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The Committee Secretary
Select Committee on the Reform of the Australian Federation
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Dear Sir / Madam,

Select Committee on the Reform of the Australian Federation

I am pleased to provide this submission to the above inquiry into possible reform of the Australian Federation.

I understand the Select Committee has been established to :

- a) inquire into key issues and priorities for reform of relations between the three levels of government within the Australian federation; and
- b) explore a possible agenda for national reform and to consider ways it can best be implemented in relation to, but not exclusively, the following matters;
 - a. the distribution of constitutional powers and responsibilities between the Commonwealth and the States
 - b. financial relations between federal, state and local governments,
 - c. possible constitutional amendment, including the recognition of local government,
 - d. processes, including the Council of Australian Governments, and the referral powers and procedures for enhancing cooperation between the various levels of Australian government, and
 - e. strategies for strengthening Australia's regions and the delivery of services through regional development committees and regional grant programs.

This submission addresses the final area of enquiry – namely *strategies to strengthen Australia's regions and the delivery of services through regional development committees and regional grant programs.*

The importance of regional universities

Regional university campuses are an important resource for Australia's regions in that they :

- have a significant direct and indirect economic impact on the communities in which they are located,
- are a key resource for building skills for the future of their regional economies,
- form a connection to national and international ideas and knowledge and serve as a catalyst for innovation, and
- contribute to the cultural and civic life of regional Australia.

The **economic benefits** of universities to regional economies are well established¹. For example, Deakin University operations at the Geelong and Warrnambool Campuses in 2009/10 are estimated to have accounted for around \$475.5 million in output, \$288 million in Gross Regional Product (value added to the region), over 2,739 full time equivalent direct and indirect jobs, and \$197.4 million in household income in the Barwon and Western Districts region of Victoria².

A key benefit of having a regional campus is its contribution to the human capital of the region. This contribution extends beyond the production of new graduates to include professional development for regionally based professionals and support for essential services. Universities which engage with regional industry and government around regional planning and development are able to meet current and future regional skill needs through offering relevant courses. Deakin University, for example, is a member of the Committee for Geelong and G21 which consider regional skill needs. Deakin's partnership with the Department of Human Services in Barwon-South West region is engaged in workforce planning for new recruits as well as professional development and continuing education for the regional health workforce.

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations has granted Deakin \$8.2 million to develop an Associate Degree program with a pathway into Bachelor Degrees. The Associate Degree is offered at its Warrnambool Campus and in conjunction with TAFE Institutes in other Victorian regions. This program is a response to the identified gap between the qualification profile of regional Victoria and skill needs for growing and emerging industries such as sustainable agriculture and clean power generation in the south west. The degree has been successful and in 2010 there are 71 students enrolled, an indicator of the value of this type of foundational program and the capacity of a regionally based university to deliver the necessary staff expertise and student support required to ensure successful participation.

The challenge of providing sustainable rural health care services is being addressed by regional medical schools and University Departments of Rural Health located on regional campuses throughout the country which educate new entrants to the health professions and support the existing health workforce. In regional Victoria, the Deakin University Medical School has precisely this function, with increasing capability also being established at the Waurn Ponds campus in outer Geelong. It is well documented that health professionals who have a positive training experience in a rural area are more likely to practice rurally after they qualify^{3,4}. Deakin University's Faculty of Health, Medicine, Nursing and Behavioural Sciences has nurses and occupational therapists as well as medical students on placements in regional health services across Victoria. The Warrnambool Campus is home to the Greater Green Triangle University Department of Rural Health which is training local health professionals to research pressing local health issues such as the prevention of chronic diseases.

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 3. Dunbabin J, Levitt L. Rural origin and rural medical exposure: their impact on the rural and remote medical workforce in Australia. *Rural and Remote Health* [serial on the Internet] 2003 [cited 23 March 2009];3 (online)(212).
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Connection to national and international knowledge

The recent report on the national innovation system recognised the role of learning and knowledge generation in innovation⁵. Regions where universities, business and industry collaborate are more likely to be innovative and prosper⁶. Regional campuses can and should form an interface between the global store of knowledge and local potential, facilitating the generation and application of knowledge for regional advancement. They should be a focus for exchange of knowledge among local networks and create a place where local problems and opportunities can be shared and social capital is built⁷.

It is now well recognised that place-based knowledge networks that understand regional assets and contexts can create opportunities and solutions that benefit a region^{8,9}. Further, those regions whose universities go beyond engagement to being embedded in the regional economy and social fabric are best placed to flourish⁸. Deakin University is committed to working with its regional communities and builds this into planning at individual, organisational unit and institutional levels. It collaborates with partners, exchanging information and conducting mutual activities that work towards a common purpose¹⁰.

Deakin University collaborations encompass building the capacity of partners. The University has established the Geelong Technology Precinct on its Geelong Campus at Waurn Ponds where industry and researchers are co-located and share research facilities. Deakin's research at Geelong includes new materials, composites, nanotechnology, biotechnology and intelligent systems. Over 40 research partnerships are in place. The Innovative Regions Innovation Centre for Australia is located at the Geelong Technology Precinct, funded from the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research's Enterprise Connect program. This facility will help small and medium-sized businesses with technical assistance, research and development, and to access a national network of innovative small and medium enterprises. In a further example of regionally relevant research, Deakin's Warrnambool Campus has expertise in marine and freshwater ecology and research partnerships with water and catchment management authorities.

Cultural and civic benefits

Many regional campuses include facilities that are available to the public. Performance venues such as Costa Hall at Deakin's Geelong Waterfront Campus and sports facilities such as the golf course at the Warrnambool Campus are examples. The students and staff at regional campuses contribute to the richness and diversity of regional cultural life. Students and staff in many disciplines other than visual and performing arts enhance the liveability of regional Australia: Deakin Warrnambool journalism students write for the local paper; the university sponsors the local football and netball leagues. Students and staff contribute to civic life through membership of clubs and associations and leadership roles on bodies such as the South West Sustainability Partnership, Brophy Family and Youth Services and the South West Local Learning and Employment Network.

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Strengthening Australia's regions

Investment in regional skills development, research and innovation on regional university campuses will return dividends that multiply in value over time. Regional university campuses can occupy a key strategic position in regional development. However, many regional university campuses struggle to achieve a balance between global awareness and local responsiveness¹ and not all regional campuses have been equally successful in engaging with the multiplicity of interests in their region, let alone becoming embedded in their region through collaborative partnerships. How much advantage regions and Australia as a whole can take of regional university campuses depends on adequate and appropriate funding models, and incentives for universities to invest in engagement with their regions.

Of late, the funding required to ensure the viability of regionally-based universities and their campuses has been variable and frequently ignored in favour of metropolitan demands. This is disappointing, especially considering the place regional Australia has in the future of Australia as a whole. The issues facing us globally, most specifically water sustainability, ethical and sustainable food production and the overwhelming impact of climate change, will surely mean that we will have to come back to our regions. Securing them now is important if our future is of any consequence. Regional campuses are a resource available for positive change in regional Australia that can be harnessed for a relatively small investment. The Australian Government has stated its willingness to invest in building national infrastructure as a way of addressing the economic downturn caused by the global financial crisis. The right funding incentive model with a realistic regional loading will encourage regional economic development and employment, strengthening and ensuring the future of Australia's regions.

Regional University campuses bring economic, social and employment benefits to regional areas of Australia and it is essential that appropriate attention and funding is available to ensure that these benefits continue to accrue.

We would be delighted to expand on the positions within this submission during the public hearing process.

Please direct any enquiries about this submission to our Manager of Government and Media Relations, Andrew Birks, on 03 9246 8058 or at andrew.birks@deakin.edu.au

Yours sincerely,



Professor Jane den Hollander
Vice Chancellor and President