

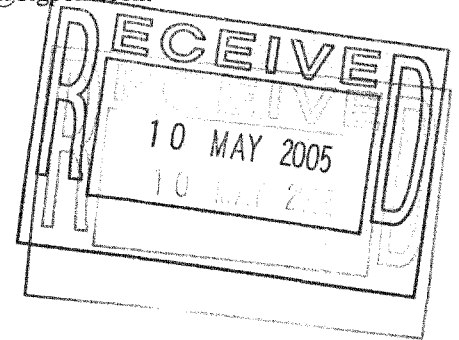
The  
**Isolated Children's Parents' Association**  
**OF NEW SOUTH WALES INC. • N.S.W. COUNCIL**

**SUBMISSION NO. 18**

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2<sup>nd</sup> May 2005

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



Dear Mr Shultz

**Re: Inquiry into Rural Skills Training and Research**

The Isolated Children's Parents Association of NSW would like to present to you as evidence into the Inquiry into Rural Skills Training and Research, a submission that has been prepared by the Association and that goes some way to addressing some of the issues involved.

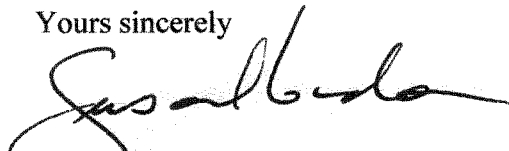
The "new look" Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture, as proposed by ICPA, is primarily aimed at offering senior school aged students an alternative pathway to a career in agriculture and related industries. The proposed course would see them complete school with a Certificate Three level of competency and ready for the workforce. The college would also be able to offer students the ability to extend their education in the future and as their career advances.

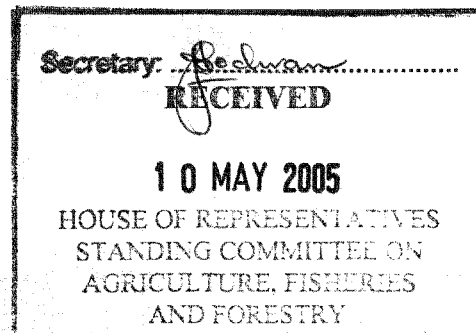
It is vital that accommodation be seen as a priority for isolated students.

As well as offering a full-time residential course, the college could supervise and oversee trainees that are being trained "on the job". This training would also be provided to Certificate Three level of competency.

ICPA-NSW believes this is an exciting proposal and is prepared to speak further to the submission if the necessity arises.

Yours sincerely

  
Susan Gordon  
President

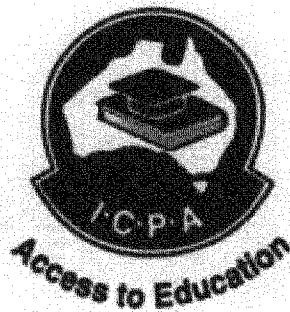


Submission to

**Establish a Senior Residential College  
at Murrumbidgee College of  
Agriculture**

from the

**Isolated Children's Parents' Association  
of NSW Inc.**



Prepared by  
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## **Executive Summary**

The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of NSW would like to submit a joint funding proposal to re-establish Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture. It is proposed that a memorandum of understanding be created between:

- Department of Education, Science and Training
- Department of Education and Training (NSW)
- Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry
- Department of Primary Industries (NSW)
- Industry
- Students

The college would be one of agricultural excellence providing flexible pathways of education to both indigenous and non-indigenous students from Year 11 and beyond. The college would offer accredited residential accommodation for Year 11 and 12 students wishing to pursue a Vocational Education & Training, HSC.

ICPA believes all students should have equal access to all forms of education and training and that safe accommodation should be available for school aged students who have to live away from home to access that education.

Concurrently MCA could provide an extension programme for

- trainees with trained staff supervising the indigenous and non-indigenous students "in the field".
- short courses
- Certificate IV in Farm Management by distance education with the residential component offered during school vacation periods

This college of excellence would offer a flexible pathway of education and training that would follow industry best practice guidelines whilst offering students, the potential employees; current employees and employers a skills based training programme second to none.

Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture would be busy, it would be dynamic and it would be laying the educational foundations for the future custodians of the land in the heart of the food bowl of this nation.

## **Introduction**

The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of New South Wales Inc (ICPA-NSW) is a voluntary, parent group that lobbies for access to equal educational opportunities for geographically isolated students. It is part of the larger national organisation ICPA-AUST, formed in 1971 when the rural industry was experiencing a severe downturn.

Children were being withdrawn from boarding school and mothers supervising their children on Correspondence (Distance Education) were simply not able to cope with the demands of working on the farm and continuing to teach their children. The school hostel at Bourke was threatened with closure and this was the catalyst for the formation of ICPA. Access to education for isolated children was disappearing and Mrs Pat Edgley MBE, from Bourke, called a public meeting from which ICPA was born. It quickly became a national organisation as parents across Australia came together to fight for their children's right to an education.

Drought is a fact of Australian Life – it is something that rural families take into consideration in their planning. However this history making drought, is so devastating and debilitating to many farming families that it will take a long time to fully recover from its effects.

Australia needs a productive, innovative rural industry, run by dedicated young people just as their parents have been. There must be assistance and encouragement to enable our young people to survive and even grow as a result of drought. Now more than ever it is vitally important that there is the opportunity for them to develop new skills and to keep abreast of changing trends in agriculture. This can only come from training facilities such as Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture where the practical development of those skills goes hand in hand with the theoretical knowledge needed in training these young people.

ICPA-NSW has made personal representation to Members of the Government, Opposition, Independents and the Department of Education and Training, expressing its outrage and dismay at the closure of the residential full and part time courses at Murrumbidgee in December 2003.

**ICPA-NSW proposes that a Senior Residential College should be established, focusing on agriculture for years 11 & 12 students who wish to pursue a career in agriculture and/or agricultural related industries, without the restrictions of traditional school teachings. This college should be located at Yanco using the existing infrastructure of the former Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture.**

## Background

Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture closed its doors to full-time and part-time residential Certificate 111 & 1V courses in Agriculture at the end of the school year in 2003. This was one of two colleges in the state of NSW that offered this type of education. The other is at CB Alexander Agricultural College, Tocal, forty five minutes inland from Newcastle, CB Alexander College.

- Murrumbidgee focused on broadacre farming and grazing management and being in the heart of the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area (MIA), irrigation farming and horticulture. It also offered traineeships for part-time students. It was the only facility in NSW that offered Pastoral Property Management, which at the time of introduction, was a unique course that offered training to those wishing to work in the pastoral industry. This course was developed with the assistance of a former ICPA President, Mrs Helen Withers and her late husband, Peter.
- CB Alexander College focuses on horse management, dairying and small scale farming principals and practices. It also offers a traineeship scheme as a part-time student and external studies.

## Inquiry into the Closure of MCA

It seems the decision behind the closure of the college to residential full and part-time courses was based on one recommendation (out of 19) from *Extending Education: review of the Agricultural colleges within NSW Agriculture* and that was to consolidate residential courses into one college if numbers continued to fall. The decision was made before other recommendations could be put in place to reverse the alleged trend or to consider projected numbers. The inquiry also reports that the statistics quoted from which the decision was based were inconsistent and did not reflect the true picture of what was being provided by MCA.

One witness statement can be quoted as stating the *plan for decline*. If it is thought that communities will decline, then the planning for that event begins to happen and it then becomes a *self-fulfilling prophecy*. This witness also stressed that *education is vital to sustainability of rural life and rural youth deserve a variety of regionally specific education options*. A range of evidence supported the need to have residential accommodation available for isolated students – many of whom do not even have a licence, let alone own the means to drive vast distances on a daily basis to attend college or TAFE. This was particularly relevant to MCA where the client base is from more remote areas of the state.

## Recommendations from the Inquiry

There were six recommendations from the inquiry:

- *That all rural communities impact statements be assessed by the Regional Communities Consultative Council before being included in any Cabinet proposal.*
- *That the Department explores with other agencies innovative ways by which the residential facilities at MCA can be reopened, recognising that residential facilities are essential for isolated students, indigenous students and farmers who may attend short courses at the Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture.*
- *That the Department working party examining the future of MCA infrastructure develops a strategy for use of the residential facilities in consultation with the local community.*
- *That the residential facilities remain intact and functional until such time as the working party examining the future of the College has completed its deliberations and reported.*
- *That the Government recognises the uniqueness and importance of agricultural education in NSW and continues to provide adequate financial, human and capital resources to MCA and CB Alexander Agricultural College, Tocal.*
- *That the Minister, in conjunction with the advisory councils of MCA and Tocal colleges, continue to seek improvement of courses offered at the Colleges and effectively market these courses, to ensure both colleges remain centers of excellence in agricultural education.*

## Cunderdin College

This proposal is based on the consortium, Western Australia Colleges of Agriculture. These five campuses are under the direction of the Minister for Education and operate with a degree of autonomy under an over-arching management structure. The college has achieved the status of Registered Training Organisation (RTO) under the Australian Quality Training Framework.

The campus that ICPA is basing its information is Cunderdin College, located at Cunderdin, east of Perth in the sheep/grain growing area of WA and which was visited by a deputation from ICPA-NSW State Council in August 2004.

Cunderdin College was featured on Landline in 2004 and boasts 100% uptake of students post school either into the workforce, tertiary education or apprenticeships.

The College has a 2000 hectare farm attached, enabling students to meet the requirements of Certificate 11 Level within the National Agriculture Training Package featuring competency based assessment. In conjunction with Agritech Crop Research, trials are conducted on the property. The trials are funded privately by national and international companies and by government and the college has developed a high profile as a Research and Development Agricentre.

Students can elect the training package suitable to their needs under the broad outline of

- 1) Farm Skills
  - Beef Production
  - Grain Production
  - Pig Production
  - Sheep & Wool Production
    - Certificate 11 in Wool Handling
    - Certificate 11 in Shearing
    - Certificate 11 in Crutching
- 2) Automotive Workshop in Design & Technology
- 3) Metals Engineering in Design & Technology
- 4) Furniture in Design & Technology

Maths and English are compulsory in Year 11 and maths is optional in Year 12 as is Senior Science.

Short courses are covered in the programme and consist of:

- Bushfires Fire Fighter Course
- ChemCert Chemical Users Course
- Defensive Driving Course
- Farmsafe Course
- OH & S Course
- Senior First Aid

## **Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture**

The existing infrastructure places MCA in an ideal situation to offer a similar senior college of excellence in agriculture. It is ideally located in the heart of the MIA but on the edge of the NSW sheep/grain growing area and not too far from the large pastoral areas to the south west of the state.

The senior college would allow students from other schools, including the three selective agricultural high schools, to transfer their studies which may more appropriately meet their needs and allow other students a position to complete their schooling with a UAI, HSC. This would also suit the schools that compete so intensely for the greatest number of students with the highest UAI. For some reason this is seen as a mark of excellence in education.

The Headmaster at Yanco Agricultural High School has stated that there are students who would benefit greatly if they were able to pursue a skills based HSC. He indicated to ICPA that he fully supported the proposal

Parents have been "conned" over the last few years into believing that all students must complete Year 12 and that students must aim for a UAI. This has proved to be detrimental to some students who either "drop" out during the two senior years or end up



disillusioned because they have been ranked so lowly in the UAI process. Students need to make a decision in Year 10 as to their educational pathway.

This Senior College of Agriculture is offering these students an **alternative pathway** to achieve success in life whilst gaining an education based on practice and competency. It is also upholding the ideals of the National Training Authority that all employees be trained to at least Certificate 111 level.

Employers have the opportunity of employing school leavers "with experience" and therefore do not have to spend valuable time on basic training and skilling. This gives both the employer and employee confidence that the job will be completed successfully and competently. A recent letter to the Land attests to this very problem whereby an advertisement asked for experienced farm labour, a school leaver was given the job on trial, it proved a disaster for both parties and the school leaver left, totally disillusioned and soul destroyed. If the student had the opportunity to attend the proposed new MCA, then the disaster could have been avoided.

### **Joint Venture**

The proposal is aimed at the college being a joint funding venture between,

- Department of Education and Training NSW
- Department of Education, Science and Training
- Department of Primary Industries NSW
- Department of Agriculture Fisheries & Forestry
- Students
- Industry (in kind)

### **Accommodation**

Waiting lists exist with the three state residential Agricultural High Schools in NSW. CB Alexander College offers the only residential facility for students, to pursue a career in Agriculture vocationally in rural NSW.

Residential accommodation is essential for students from isolated areas. Most students at the beginning of year 11 do not have a licence and/or will live too far from the college to commute on a daily basis.

Families must have their school-aged children board in a safe, supervised facility with 'duty of care' accreditation, for example the certificated course as set out by The Australian Residential Schools Association (TARSA). ICPA-NSW recommends that this responsibility rests with the Department of Education & Training

### **Training Provider**

It is essential that the college become accredited as a National Training Provider in its own right. This gives students a qualification that will be recognized nationally and allows them to work in all states of Australia.

## **Course Content**

- English and Maths at HSC level
- Sheep and Wool Production
- Beef Cattle Production
- Grain Production – Dryland / Irrigated
- Horticulture
- Automotive
- Metal Fabrication
- Others

## **Ancillary Courses**

The college could still run its short courses at the weekend and during school vacation periods. This would attract additional funds for the college, utilize the facility to its full potential and allow the students to access these short courses (free of charge), which may include:

- OH&S (green card)
- All terrain vehicles and motorcycles
- 4WD and off road driving
- Advanced driving course
- Tractor driving course
- Chainsaw Course at Level 1 & 11
- Chemical Users Certificate
- Senior First Aid
- Low Stress Stock Handling

## **Flexible Delivery**

MCA, could at the same time as educating the residential students, offer a traineeship programme co-ordinating and supervising extension students out in the field, just as they are currently doing in the Aboriginal Rural Training Programme. This world class training programme could also be offered to non-indigenous students who would study the same modules as the residential students (without the HSC component) and “come in” for short courses. Field staff would be required to supervise these students and be a link between the employer and the student’s education and training. MCA could provide links to employment and assist employers with student placements. This could work along the same lines as Rural Industry Training and Extension (RITE) Inc. in Queensland. It ensures the rural employee is trained adequately and employed correctly.

## Competition

Whilst it might be argued that this can be offered already through existing institutions in NSW, ICPA is putting this proposal forward as an alternative or a choice in pathways, to success for students and trainees. The ACCC is the competition watchdog, it promotes competition and fair trade in the market place to benefit consumers, business and the community. This proposal upholds the ideals of the ACCC and will provide a choice for students and the employer, therefore benefiting business, the consumer (student) and the community in general by upholding the ideals of the Australian National Training Authority "that all employees be trained to at least Certificate III level" (quoted from an ABC radio interview with Stuart Homery AO, Ex Chairman of ANTA, 9<sup>th</sup> November 2004). Competition is a great guardian of quality.

## Best Practice

Agriculture seems to have been overlooked when it comes to education and this in part could be a result of the prediction that population will diminish west of the eastern seaboard, so for the planners it ceases to exist. It then, as said earlier, becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The rural sector is currently facing some of the greatest changes ever in industry lead practice management and government imposed legislation restricting and even banning long used management practices. Whilst this is not a criticism, it points out the even greater need for agricultural industry employees and managers to be far better educated and trained than was essential in the past.

They need to be skilled in best practice of

- animal husbandry and food production
- in repairing and maintaining plant and equipment
- of building and construction
- of understanding the land and environment upon which their livelihood depends and the way that this can be managed and improved
- of understanding the law and its requirements
- of accreditation and record keeping

Agriculture is an extremely complex industry and it needs educated managers and employees who are trained to different levels in a variety of ways. They need to be quick thinkers; they need to be lateral thinkers as there is never one solution to the problem or one way of doing a job.

Agricultural employees need to be able 'to do' before they can tell, it is therefore essential that they have available to them skills based training in a controlled and safe learning environment.

Agriculture provides over 20% of Australia's goods and services exports and farmers are the custodians of the land. Australia needs skilled farm labour, it needs skilled and educated agricultural managers, and it needs students to be able to choose the pathway that can best provide those skills.

One of those choices should be a college of agricultural excellence as proposed by ICPA at Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture.

## **Conclusion**

ICPA believes and recommends:

*“That, via all levels of government, with community and business assistance, a residential college for senior school students wishing to pursue a career in agriculture should be established, utilizing the existing facilities at Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture, Yanco. This proposed college would also provide flexible pathways to extend training and education beyond the school years.”*

ICPA is willing to speak further to this submission and would like to be involved in further discussions with the Department of Education and Training on the issues that are particularly relevant to and affect rural students.