I don’t think there will be any lingering doubt after this next week how badly so many farmers were treated,” Mr Phillott said.**

The Hayne commission is expected to focus on how a farm is not just a small business but a family home — often for generations — and the tragic trail of suicides, stress, cancers and deaths that has followed many families after they have been evicted by the banks.

Rural debt, covering 130,000 farm businesses, is running at $60 billion, down from a high of $70bn three years ago, but still equal to the value of Australia’s gross annual rural production.

Nationals senator John Williams who was deputy chair of last year’s Senate committee inquiry into rural lending — which has served as the source of many horrific cases for next week’s special hearings — expects the royal commission will focus on many sad stories and the plenty of cases of ruthless and bad behaviour by banks in the bush. “The stress on families, the marriage breakdowns, the suicides; there’s been a lot of harsh goings-on by the banks for too long and when it involves land, farms and breeding herds that have often been in the family for generations, you never get over (being forced off),” Senator Williams said.

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Maccie Whelan who committed suicide at 16 years old, from Charters Towers, Queensland.

Jim Whelan lost his two Cape York cattle stations, Dixie and Koolatah to the Rural Bank in 2013-14 at the height of the crisis when cattle once worth $800 were fetching less than $100 each, and the bank hiked interest rates and called in its $12 million debt. With no money to employ staff, Mr Whelan pulled 16-year-old son Mac out of school to help him run the 1.7 million acres of bush country and muster cattle from Dixie as it was sold, in the hope of hanging on to Koolatah. Mac shot himself when he was alone on Dixie station in 2013, worried about bank threats of liquidation and foreclosure. It's a story that Mr Whelan, whose youngest daughter Kaci is now battling bone cancer in a Brisbane hospital, wants to tell the royal commission.

"These banks have destroyed lives, marriages, families; this commission has to hear how the pressure these banks put on all of us cost my son his life and caused so many farmers to take their own," Mr Whelan said.

"I call it corporate manslaughter; they destroy you, bleed you dry and wreck your family until you have no money or spirit left to fight with."

A key focus of the royal commission's inquiry will also be on what happened during this period when the ANZ Bank took over the rural debts — known as the "loan book" — of the Landmark group, and the Commonwealth Bank acquired Bankwest's rural portfolio in late 2009. Both banks then brutally cracked down on what they saw as impaired or high-risk loans to specific farmers.

John Wharton, the mayor of gulf country town Richmond, expects to be one of the first to appear in the commission, detailing how he was rushed into receivership in 2011 with the loss of his outback cattle property Runnymede, 500km northwest of Townsville that had been in the family for 96 years.

In ugly scenes, police and security guards forced Mr Wharton, his wife and daughter from their family home of decades, and the property was sold "as fast as possible" by receivers KordaMentha.

"But we hadn't done anything wrong, we'd made all our payments, but our budgets were all changed (after the takeover) and they put us into default," Mr Wharton said yesterday.

He hopes the commission will expose the "'really bad things" done to people in the bush.

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All of the major banks contacted by The Australian declined to comment.

Source - Sue Neales - The Australian

If you or someone you know may be at risk of suicide, call Lifeline (13 11 14) or the Suicide Call Back Service (1300 659 467), or see a doctor.

BRN Comments - Round 4 is the Royal Commission's last chance to show us it means business. If you can be in Brisbane next week please come to the Royal Commission - 363 George St - to support our rural brothers and sisters. Cate Stuart (who was done in by Rabobank) is organising a vigil each day and Paul Herman (who was done in by NAB & ANZ) a gathering on Tuesday. See our Facebook page regularly this week for the details.

If Hayne continues to shield the lawyers and liquidators who assist the banks' asset stripping practices it will expose the RC as a sham.

BRN would appreciate it if you could print out some CBA Boycott pamphlets (see below) and hand them out to interested people around the RC hearings in Brisbane from June 25-19.

Let's unite and take a stand - the harm our financial system is causing to all of us must end. Politicians that don't support the people must fully understand ..... they will not be re-elected.

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