

2nd September 2008

Mr John Carter
Secretary
The Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Government Skills Australia Submission to:

Inquiry into the effects of climate change on training and employment needs

Government Skills Australia is the Industry Skills Council for Government and Community Safety and is contracted by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations to manage the national qualifications and workforce development strategies for employment in:

- The Public Sector including Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments;
- Local Government;
- Correctional Services;
- Public Safety including Defence, Police, Fire services, Emergency Management and services and marine rescue;
- Water.

Each Industry sector has an industry advisory committee with representation from employers, trade unions and professional associations, peak bodies and training organisations. Government Skills Australia is contracted by DEEWR to develop an annual Environmental Scan which identifies and analyses trends in skills needs and workforce development priorities. This Scan helps to inform the Commonwealth

Government on the allocation of resources for training to address current and future industry needs.

The current predictions about future climate change have recently been included in the strategic planning of the GSA industries, with some sectors making the predictions a high priority. The following comments are summaries of the discussions taking place in each of the sector consultation and planning activities.

Water

The water industry is acutely aware of the impact of climate change on its role, and on the skills required by its current and future workforce. The areas of impact on training include:

- The escalating development of new technologies to improve water efficiency and water re-use such as desalination plants, waste water treatment, pipelines and water transfer.
- Changing demographics and the continuing population growth and pressure in certain urban growth areas, for example South East Queensland.
- Government policy and legislation on water use and re-use and the shift to new sources of potable water.
- New emphases on water measuring and the demand for hydrography and hydrology and metering.
- Expanded investment in infrastructure such as dams and aquifer management.
- Organisational culture and leadership from a demand and productivity approach to a conservation and consumption control approach, and from large state-wide utilities to small community water resource management.
- More demanding environmental regulations and accountability.
- Move by regulators, national guidelines, water quality standards and service contracts to require water operators to have certification based on national qualifications and skills sets.
- On site water collection, treatment and distribution for industries such as housing development, resorts, manufacturing, mining and agriculture.

Public Safety

The Public Safety industry has primary responsibility for the safety and security of Australian infrastructure, national boundaries, individual and community safety, protection and preservation of property and assets. Sectors such as the fire services and emergency management and response have examined the direct impact of climate change including:

- The increase in extreme weather events, particularly in changes in scale and location, and the demands on recruitment and training of volunteers essential to these services in regions which have no previous experience in these events.
- New technology and more sophisticated and skilled equipment for use in extreme events.
- Reduced access to water for use in firefighting and in maintaining essential services to devastated and evacuated communities.
- Reduced access to water for training in firefighting, and therefore more dependence on simulations and non-water substances.
- Collaboration and coordination for multi-agency planning and response strategies and common investment in communication technology, transport, equipment, logistics and authority.
- Potential for Police and Defence to play a greater role in civic control and national and international population movement.

Public Sector and Local Government

The work of government focuses on policy development and implementation and on maintaining social infrastructure during changing demands and circumstances. This includes:

- Requirement for increased regulation and inspection in new areas of government responsibility; for example, Gold coast houses on canals now have to be built so they can be moved if sea levels rise.
- Policing water regulations and the use of hoses and watering systems.
- More specific customs and quarantine inspection as diseases, pathogens and organisms change habitats.

- Policy development and innovative thinking - solar panel subsidies, hot rocks project, new forms of transport, new energy generation, environmental impacts.
- Risk management for government and for changes to liability.
- Greater investment in sustainability.
- Social action in times of crisis and providing leadership and good practice to be credible and maintain the communities confidence.

The Senate Inquiry Terms of Reference

a. the ability of universities and other research and training institutions to meet current and future demand for climate change professionals

Government Skills Australia, with other industry skills councils, has increasing concern about overall skills shortages for its industries. The pressure of putitive climate change comes at a time when a combination of other factors is placing pressure on the recruitment and development of the next generation workforce. There is no existing culture of climate change professionals, and government responses to the changing skills needs created by proposed climate change are piecemeal. If research and training institutions need to rely on industry to provide the climate change professionals, they will only exacerbate the problem of skills shortages in the industry. If there are climate change professional outside industry, they will have problems with credibility with the industry. GSA has no evidence that the significant emphasis on research on climate change has found its way into education and training for industry. It is likely that this gap in response will be more marked in the vocational training sector than in universities.

b. measures to assist understanding of climate change in the Asia-Pacific region, including provision of training and skills assistance.

Enterprise training providers in the Government Skills Australia industry sectors have significant experience in partnering in projects in the Asia Pacific region to provide training and skills assistance in areas such as governance, public sector management, Defence, Policing, natural resource management, and in aid projects to assist developing communities. Because much of this training is aligned with Commonwealth and State and Territory Government resources, policies and diplomatic relationships with Asia-Pacific countries and aid agencies, it is more

reactive than such venture might be in the corporate and business sectors. The water industry and local government do have the capacity to draw upon Australian expertise in the management of community awareness, new technologies and practices and the introduction of cultural change through regulation and community education.

Government Skills Australia welcomes the Senate's Inquiry in an area of review with great significance for its industry interests. Because of the still very speculative nature of climate change it is difficult to provide concrete examples to address the terms of reference, but Government Skills Australia, through its advisory networks, will undertake more research if the Inquiry feels it could be useful. Please contact us if we can provide more information.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Meatheringham', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Bernard Meatheringham

CEO