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HEADS MUST ROLL OVER MALICIOUS PURSUIT OF INNOCENT FARMER

“The Western Australian government must launch an immediate inquiry into the WA Department of Environment and Conservation after the disgraceful way in which the department pursued an innocent farmer,” said Simon Breheny, director of the Legal Rights Project at free market think tank the Institute of Public Affairs.

Peter Swift, a farmer from Manjimup, Western Australia, won his case against the department after they charged him with clearing native vegetation from his land and pursued him through the courts for three years. The land had in fact been cleared prior to Mr Swift’s purchase of the property. Evidence that exonerated Mr Swift in court had been presented to the department but ignored.

“The relentless pursuit of this innocent man is unacceptable and senior departmental staff must take responsibility,” said Mr Breheny.

“This case highlights the very serious negative consequences of native vegetation regimes. These laws pit small farmers against massive taxpayer-funded bureaucracies in court cases that can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars,” said Mr Breheny.

“Native vegetation laws are an attack on property rights and undermine the rule of law. They restrict the ability of farmers to manage their own land and act as a constraint on economic growth,” said Mr Breheny.

“The WA state government should immediately move to repeal these laws,” said Mr Breheny.

**For media and comment: Simon Breheny, Director, Legal Rights Project, 0400 967 382,
sbreheny@ipa.org.au.**