

## **SUBMISSION SENATE INQUIRY**

### **Higher education and skills training to support future demand in agriculture and agribusiness in Australia.**

#### **Introduction to the Food, Fibre and Timber Industries Training Council**

Funded by the Western Australian Department of Training and Workforce Development, the Food, Fibre & Timber Industries Training Council (FFTITC) has three core functions:

- Providing forward looking advice to State and Commonwealth Governments on vocational training needs and priorities for public funding
- Promoting vocational training to industry, including partnerships between industry and the training sector.
- Supporting innovation and workforce development.

The Food, Fibre and Timber Industries Training Council service the following industry areas:

- Animal Care and Management
- Horticulture, Conservation and Land Management
- Rural Production
- Seafood, Food and Beverage
- Furniture, Forest and Forest Products
- Textiles, Clothing, Footwear and Allied Services

As a not-for-profit incorporated body, the primary purpose of the Training Council is to provide advice to Government on behalf of industry, and ensure all nationally recognised training programs and packages reflect the current and future needs within the industries.

We work with key industry organisations to indentify current and future vocational education and training priorities. We undertake extensive research into the skill and workforce development needs of industry and produce an Industry Workforce Development Plan for the industries mentioned above

We promote industry take-up of training, including promoting new training initiatives from the Department. We also ensure that the quality of this training remains at the highest level and advocate the benefits of participating in and supporting training.

## ***TERMS OF REFERENCE***

***the adequacy of funding and priority given by governments at the federal, state and territory level to agriculture and agribusiness higher education and vocational education and training;***

### **Funding - Vocational Training**

The current funding of vocational training places a strong focus on traditional trades and full qualifications. This recognises the training needs of many industries, however in the Agrifood industry, full qualifications are often not the prime training needs.

In consultation with industry, skill sets or incremental building blocks seem to be more attractive option to industry. A skill set is a group of competencies that have been designed for a specific job function or compliance. A person who has a particular need for a 'package' of skills would undertake a skill set. The person could then build on that skill set with one or more building blocks and then acquire, over time, a full qualification.

While this 'building blocks' approach to skill set acquisition is considerably more flexible for industry, and would dramatically increase VET participation, the current funding model doesn't support this method of delivery.

It is essential that public funding be maintained for the VET sector and increased investment is required to ensure that industry has a skilled workforce. If potential funds are limited, it is essential the foundation skills (literacy and numeracy, job work-ready, training for equity groups) be fully funded with higher level qualifications possibly being funded by the user; with income-contingent loans being available.

Also, as much of the agricultural industry is located in rural and remote locations, the funding model doesn't adequately cater for the problems of thin markets. Thin markets are a prime concern of the Food, Fibre and Timber Industries Training Council as they affect the agricultural industry significantly. Thin markets make it difficult for Registered Training Organisations to deliver training to a small group of students in locations that require (frequently, considerable) travel. The funding simply doesn't support the cost of delivery.

### **Funding – Workforce Development**

There needs to be a national policy (with subsequent investment) that increases organisational capabilities in workforce development. Funds that encourage middle and upper management of organisations to gain skills and understanding of the importance of workforce development are essential.

During consultation for the FFTITC Industry Workforce Development Plan a strong theme became apparent; the need to build business capability in the agricultural industry for workforce development, including the need to:

- Provide funding for specific workforce development activities such as assistance with the development of job descriptions, human resource policies, training plans.
- Identify 'good practice' in workforce and skills development for industry and encourage mentoring/sharing of ideas between businesses.

- Facilitate workshops/training sessions that discuss workforce development strategies, e.g. job redesign, work/life balance, staff rewards.
- Provide advice to small businesses on how to improve flexibility for their workforce and provide practical examples including job share arrangements, flexible leave arrangements, and child care provision.

The Food, Fibre and Timber Industries Training Council also supports increased funding for initiatives such as Enterprise Connect and workforce development initiatives such as skills audits, training needs analysis and training in areas such as competitive manufacturing and leadership training.

### **Funding – Advisory Bodies/Skills Councils for Tertiary Sector**

Both the Federal and State Governments recognise the role that Industry Skills Councils and State Advisory Bodies have in vocational training in respective industries. The Federal Government funds organisations such as Agrifood Skills Australia and the WA government funds the Food, Fibre and Timber Industries Training Council.

These organisations play an important role in promoting vocational training for the agricultural industries as well as providing advice to governments on the training and skill needs of industry. They enable a cohesive national and state approach to skill development.

It seems remiss that there are not similar organisations (or planned changes to the remit of the current VET organisations) to provide the same role for higher education. There are no organisations advocating a national higher educational agenda. There are no organisations working with industry to ensure that higher education meets its respective skill needs.

### ***the reasons and impacts of the decline in agricultural and related educational facilities;***

In Western Australia, Muresk was a Curtin University Higher Educational campus for the Agricultural Industries. .

In 2010, Curtin University withdrew its support of Muresk because of declining enrolments. This was a contentious decision, as Muresk has a long history in WA and produced many high quality agricultural graduates.

Recently the WA Department of Training and Workforce Development announced a \$10 million injection to ensure that Muresk remains an important focus in education and training for the agricultural industry.

The WA government is committed to ensuring that Muresk remains a sustainable campus for the future, however recognises that a multi-faceted approach will be needed to ensure that there is sufficient student numbers. Muresk will be looking at a number of education and training programs, both vocational and tertiary. The Food, Fibre and Timber Industries Training Council is committed to working with Muresk management to ensure that its programs are suitable for the current and emerging skill requirements of industry.

### ***solutions to address the widening gap between skilled agricultural labour supply and demand;***

Attracting more young people into industry is a priority and VET in schools is a key workforce development strategy. Western Australia's agricultural colleges deliver the majority of VET in

schools for the primary sector and there has been some concern from industry about the college's move from rural programs to more trade related programs. Industry has stated the importance of students having access to 'real industry' and that teachers have current industry exposure.

In general, the primary sector has difficulties in attracting and retaining its workforce. With a large proportion of the industry outside the metropolitan area there is an issue of limited access to Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) because of thin markets. Individuals and enterprises are increasingly looking for flexible entry level and advanced skill sets. However, there are concerns that the current funding system does not support this.

It has been stated that the industry suffers from a lack of training culture and an undervaluing of skills development for its workforce. Marketing and promotion of the industry is seen as a priority, so too is the need to sell the benefits of training. There is also a strong need to work with career organisations and schools to promote careers in the primary sector.

Several of the recommended strategies in the Food, Fibre and Timber Industries Training Council Workforce Development Plan, addresses these areas:

- To work with the school sector to ensure adequate access to industry information and promotion of careers in all industry sectors
- To work with career service providers to ensure adequate access to industry information
- To encourage the development of a training culture by improving career path opportunities
- To promote apprenticeships and traineeships to industry, including flexible options and keep industry advised of training developments in their industry, including new apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities;

### *the impacts of any shortage on agricultural research;*

The Food, Fibre and Timber Industries Training Council is unable to comment on this subject as it does not come under its scope of activities.

### *the economic impacts of labour shortages on Australia's export oriented agricultural industries;*

The Food, Fibre and Timber Industries Training Council identified in its 2011 Industry Workforce Development Plan, the following skill shortages in the Agrifood Industries.

ANZSCO	Occupation	Recognised Job Role	Industry Area
361311	Veterinary Nurses	Vet Nurse	Animal Care
322113	Farriers	Farrier	Animal Care
311111	Agricultural technician	Horticulturalist	Horticulture
362213	Landscape gardener	Gardener	Horticulture
121411	Farm Managers	Senior farm hands	Rural Production
361211	Shearers	Shearers (Goats & Alpacas)	Rural Production
721111	Agricultural and horticultural mobile plant operators	Machinery drivers, harvesting operators, truck drivers	Rural Production/ Horticulture
841511	Beef cattle farm worker	General labourers	Rural Production

ANZSCO	Occupation	Recognised Job Role	Industry Area
841599	Livestock farm workers	Piggery workers	Rural Production
841611	Mixed crop and livestock farm worker	Senior Farm hands	Rural Production
841517	Wool handler	Shed hand	Rural Production

Ever increasing resource industry activity, an ageing agricultural workforce and the exodus of young people to larger regional centres exacerbates the shortage of labour in the agricultural industry.

Labour shortages in the Agricultural sector can have several impacts; they:

- prohibit some enterprises from continuing any normal operation
- restrict breadth of normal operations
- restrict expansion of normal activities
- inhibit development of new production opportunities

Consequently, with WA exporting over 80% of its agricultural production, labour shortages do have major economic impact.

For those businesses still able to operate, albeit with minimal staffing levels, long working hours result in marked reductions in productivity.

Eligibility criteria for occupations to be included on state and federal skill shortage lists means that shortages in labour and skills are unlikely to be addressed by such mechanisms as skilled and unskilled migration programs.

For example, calculations heavily weighted in favour of total employment numbers and employment growth mean that for Agriculture (where consolidation of ownership and labour pool contraction are key features), the ability to address crippling workforce development issues through migration is minimal.

### ***the incorporation of animal welfare principles in agriculture education;***

Livestock related qualifications within the new Agricultural training package (AHC10) incorporate units of competency dealing with care for health and welfare of livestock.

Industry and training organisations are becoming more involved in training programmes aimed at building increased animal welfare knowledge and capacity. These initiatives align well with the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS) and its associated National Implementation Plan.

### ***other related matters***

#### ***Higher Education and VET Articulation***

The Food, Fibre and Timber Industries Training Council believe that the VET degrees shouldn't be the focus of the VET sector. However, the Training Council recognises that there needs to be articulation and pathways between VET qualifications and tertiary qualifications.

There are already good examples of collaborations in the existing tertiary/VET sector including partnerships, articulation arrangements, marketing initiatives etc. And these should be encouraged to continue.

The 'merging' of the two sectors, in principle should be supported, however are Universities delivering VET qualifications and TAFE colleges delivering higher education qualifications to benefit industry or just to 'increase' their markets? The competitive nature of the two sectors is obvious in some cases and could be to the detriment of industry.

Articulation between VET and higher education is essential and the Training Council notes that in many cases it is successful; however this is sometimes dependent on the relationship between the VET provider and the University. Articulation currently is an individual business arrangement.

Articulation arrangements should be based on curriculum – that is, if one RTO can gain articulation for a qualification, then this should be consistent with other deliverers of the same training package. This should also relate to tertiary to VET. Developing curriculum for both sectors with this in mind should be encouraged.