



Day 11 - Fact Sheet 27

Tales of the Todd- Read all about it!

Interest Groups

In Australia we believe that individual rights are important. Under the law a person has a right to do what he / she pleases as long as it doesn't hurt others. For example we all have the right to say what we believe, to travel where we want to go, and to choose the kind of work we want to.

Self Interest

Each of us looks at our own self interests. This means we try to make sure the things we are interested in are protected. We try to protect our freedom of speech and travel. We want to be able to make our living in the way we choose. Most people follow their interests individually. A single voice, however, is often not heard. This can be especially true in government; therefore people often join together so their opinions will carry more weight.

Interest Groups

When people join others with similar interests, they form interest groups. People in interest groups share common needs, beliefs and concerns. Interest groups sometimes promote their interests by trying to influence laws and decisions made by the government.

There are two kinds of interest groups. Special interest groups promote the interests of their members. The Cattlemen's Association helps its members make sure that government laws and regulations do not harm their member's ability to make a living from raising cattle. Public interest groups form to defend the interests of the public as a whole. Groups supporting a healthy environment, such as Landcare, work in the name of everyone in the present and in the future. As individuals they do not personally profit from the goals of the organisation except in an abstract way.

These two types of interest groups often clash because their interests are in conflict. The cattlemen want to make a living out of grazing their cattle and using water supplies. They maintain it is necessary to kill predators such as dingoes in order to protect their cattle. Landcare groups want cattle numbers limited and grazing and water use restricted. So each interest group - because of its own needs, beliefs and concerns - tries to influence the laws and decisions made by the government.

Many of us from time to time belong to both types of interest groups. One may be a cattleman and also belong to a Landcare group. Both types of interest groups are necessary for forming public policy. From the clash of interests comes a greater understanding, which helps shape the way we look at problems. This understanding goes into the making of better laws and decisions made by government.