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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES  
AND FORESTRY

**Recognition of Prior Learning and Current Competencies**

**SUBMISSION NO. 10**

**Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture,  
Fisheries and Forestry**

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There is an aspect of existing agricultural education and training opportunities that I would like to bring to the attention of the Committee.

Currently individuals may be assessed for prior learning and current competency and granted an appropriate award to reflect their skills and knowledge. While these awards can be obtained by individuals based entirely on their life experiences they are not differentiated from awards that are gained by individuals who follow more formal and structured pathways.

The Australian Qualification Framework allows for levels of learning from 1 to 6. At the lower end of the scale the competencies are essentially skill based. Often a case of "can you or can't you?"

Problems arise at the higher levels where conceptual skills are often required. For example, in areas of decision making and management where evidence based on past experience may not be current as it relates to methodology and knowledge.

Where individuals seek recognition to obtain employment beyond their farm gates for one reason or another, and this I am told is one of the main reasons why people apply for recognition, the taking of evidence based on the past does not necessarily demonstrate the candidate's ability to operate in an unfamiliar environment. I illustrate this point with the following examples.

The first is the case of a farmer who attended a workshop and the task was to complete a budget for a farm he had visited. He did not respond and when prompted said that he had done many budgets for his own property and had brought them with him. When pressed it turned out that he lacked the skills to draw up a budget with unfamiliar information. Another concerns a person who had been granted recognition. She approached me for help with the completion of a farm plan for a property she was applying to be employed on. To me she was also not competent when it came to operating in a strange environment.

While the back of an envelope approach to budgeting may be adequate in an individual farm situation and meet the criteria of competence for that property, it may not be satisfactory in a situation where the employer expectations of ability associated with the

award are more demanding. If competencies are to be used then they should be written in such a way to reflect skills that have a broad focus and understanding.

Recognise current competencies by all means; but do not give them the same weighting as skills and knowledge gained through a more formal approach in areas of conceptual issues. If one of the aims of education and training is to expose individuals to new experiences and methods to gain knowledge then this is unlikely to be achieved by those who follow the path for competency recognition. The best use of recognition of current competency is to allow entry into more formal education of individuals without the normal entry requirements. If the assessment happens to be flawed then this will become apparent.

An important part of the learning process, as expressed by my students, was the value of mixing with and learning from their peers, not to mention the personal development which one observed. To say to these individuals that society's recognition of their time sacrifice and effort they make to develop their skills and knowledge is the same as if they took the soft option, is not only inequitable but ludicrous in the current climate of the shortage of skilled people through out Australia.