

5 August 2010

Dr Shona Batge
Committee Secretary
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Dr Batge

Inquiry into Industry Skills Councils

The National Farmers' Federation (NFF) seeks to provide a brief assessment of our experience with Industry Skills Councils to date and in particular our relationship with Agrifood Skills Australia (AgriFood).

The NFF did hold some initial concern as to the process of the merger of the old Industry Training Bodies that resulted in the NFF having no formal representation on either the board or any committees of AgriFood.

This concern has now been alleviated with the NFF being provided the opportunity to nominate representatives to the rural and related industries committee of AgriFood.

Nevertheless we continue to believe it is inappropriate that the unions have an automatic right to board membership on AgriFood while peak industry associations do not. We are in no way advocating for our right to be on the board but rather we are of the view that Industry Skills Councils including AgriFood must have a skilled based board. Representation from relevant employer or employee bodies is more appropriately dealt with at a committee level.

The development of AgriFood since it was established in 2004 now provides the NFF with a wealth of detailed information that greatly assists us in better understanding the skill needs of the industry.

We have a good positive working relationship with AgriFood which has strengthened over the past 2 years as we commenced work on a number of projects together along with holding regular meetings so that we are aware of work programs and issues affecting the sector.

Two recent matters exemplify the relationship between the two organisations. The first relates to the important work being progressed by AgriFood in relation to

regional training funding to resolve many of the difficulties faced by the industry as to skill needs. The strength of the proposal is due to the significant stakeholder engagement undertaken by AgriFood.

Further, we are currently in the early stages of a project funded by DEEWR between NFF, AgriFood, Minerals Council of Australia and Skills DMC. This joint collaboration focus' heavily on the collective needs of key industries working in regional and remote Australia without a duplication of costs that could have otherwise arisen if we have not worked in such a collaborative approach.

The NFF is highly supportive of the industry skills council model based on our experiences to date.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely

DENITA WAWN
General Manager – Workplace & Corporate Relations