

Ms Loes Slattery
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations
and Education Committee
Parliament House Canberra 2600

Tuesday, 4 March 2003

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee:
Inquiry into current and future skills needs

In follow up to our telephone conversation this morning, I wish to reiterate for the Committee's information the kind of work we undertake and the difficulties in funding this work in order to build the human capacities of rural communities as well as provide future options, the adaptive capacity to change in response to pressures of change and the experience, skills and "capability-building" knowledge required. This work also involves considerable policy analysis relevant to these issues.

The Institute undertakes truly engaged research and "extension" including transfer of knowledge and skills for innovative solutions to pressing issues of change on rural Australia. These include - to give just a few examples - regional development (environmentally friendly industry clustering and industry ecosystems), community cohesion and rural crime; life stages and farmer retirement (a mentoring scheme developed); inter-generational transitions; innovative sustainable farming practices through 'model' projects with farm families (eg, "Tilbuster Commons" project featured on 7:30 report and Landline); helping in rural homes and businesses with internet and communications issues (while gathering data).

These projects require an enormous investment of time in building and maintaining relationships and credibility with "real" people, businesses, local government and all levels of other government agencies and policy makers in this part of rural Australia (Some of the Institutes work is National, but much is focussed on the New England and North West NSW, Southern Qld, and adjacent rural-coastal areas; and Murray Darling Basin). However, with the exception of the Directors salary, all Institute staff must fund their salaries (& on-costs), travel, operating and maintenance from projects (external funding sources) - in fact the Institute is 95% self funding.

The Institute could contribute much more, in building and transferring knowledge, training and capacities to rural communities, if just a proportion of its time was funded for this critically important rural engagement. Funding 20-25% of Institute staff time only amounts to \$240,000 - \$280,000 per year - a small investment for really quite substantial returns.

As time permits, I'd be happy to attend a public Hearing of the Committee. I would appreciate travel costs being covered.

Yours sincerely

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