

*Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture Advisory Council  
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27 April 2005

Mr Alby Schultz  
Chair  
House of Representatives  
Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Schultz

*Re: Inquiry into Rural Skills Training and Research*

Please find attached joint submission to this Inquiry from the Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture Advisory and the CB Alexander Agricultural College, Tocal Advisory Council. This submission has been prepared as a result of consultation between members of the Councils and their respective industries.

Council members are strongly supportive of rural education measures and have been concerned at the decline in opportunities for rural education across Australia.

Council members would be happy to attend an Inquiry hearing at an appropriate location and time.

Yours sincerely

Jim Geltch  
Chair  
Murrumbidgee Advisory Council

Margo Duncan  
Chair  
Tocal Advisory Council

Att.

*Inquiry into Rural Skills Training & Research  
Joint Submission by Advisory Councils of  
Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture, Yanco and  
CB Alexander Agricultural College, Tocal*

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This submission is submitted on behalf of the two organisations which support the operation of these Colleges. The Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture is located in the Riverina of NSW and provides a wide range of adult education and training for rural industries. In December 2003, full-time and part time youth education services as well as availability of full-time residential facilities ceased at this College.

The CB Alexander Agricultural College, Tocal Paterson is located in the Hunter Valley of NSW and provides youth and adult education and training for rural industries. Further details of the exact operation of these Colleges are available to the Inquiry if required.

The two Advisory Councils provide advice for the operation of the Colleges. They have an important role in ensuring that the Colleges' stay in touch with rural industries and the community in general. They advise the Colleges on the implementation of educational programs and assist the Colleges to maintain an effective network of contact within the industries. Both Colleges are operated by the NSW Department of Primary Industries.

The Councils have considered many of the issues pertinent to this Inquiry on many occasions. This submission will take the form of the issues and suggested solutions to them for the Commonwealth. Representatives of the Councils would like to have the opportunity to address the Inquiry in due course.

### *Issue 1- Depopulation of rural areas*

Many, more isolated rural areas of Australia are slowly being depopulated due to the impact of mechanisation, drought and narrowing employment opportunities in the regions. This however does not negate the need for well trained personnel to continue to operate and manage the Australian farms and natural resources. Members have recently noted a sharp decline in the availability of trained or untrained personnel to work on farms, especially in some of the more remote areas.

### *Action*

The following strategies should be considered to address this problem.

- ❖ That the Commonwealth continue to support regional employment and development of communities in general. Communities should be treated as whole and not as a separate series of entities.
- ❖ That any services provided to the communities be costed to take into account the added expenses of isolation and regional disadvantage. This particularly applies to education and will be addressed later in the submission.

### *Issue 2 - Shortage of trained farm staff*

Members have identified a real shortage of trained staff for farms in rural areas, with the demand for College graduates outstripping the number available. In addition, the Colleges regularly receive inquiries for trained personnel.

#### *Action*

- ❖ That further investment is made into rural training for young people for a career on the land.
- ❖ That promotion of agriculture and related courses is enhanced in schools through careers advisers and industry support.
- ❖ That a long time frame be placed on these strategies so that they are not stop/start initiatives which by the time they have momentum, the funding ceases and they are no longer operational.

### *Issue 3 - Standards*

Members have noted that there are very different standards of educational provision by vocational education training providers within and between states. This has tended to de-value the qualifications of people undertaking courses particularly from TAFE colleges.

#### *Action*

- ❖ That efforts be put into the development of trainers to ensure that high quality trainers are used for industry training.
- ❖ That the strong emphasis on the training and assessment side of VET delivery be changed so that there is equal emphasis on technical and industry competence.
- ❖ That the differential funding for agricultural training be examined to ensure that there is adequate incentive for training providers to undertake VET training in agriculture. At present the training provision funds available for industry training in agriculture is too low on a per student contact hour basis.

#### *Issue 4 - Industry involvement*

The involvement of various rural industries organisations in vocational education and training is limited. The Research and Development Corporations spend very little funds on vocational education and training compared to what is spent by them on higher education. In addition Research and Development Corporations often see vocational education and training as a way of generating income and maximising benefits from their intellectual property. The intellectual property held by Research and Development Corporations is really owned by the industry producers themselves however the corporations seem to take the view that they should be marketing that IP back to the industry through educational programs.

Research and Development Corporations have, from time to time tried to become involved in vocational education and training, often ignoring the existing structures and institutions. This has in many cases duplicated efforts and confused producers resulting in expenditure of significant amounts of funds for few benefits.

The Commonwealth should be aware of the strong interest that regions have in education and training and any programs should acknowledge regional initiatives as well as industry initiatives.

#### *Action*

- ❖ That Research and Development Corporations be obliged to spend a proportion of their funds on vocational education and training. At present some already do so, for example the Grains Research and Development Corporation have supported VET training through the provision of scholarships for full-time training in agricultural colleges. This has been a most successful initiative. Australian Wool Innovation is now taking a leading role in professional development of VET trainers. Which should be commended.
- ❖ That Research and Development Corporations do not see vocational education and training as a means of increasing their income. In other words, some of these corporations see farmer training as a way of making money rather than training farmers.
- ❖ That Research and Development Corporations be more considerate with copyright of educational materials. For example, Meat & Livestock Australia have priced educational materials at a level which is out of range for agricultural students. As a result very good quality educational materials are unavailable for future farmers due to Meat & Livestock Australia's policies.

### *Issue 5 - Opportunities in regional areas*

The opportunities for employment in regional areas are largely discounted. At present there is a strong demand for people to work on the land and receive very good starting salaries. For example some Certificate IV graduates of Tocal are now receiving starting salaries of between \$40-50,000 for work on farms. This is a new phenomenon.

#### *Action*

- ❖ That efforts be put in place to ensure the good salaries for farming are made widely known. This will attract people to the industry.

### *Issue 6 - Identification of needs*

Members believe that there is not a strong balance between the identification of needs for rural training and the delivery of that training. Often programs for training are of a stop/start nature and are made available just to spend the funds at a certain time. This provides no particular routine or annual means by which training is provided.

#### *Action*

- ❖ That resources be provided to undertake further needs studies and analysis for rural training.
- ❖ That the results of these needs be transmitted back to training providers and also to funding bodies.
- ❖ That the needs of rural industry be continually monitored and altered accordingly.
- ❖ That the specific needs identified be resourced for training eg agricultural colleges, for example high tech equipment now commonly available on farms should be well resourced to training institutions. This has not occurred in recent years.

### *Issue 7 - Qualification range*

The qualifications available and funded through the VET system are not necessarily in line with industry needs. For example traineeship incentives in NSW are currently for Certificate III only. This means that the higher order and more long-term natured training is not undertaken. Employers will not support their trainees to undertake Certificate IV training even though it's in this area that the trainee should move for future employment.

#### *Action*

- ❖ That funding for training be made on gradational basis encouraging young people to proceed right through the VET ladder of levels.
- ❖ That strong support be made available through incentives.

### *Issue 8 – Indigenous training*

Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture has been very active in indigenous training programs. As a result, a wide range of training has been made available to young people who would have otherwise not had the opportunity. Advisory Council members are keen to see opportunities for people in indigenous communities to have further training.

#### *Action*

- ❖ That further support and funding for indigenous training be made available.
- ❖ That indigenous training issues be addressed on a national basis rather than state by state so that there can be integration between states.

#### *Conclusion*

Council members seek that these matters be given thorough consideration by the Inquiry. Sound rural training brings great benefits to individuals, industries involved and the regions in which the individuals reside and work. An investment in training pays dividends for many years to come. It is however an area in which funds must be invested continually to ensure that opportunities are always available for people to undertake the training.

Jim Geltsch  
Chair  
Murrumbidgee Advisory Council

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