

27 May 2005

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Secretary

Inquiry into Rural Skills Training and Research

The Victorian Farmers Federation represents over 21,000 farmer members across 15,000 farm enterprises. As the leading representative organisation for farming interests in Victoria, the VFF speaks on behalf of our State's grains, dairy, livestock, horticulture, chicken meat, pigs, flowers and egg industries.

As the primary beneficiary of quality rural skills training and research, the Victorian farming community has a very strong interest in the long term provision of quality education services in Victoria.

This interest is also shared by Primary Skills Victoria, which is a key partner and industry stakeholder in Victorian agricultural and horticultural education. The PSV works closely with the VFF on vocational education and training issues, and regularly undertakes industry consultation and service delivery analysis to ensure that the training needs of the farm sector are being met.

At present, the VFF is extremely concerned about the long term sustainability of agricultural and horticultural education services in Victoria. This view is also shared by many other education service providers in Victoria, especially after the University of Melbourne announced its intentions to centralise its Institute of Land and Food Resources (ILFR) regional campus network late last year.

While the University's efforts to restructure their VET campus network has been temporarily stalled, serious concerns are held by the industry in regards to the sustainability of agricultural and horticultural education throughout the ILFR facilities and throughout other regional tertiary education providers in Victoria.

To address these concerns, the VFF will be hosting an Education Roundtable with industry stakeholders in early June. The primary goal of the Roundtable will be to establish a policy position with broad stakeholder agreement on the level of agricultural and horticultural education and training service required to support our farm industries.

In addition to developing broad principles supporting quality agricultural and horticultural education in Victoria, the roundtable will review the existing funding mechanisms which currently underpin the Victorian system. This Roundtable meeting will examine the following issues: student contact hours, infrastructure and maintenance costs, VET in Schools, individual ILFR campus autonomy and travel, accommodation and living support assistance.

A large number of industry stakeholders have been invited to participate in the Roundtable, including representatives from universities, TAFE's secondary schools, training interests, students, government representation (Federal, State & Local) and agribusiness.

At the conclusion of the Roundtable process, the VFF (in conjunction with industry participants) will use the roundtable's findings to advocate the industry's position to key decision makers within the agricultural and horticultural education sector.

The VFF appreciates the opportunity to provide input into the Rural Skills Training and Research Inquiry. We believe the outcomes of our Education Roundtable will be of significant value to your inquiry.

Should you have any queries regarding the details contained in our submission, please do not hesitate to contact Asher Judah, Policy Adviser - Education on (03) 9207-5522.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Merna Curnow', written in a cursive style.

Merna Curnow
Chairman
VFF Education Committee