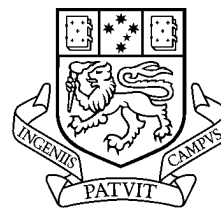




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Submission to the Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Inquiry into rural skills training, research and extension

I make this submission to the AFF Committee, and make myself available to it, in a bid to highlight the important role of understanding social issues for the future of agriculture and therefore the need for them to be considered in rural training, research and extension.

While the Committee's Terms of Reference are sufficiently broad, the Issues Paper presents a rather narrow technical view of what agriculture is about. As agricultural issues will increasingly become social issues relating to conflict over resources, as demonstrated by, for example, water management issues (e.g. the Living Murray, water sharing plans etc), perhaps the most important skills that are lacking in agriculture are facilitation skills, negotiation and mediation skills. There will also be a shift in focus from production issues to consumption issues. And as the number of lifestyle farmers increases with the grasschange phenomenon (especially in rural areas with high aesthetic amenity), the diversity of rural landholders will increase. Concern about natural resource management issues will mean that there will be a need to address the information needs of these smallholders.

Agricultural extension is transforming itself into a new discipline that seeks to facilitate change in rural and regional communities. With extension being currently undervalued in Australia, there is need for increased awareness of the role of the 'new extension', an extension that is part of a suite of policy instruments and that recognises the potential role to be played by private sector extension providers. As a professor of rural sociology and extension in the Tasmanian Institute of Agricultural Research at the University of Tasmania, I hold a unique position and I offer to make myself available to the Committee for further discussion on the nature of the new extension and the pivotal role of rural social research in agriculture.

To give some sense of the contribution rural social research can provide, I attach a paper “Social principles for agricultural extension to assist in the promotion of natural resource management” which is currently the most downloaded paper from the *Australian Journal of Experimental Agriculture* (published by CSIRO). Further publications can be downloaded from my website (see below).

My position was created by the Tasmanian Institute of Agricultural Research – itself a partnership between the Tasmanian Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment; the University of Tasmania; and agricultural industries – in order to address the social issues in agriculture, and to apply an understanding of the social issues to the competitive advantage of agricultural industries in this state. I would be please to engage with the Committee further to encourage a broadening of the way rural training needs are conceived.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'F. Vanclay', written in a cursive style.

Prof Frank Vanclay

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