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House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

SUBMISSION NO. 100

Submission from the Balanced State Development Working Group (BSDWG) to the

Inquiry into Rural Skills Training and Research

The purpose of this submission is to draw to the Committee's attention to some of basic features of the education and training infrastructure in the Capital Region (CR) that inhibit the ability of the CR to respond to some of the key recommendations identified in the 29 October 1999 Communique of the Regional Australia Summit.

The two paragraphs that are particularly relevant to this submission read as follows:

'The Summit urges all levels of government, industry and communities to develop strategies which ensure equality of access to quality education and training in regional Australia. Regional Australians must develop a culture of lifelong learning to adapt to, and maximise the benefits from, change.

Education providers, governments, business and community members must collaborate to deliver significant improvements in learning and education opportunities which should be determined by the communities themselves.'

WHY FOCUS ON THE CAPITAL REGION

There are a number of reasons for selecting the Capital Region to illustrate the issues we wish to discuss.

* In August 2004 the Australian Capital Region Development Council (ACRDC) published a discussion paper 'Working on our future together: People and places in the Australian Capital Region'. The paper presented social and economic data relating to the then Local Government Areas, the Cities and the ACT in a form suitable for more detailed analysis.

* In May 2004 the Balanced State Development Working Group (BSDWG) made the first of three submissions to the Productivity Commission's Review of National Competition (NCP) Arrangements. Attachment 5 to that submission considered 'How can access be improved to facilities that will allow Australians to undertake Life Long Learning if that is their choice.'

One of the reasons for developing Attachment 5 was that BSDWG suspected that the Productivity Commission (PC) did not have any professional staff with working experience in regional or rural Australia. At a public hearing on 14 December 2004 the PC's chairman acknowledged the point. He did however point out that 'we have members of our research team who were born and bred in the bush and others whose family are still living in country Australia'.

Attachment 5 drew on ABS data from the 2001 Census to analyse information relating to post year 12 studies being undertaken by Capital Region (CR) residents on a full time or part time basis. The ACRDC paper also used ABS data from the 2001 Census.

* In 1974 Sir Alan Cooley, then Chairman of the Commonwealth Public Service Board, raised with Mr Halton (who moved from the Canadian Public Service in November 1973) the opportunities that the location of the ACT, in the 'middle' of a couple of regional cities and a range of large and small NSW Local Government Areas, presented to senior, Canberra based, Commonwealth Public Servants to keep in touch with issues relevant to Regional and Rural Australia. Sir Alan observed that colleagues whose careers had already included appointments outside Canberra and the State/Territory Capitals were more inclined to take advantage of those opportunities.

Sir Alan's career had included appointments in Echuca and Lithgow. Mr Halton has frequently acknowledged the value of having received Sir Alan's advice early in his Australian Public Service Career.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF AUSTRALIANS OF 'WORKING AGE'.

Although there seems to be a popular impression that it is only in 'remote' areas of Australia (eg parts of Tasmania) that the educational attainment of a substantial percentage of Australians in the 25 - 54 age group is no greater than year 10 an analysis of the ACRDC data suggests that this is not so.

ACRDC presents data on educational data for younger (0-24), middle (25-54) and older (55+) cohorts. For those in the middle cohort who achieved either year 10 (or equivalent) or year 12 (or equivalent) the data can be reviewed in absolute numbers and then normalised using 100 persons who achieved year 12 (or equivalent) as the reference.

Crookwell	680 - 455	150:100
Goulburn	3470 - 2303	150:100
Mulwaree	1049 - 790	134:100
Gunning	295 - 471	60:100
Yass	1447 - 1853	71:100
ACT	27713 - 92228	30:100
Queanbeyan	4572 - 6491	70:100
Yarrowlumla	1251 - 2730	46:100
Tallaganda	363 - 465	78:100
Eurobodalla	4586 - 3603	123:100
Bega Valley	4309 - 3840	112:100
Bodalla	383 - 290	132:100
Cooma Monaro	1376 - 1334	103:100
Snowy River	2118 - 4454	48:100

Thus, and contrary to general understanding, there is one regional city and six local government areas in the Australian Capital Region (ACR) where, in the 25-54 age group, there are fewer people who achieved year 12 (or equivalent) than those who achieved year 10 (or equivalent).

If a more stringent test, say no more than 50 people who achieved year 10 (or equivalent) for every 100 who achieved year 12 (or equivalent) is applied then only the ACT (30), Yarrowlunla (46) and Snowy River (48) 'pass'.

Other than in the ACT the only University 'presence' in the ACR is the University of Wollongong Campus in Bega.

Similarly, outside the ACT, the TAFE 'presence' in the ACR is best described as uneven. The TAFE NSW – Illawarra Institute has campuses in Goulburn, Yass, Queanbeyan, Bega, Eden, and Cooma, with Learning Centres at Bombala and Jindabyne. Learning Centres are staffed and provide courses on an 'as required' basis.

In addition there are 'Skills Centres' in the Bega Valley, located in the centre of Merimbula and at the Monaroo-Bobberer-Gudu (MBG) Keeping Place on the Princess Highway between Pambula and Eden. They are run by the Skills Training Employment Program Inc., trading as Auswide Projects, a community based service provider operating on a non-profit basis.

In both cases, 1998 for the Merimbula Skills Centre and 2003 for the Keeping Place, Commonwealth funding for the 'Skills Centres' was provided by the then Australian National Training Authority through the NSW Department of Education and Training

IS THERE EQUALITY OF ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

In responding to the Standing Committee's Terms of Reference it seems logical to now consider 'How can access be improved to facilities that will Australians to undertake Life Long Learning, if that is their choice'.

As mentioned earlier the Balanced State Development Working Group (BSDWG) considered this issue in attachment 5 of its May 2004 submission to the Productivity Commission's recent Review of National Competition Arrangements.

We believe that the Committee would find it helpful for an extract from attachment 5 to be included as the next section of this paper.

EXTRACT FROM ATTACHMENT 5 OF BSDWG's May 2004 SUBMISSION to the Productivity Commission's 2004/5 Review of National Competition Arrangements:

In the mid 1970's a member of BSDWG had the opportunity to attend a weekend seminar in Oxford (UK) at which the key theme was the changing nature of work. Various speakers stressed that, in contrast to changes that occurred as a result of the Industrial Revolution, changes over the next 50 (or more) years would affect all areas of activity and would occur at such a speed that by early next century three or four basic skill sets would be used up during a typical working life.

The views expressed at that seminar were much broader than those that generated considerable publicity (and interest) after the 1978 publication of James Martin's book.

'Many persons will learn two, three, of four careers in a lifetime as telecommunications, automation and later, machine intelligence will cause entirely different work patterns. Electronics will create both the need and the tools for lifelong learning.'

James Martin, The Wired Society, (1978)

ABS data from the 2001 Census provides some interesting information relating to post year 12 studies presently being undertaken by Capital Region residents on a full time or part time basis.

The data presented below, based on the then LGA's, is taken from print out B11. Although BSDWG does not agree with the descriptors used, for the purposes of this analysis we have accepted ABS use of TAFE as shorthand for 'Technical or Further Educational Institution, and Uni as shorthand for 'University or other Tertiary Institution'. The population data comes from the ABS 'LGA populations for each State and Territory'.

	TAFE	Uni	Population
Crookwell	79	32	4373
Goulburn	628	723	21427
Gunning	46	47	2308
Mulwaree	180	80	7007
Queanbeyan	987	988	32690
Tallaganda	51	30	2805
Yarrowlumla	264	369	10688
Yass	263	201	10295

The information for the ACT comes from ABS 2001 Census data for the Territory:

ACT 9998 21976 321680

There are number of ways in which this data can be analysed.

For example we understand that Crookwell, Mulwaree and Tallaganda do not have any post year 12 educational/training facilities provided, or supported, by Government and also lack public transport.

Although lacking public transport Gunning and Yarrowlumla have excellent road access to both TAFE and Uni. The population of Yarrowlumla has a very high percentage of adults with at least a first degree.

We understand that Goulburn is the 'host' TAFE for Queanbeyan and Yass within the Illawara Institute. The multi campused CIT is the comparable institution in the ACT.

There are four Universities in the ACT, though strictly speaking ADFA is a University College.

Starting from the 'raw data' it is possible to analyse the information on a comparable basis, say per 1000 of the population. For example if the NSW Shires and Cities are ranked with regard to TAFE from highest to lowest the answer is:

Queanbeyan	30.2	30.2
Goulburn	29.3	33.7
Mulwaree	25.7	11.4
Yass	25.5	19.5
Yarrowlumla	24.7	34.5
Gunning	19.9	24.7
Tallaganda	18.2	10.7
Crookwell	18.1	7.3

The 'top to bottom' scores for TAFE participation produce a ratio of 1.67.

If the NSW Shires and Cities are ranked with regard to Uni from highest to lowest the answer is:

Yarrowlumla	24.7	34.5
Goulburn	29.3	33.7
Queanbeyan	30.2	30.2
Gunning	19.9	24.7
Yass	25.5	19.5

Mulwaree	25.7	11.4
Tallaganda	18.2	10.7
Crookwell	18.1	7.3

The 'top to bottom' scores for Uni participation produce a ratio of 4.73.

For the ACT the 'per 1000 head of population' participation figures are

ACT	31.1	68.3
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In other words, from a TAFE perspective, both Queanbeyan and Goulburn participation rates are **COMPARABLE** to the ACT's.

However from a Uni perspective the ACT participation rate is **TWICE** that of Yarrowoomla, the highest performing Shire/City, and **TEN TIMES** that of Crookwell.

WHY IS THE COMPARATIVE DATA FOR CROOKWELL SO DIFFERENT TO THAT FOR GOULBURN AND MULWAREE

Although the analysis presented on page 2 indicates that all three have many more members of their 25-54 age cohort who achieved year 10 than year 12; 150:100, 150:100 and 134:100 for Crookwell, Goulburn and Mulwaree respectively their 'scores' in the TAFE and University analysis are markedly different.

For TAFE (Page 5) Goulburn and Mulwaree rank 2nd and 3rd of the NSW Shires and Cities in the Capital Region while Crookwell ranks 8th.

For University (Page 5/6) Goulburn still ranks 2nd, Mulwaree has dropped to 6th and Crookwell still ranks 8th.

It has already been noted that Goulburn is a 'host' TAFE within the Illawara Institute and that there are four Universities in the ACT.

BSDWG suggests that the markedly different standards of road access may help to account for the differences in the comparative data.

In recent years the road from Crookwell to Goulburn has undoubtedly improved but it still has bends and grades more suitable for competitive racing drivers than for the average domestic motorist.

Conversely the Hume Highway is dual carriageway from Mulwaree to Goulburn and a realistic 110km/hr speed limit that makes the trip time less than half that from Crookwell.

Similarly Goulburn to the ACT is dual carriageway to Northbourne Avenue and there is a 110km/hr realistic speed limit to the ACT border.

BSDWG suggests that similar problems with respect to road access to existing post secondary education and training centres may help to explain the comparative data for Tallaganda. The Shire ranks immediately above Crookwell for both TAFE and University although page 2 shows that its ratio of year 10 to year 12 for the 25-54 age cohort is 78:100.

The architects of Australian National Competition Policy envisaged, amongst other things, equal access and equal opportunity. Though BSDWG noted some time ago that in his 1989 book 'New Games New Rules' Professor Hilmer made no reference to Regional and Rural Australia

This is not necessarily an argument for more investment in roads, it may be an argument for investment in more, site specific, post secondary education and training centres.

Although the analysis provided in this paper has highlighted the difficulties experienced by the communities of Mulwaree, Tallaganda and Crookwell the Committee should not assume that they have not been endeavouring to help themselves.

The endeavours of the Crookwell Potato Grower's Association are a good example.

PROPOSAL FOR AN AUSTRALIAN RURAL INNOVATION CENTRE LOCATED IN CROOKWELL

We understand that the initial concept for a multi functional Rural Innovation Centre was conceived at a Strategic Planning exercise undertaken by the Crookwell Potato Association in 1997. It was incorporated in the Association's ten year plan. Briefly with increasing change through innovations and technology in rural industries, there is greater demand within the region. There is also a need for farm and rural maintenance services and employment opportunities with rural service providers.

Subsequent visits to international and Australian tourism attractions and rural enterprises that capitalise on their products by David Montgomery and his colleagues reinforced the direction of the concept. They confirmed that the concept was founded also on the need for activities and projects that contribute to rural and regional renewal.

The goals of the Centre were identified as:

- Be a chief source of information about innovation in rural Australia
- Provide rural education and technical training services
- Inform people about technological, economic, environmental and social change
- Provide learning experiences that attract visitors, landholders and new investors, who are interested in the breadth of innovation in rural Australia
- Provide ancillary services for visitors (merchandising, accommodation, catering)

An overview of the concept prepared by David Montgomery in April 2004 is provided as an attachment to this submission.

In late 2003/early04 an application was made for support, under the Commonwealth's Regional Partnerships Programme (RPP), for a feasibility study and business plan for the Australian Rural Innovation Centre. Financial assistance from the NSW Department of State and Regional Development was secured, subject to approval of the RPP application.

There was also confirmation of significant cash and 'in kind' support from partners in the Region. The Capital Region Employment Council (CREC), acting in its role as the Area Consultative Committee, advised the Department of Transport and Regional Services of its strong support for the application.

In October 2004 the Department's Regional Manager, Sydney Southern NSW Region based in Wollongong advised David Montgomery that the application was not successful because:

The project did not demonstrate a clear path to sustainability. There was no evidence in the application of consultation with potential partners for the development of the ARIC and the business planning phase has not yet been determined; and

The project did not demonstrate an equitable partnership funding arrangement, with the Australian Government taking the majority of the project risk.

There was no reference to consultation with either the Department of Education, Science and Training and or Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. BSDWG understands that there was no consultation with CREC during the review process.

Since the application related to a feasibility study and business plan it was difficult to understand how it could be expected to 'demonstrate a clear path to sustainability' and the then Parliamentary Secretary was approached seeking a review.

In February 2005 Mr Cobb wrote advising the outcome of the Department's Review. That review confirmed the original decision, no additional information was provided.

Earlier in this submission reference was made to the Commonwealth's decisions to fund two skills centres in Bega Valley Shire between the two TAFE campuses in Bega and Eden. A member of BSDWG is familiar with both projects and advises that they are both consistent with the concept of small, site specific, post secondary education and training centres

The members of BSDWG find it difficult to understand why a far more rigorous standard appears to have been applied, by the Commonwealth, to the Crookwell project.

Conclusions

In the view of the Balanced State Development Working Group it is important that Commonwealth Departments and Agencies acquire a more balanced and informed view of the educational and skill levels available in regional and rural Australia. They would then be better able to ensure that Government decisions made, using advice from Departments and Agencies, are adequately informed.

The Committee should explore the possibility of more detailed information relating to educational and skills levels and employment opportunities requiring more advanced skills, in regional and rural Australia, becoming a regular feature of the 5 yearly Census conducted by the ABS.

The Public Service Commissioner should be encouraged to make it clear that in terms of career development professional experience gained in regional and rural Australia is no less important than professional or academic experience gained in London, Oxford, Paris, Geneva, Washington, Cambridge etc.

The Committee should also encourage Heads of Departments and Agencies, and their senior officers, to take note of the advice that Sir Alan Cooley offered some thirty years ago.

Balanced State Development Working Group
October 2005

**AUSTRALIAN RURAL INNOVATION CENTRE
(A.R.I.C)
AN OVERVIEW**

The concept for a multi functional Rural Innovation Centre was conceived at a Strategic Planning exercise in 1999 and was guided by the need for activities which contribute to rural and regional renewal in the Crookwell region

The rationale is in accord with policy at a Commonwealth and State government level, where there is a strong emphasis on improved technologies in land and water management; growing the human and social capital of rural Australia; energy generation; crop and livestock diversification; gene science, technology and value adding; and consumer education, appreciation and understanding of rural production, processing, promotion and marketing.

With increasing innovations and technological changes in rural industries and changing land use, there is greater demand for technically trained people for farm and rural maintenance services and for up-skilling of new settlers to the region. NSW TAFE has identified a need for formal off campus rural training facilities. The NSW Illawarra Institute, Goulburn, has no off campus rural training facility.

Visits to Australian and international education and tourism attractions and rural enterprises also guided the concept development.

The ARIC will be located at Crookwell in Southern NSW and within close proximity to around one quarter of Australia's population. This unique centre will celebrate the innovativeness of rural Australians and their long history of re-inventing the ways they do things and live, so as to adjust to a highly dynamic and complex world. There will be a close relationship between **tourism and informal education** (consumer, school and industry education and training) and **formal rural education** through technical colleges and universities, weekend workshops, and interest based adult courses.

The goals of the Centre are to

- be a chief source of information about innovation in rural Australia;
- provide rural education and technical training services;
- inform people about technological, economic, environmental and social change
- provide learning experiences that attract visitors, landholders and new investors, who are interested in the breadth of innovation in rural Australia
- provide ancillary services for visitors (merchandising, accommodation, catering).

The following strategies will be adopted to implement the action plan for establishing the Rural Innovation Centre.

- Aggressively promote the Centre through all prospective sources of visitors eg Capital Region, Canberra and Goulburn Tourism networks, regional national and international tourism; rural, educational, environmental/ science networks.
- Enter into cooperative relationships with organizations at the forefront of innovation in rural Australia.
- Establish a focal building to house facilities for interactive displays, lectures, demonstrations and specialist rural based library.
- Enlist and coordinate a network of cooperating rural businesses prepared to host visitors.
- Establish dormitory and motel-style accommodation facilities for students and visitors.

A feasibility study to commence July 2004 will rigorously test the proposal and will address the following:

- The market for an Australian Rural Innovation Centre;
- Concept development and design, and the recommended Model;
- Ownership, Governance, Management and Operations;
- Site Location and Facilities Assessment;
- Finance, including start up capital, revenue streams, projected cash flow, profit and loss projections; number of years to achieve self-sufficiency; staged development options; identification of funding sources;
- Critical success factors;
- Risk assessment.

The Business Plan will be presented so that it can be used as a tool to attract investors and sponsors to the development of the Centre.

The outcomes of establishing the ARIC will include

- Strengthened local community through increases in employment opportunities, services, population and profile.
- More options for young people to remain within and to be attracted to the region through improving access to rural education services and technical training and extending the pathways to rural employment.
- Providing a regional focal point for rural based tourism, and to provide an important element of consumer education
- A business that is responding to a market need and that is self-sustaining.

Our Vision

- Long-term benefits accruing from an increased flow of visitors wishing to learn about the exciting new things happening in rural Australia; and
- An education centre that is established for pre-school to tertiary student excursions and other visiting students and a learning centre for all ages.

Our Mission

- The Centre will offer visitors opportunities to learn about innovations in rural Australia – technological, economic, environmental and social – through live presentations, interactive displays, demonstrations and direct experience of real world rural developments.

Our Operation

Once operational the Centre will complement other district businesses, community centres and groups. It will provide:

- Employment opportunities that will extend economic and social benefits to the region;
- Off campus facilities for education linked with the Illawarra Institute of TAFE, Universities and other learning institutions;
- a location, facilities and an opportunity for Industries linked to rural Australia to display their wares, conduct field days, and run short courses and conferences.
- Accommodation in the form of motel, cabins and bunkhouses;
- A presence, complementary to the town office, for the Crookwell Visitors Information Centre.
- Restaurant and/or snack bar facilities for visitors, conferences, school groups, and students;
- A retail shop front for regional products, art and crafts, gifts and souvenirs;
- A benefit for Service centres and town businesses as it attracts increased tourist, visitor and student traffic.