



THE CRAWFORD FUND

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Committee Secretary
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Higher education and skills training to support future demand in agriculture and agribusiness in Australia.

The Crawford Fund understands the importance of building Australia's agricultural research, education and training capacity to underpin its own agricultural development. We presume that the Enquiry will be receiving submissions from a range of bodies competent in this matter. The Council of Deans of Agriculture will, for example, be a leading adviser. We argue here that the scope for an exciting *international* research and development career experience, as an option for students of agricultural education, will encourage young Australians to enter such a career path. Greater engagement in international agricultural research can also be gained by training foreign students in agricultural sciences.

In other words, participation in international agricultural research and training provides a win-win opportunity for Australia: the more we strengthen our own capacity through building a cadre of agricultural scientists, the stronger will be our ability to address our own concerns in agriculture, grow and export more food, and help deliver a food secure world; increased engagement in international agricultural research will in turn encourage more young Australians to take up a career in agricultural science. This increased engagement can take the form of training of foreign scholars as well as exporting agricultural knowledge, for a fee or through aid programs.

Encouraging Young Australians to Study Agricultural Sciences

The Crawford Fund Task Force¹ on the World Food Crisis addressed the question of how to encourage more young Australians to take up a career in agricultural science. At a Round Table discussion sponsored by the Fund in September 2008 - on issues raised by the Task Force, several participants from Australia and the Policy Advisory Council of the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research emphasized the importance of this issue. It was beyond the terms of reference of the Task Force to explore the question in any detail. However, the report noted:

This is a matter of interest given that the supply of future graduates is likely to affect crop and animal productivity in Australia and our ability to increase exports and, more importantly in terms of international agriculture, to contribute to increased global food production. The export of knowledge embodied in Australian professionals, including

¹ Report of the Crawford Fund World Food Crisis Task Force October 2008: a food secure world – how Australia can help, available at www.crawfordfund.org

through employment in the CGIAR centres and in agricultural production abroad, may be just as significant as food exports in terms of impact on future food security.

We know from our own experience, in providing scholarships for young Australians to participate in Crawford Fund Parliamentary Conferences on key topics in international agriculture, the potential interest exists. We note also that the Council of Deans has added the prospect of an international dimension to a career in agricultural science to their website as a means of encouraging increased Australian enrolments.

The Crawford Fund has increasingly included Australian researchers in some of its short-term training courses in addition to our primary targets, viz. developing country scientists. The Australian participants are fully sponsored by government or industry organisations. This added dimension to Crawford Fund training is especially significant in the area of biosecurity, because it enhances our domestic capacity to protect Australian agriculture from exotic pests, diseases and weeds.

Increasing Engagement through Foreign Scholars

The Task Force report also addressed the scope to increase the numbers of international students studying agriculture, science and technology in Australia funded by themselves or their families, by their employers or by private and philanthropic sources. An Australian contribution to world food security through trade in services in this and other ways might be most successful in the emerging economies no longer eligible for Australian aid or for whom lower priority has been recommended by the Review of the Australian aid program as aid recipients, a recommendation broadly accepted by the Government.

Australia has more than 50 years' experience in the education and training of international students, including its major contribution to post-war reconstruction and development in Asia through the Colombo Plan, and in Africa through the Special Commonwealth African Assistance Plan. Scholarships still constitute a major proportion of aid expenditure.

More recently, through trade in educational services, Australia has been training about 100,000 international university and other scholars a year to the point where the value of our so called 'education exports', at \$12 billion, exceeds the value of exports of our wool, wheat and meat combined. Most of these students are drawn from the more advanced developing countries.

So far, however, this success has mainly been in courses in accounting, business studies, information technology and commerce, where students or their sponsors meet the full cost of their studies. Only a small proportion of international students in Australia are enrolled in agricultural science, agricultural economics and related disciplines.

The new and higher priority now being given to agriculture and climate change in the public and private sectors, and in aid programs, and the increasing interest in modern biology may well be reflected in a growing future demand for university places in agriculture, biosciences and economics, by both Australian and international students. Some Australian universities may take the initiative, either collectively or individually, to enhance their services and marketing efforts in these disciplines (including the character of course offerings in agriculture which might emphasise advanced technology, mechanisation, management and international marketing and the environment).

Marketing might be focused on urban dwellers not just those living in the countryside.

Universities will have to make business judgments about the extent to which they are prepared to rebuild their agricultural science capacities, redesign courses and invest in marketing them abroad. Government could provide some leadership and surety through an expanded scholarships program and the initiative in science and technology in agricultural sciences.

The Fund has initiated discussions with Austrade on a cohesive program to encourage increased international enrolments in agricultural science courses in Australia.

We also note recent announcements by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, indicating Australia would rejoin the Commonwealth of Learning, an intergovernmental organisation that provides education from primary to university level to small nations through distance learning. We recommend that some effort be contemplated to assist with the encouragement of increased awareness of opportunities in agricultural careers in this regard.

Yours sincerely

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Executive Director

For a Food Secure World

An initiative of the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering