




**SENATOR THE HON KIM CARR**

**MINISTER FOR INNOVATION, INDUSTRY,  
SCIENCE AND RESEARCH**

14 OCT 2008

Ms Julia Irwin MP  
Chair  
Standing Committee on Petitions  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

  
Dear Ms Irwin

Thank you for your letter of 17 September 2008 concerning a petition submitted for the consideration of the Standing Committee on Petitions regarding the closure of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) research centre at Merbein.

CSIRO has advised me that it recognises the contribution that its science at Merbein has made to industries in the Sunraysia region. However, in light of a range of budgetary and strategic planning issues, in May 2008 CSIRO announced it could no longer afford to operate its research facility at Merbein. Associated with the closure, CSIRO also decided to move all wine related research to Adelaide, and to phase out research on table grapes, dried grapes and citrus.

Subsequent to that announcement, senior staff of CSIRO (including the Chief Executive, Dr Geoff Garrett, the Deputy Chief Executive, Mr Mike Whelan, and the Agribusiness Group Executive, Dr Joanne Daly) met on several occasions with representatives of affected industries, as well as the Mayor of Mildura, and the Chair of the Sunraysia Consultative Committee, to discuss the implication of these changes. I understand that these discussions have been productive, with industry requesting an opportunity to develop an alternative strategy that would see the continued functioning of the Merbein facility.

CSIRO agreed to the request from industry, and was due to receive an industry submission by 3 October 2008. In these discussions, CSIRO has clearly articulated the need for the plan to include additional financial resources.

CSIRO will consider the industry submission on its merits to determine whether there is a viable alternative to CSIRO's current intention to close the Merbein site. I expect that a final decision in relation to the site will be made in the near future.

I can assure you that the Rudd Labor Government understands the importance of research and will ensure that our public research contributes appropriately to national goals and the long-term economic growth of Australia.

Thank you for taking the time to bring the petition from concerned citizens of Sunraysia to my attention.

Yours sincerely

Kim Carr