

RETHINKING RESILIENCE: A STUDY IN AUSTRALIAN GRAIN FARMING

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby certify that the work embodied in the thesis is my own work, conducted under normal supervision. The thesis contains no material which has been accepted, or is being examined, for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University's Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968 and any approved embargo.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis critically examines *resilience* in the context of agriculture. The research focus is primarily at farm level, and positions the Australian grain farm as a heterogenous complex adaptive system and a socio-material location for emergence of resilience. Farm visits and semi-structured interviews with farmers and key grains industry informants form the basis of the qualitative research approach. The analysis reveals problematic discursive contradictions on the one hand, but on the other, enriched and extended imaginaries of farming futures. By anchoring the concept of resilience in *place* and in the everyday practices of farming as a generative relational conversation between farmer and farm, evidence for an emergent *farm-and-farmer co-resilience* is uncovered. I argue that this ongoing conversation inspires farm level experimentation and social learning in a visible process of *productive novelty* that might signal or precede farm-and-farmer co-resilience.

The resilience framework, developed in ecosystem science, has met lively debate on its advance into social science literature. In its current state, the framework is ambiguous in its disposition to power relations and to human intentionality. However, in the face of escalating calls for resilience as a policy outcome, as a key condition for funding programs, and in public discourse, there is an urgent need to sharpen the critical edge of the resilience framework. This thesis contributes to exposing the scalar politics of resilience through analysis of resilience rhetoric in the Australian government's policy document, the *White Paper on Agricultural Competitiveness* (2015). I use the term *faux resilience* to describe policy output in which the resilience of the individual is made to conform with the policy's embedded ideological assumptions; in this case, leaving productive novelty at farm level unsupported.

Finally, the thesis anticipates an alternative farming ontology that might carry us beyond settler-colonial agri-cultures. To recognize co-resilience as *place-resilience* acknowledges the farmscape's temporal integrity with Country such that both exist at once and each is context for the other. Ontological reframing of land tenure in which responsibilities of belonging, or custodianship, transcend human temporalities and are shared among many, opens a possible path towards restorative justice for First Nations peoples.

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ABBREVIATIONS and GLOSSARY

- ABARES** - Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences
- ABC** - Australian Broadcasting Corporation (national public radio and television broadcaster)
- ALP** - Australian Labor Party
- AUD** - Australian dollar; over the past 5 years, the AUD value has fluctuated around 65 - 80 **US** cents
- AWB** - Australian Wheat Board
- BCG** - Birchip Cropping Group
- billion** - read as one thousand million
- CAS** - Complex Adaptive System/s
- CSIRO** - Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (publicly funded)
- EU** - European Union
- GrainGrowers** - national representative grain farmer body
- GRDC** - Grains Research and Development Corporation (50% grower levy, 50% public funding)
- GTA** - Grain Trade Australia (self-regulatory membership of grain traders, storers and handlers)
- LNP** - Liberal National Party
- MLP** - Multi-level perspective (a three level socio-technical transitions framework)
- NFF** - National Farmers' Federation (lobby group for Australian agricultural sector)
- PF** - Precision farming
- RD&E** - Research, development and extension (as applied to agricultural sciences)
- Soil CRC** - Co-operative Research Centre for High Performance Soils
- UK** - United Kingdom
- UN** - United Nations
- US** - United States of America
- USD** - US dollar
- WTO** - World Trade Organisation