



Cnr Lords Place & Kite Street
P O Box 1314
ORANGE NSW 2800
Telephone: (02) 6369 0980
Facsimile: (02) 6399 0987

Mr Ian Cohen MLC
Chair
General Purpose Standing Committee No 5

Dear Sir

Re: Comment on *the inquiry into the Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture*.

The Regional Communities Consultative Council (RCCC) is the peak community advisory body to the Premier, the Minister for Rural Affairs and the Government on rural and regional issues. The Council would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to this inquiry. The RCCC supports the need to undertake an inquiry to fully comprehend the social and economic impacts on regional communities of the decision to move residential training from the Murrumbidgee College to the Tocal College in the Hunter Region.

Response to inquiry issues:

The impact on the closure of the residential training at the Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture goes beyond the communities of Leeton and Yanco. Traditionally the students of the College have come from the extensive areas of western NSW, as well as the intensive irrigation areas of the M.I.A. to undertake studies within this entirely relevant educational environment.

The intended movement of the residential courses from Yanco to the Tocal College in the Hunter Valley does not recognise the vast differences in climatic conditions between the two areas. Yanco and the surrounding district grow the vast majority of Australia's rice and the majority of NSW grapes, as well as being located close to the extensive grazing areas of the Western Lands Division. It is therefore vital for the future of these industries that students be given the opportunity to study within this environment.

For example, attempting to relocate residential course at Tocal will effectively eliminate the ability of students to access courses relating to:

- Pastoral property management (which is a requirement imposed by Western Lands leases);
- Irrigation and water management;
- Broad acre farming; and
- Environmental management in a practical context.

In addition, Yanco also delivered a range of indigenous training programs, at a location readily accessible to the indigenous communities of western NSW – we are not certain that these courses, which are an essential component of attempts by indigenous communities to achieve economic self-reliance, are to be delivered at any other relevant location.

We are also able to convey information to the Inquiry that it would appear that only one student has successfully transferred from Yanco to Tocal, and has remained in training. It has been reported to us that several students have now “dropped out” of formal training, after transferring from Yanco to Gatton in Queensland, as the social dislocation and distance from home proved too much for them.

Overall, the Council is concerned that the removal of the educational infrastructure represented by Yanco will have a negative impact on attempts to develop the economy (and particularly its agricultural industries) of the Murray and Riverina regions. Intellectual capacity and developed skills are vital components of strategies to achieve regional development. In addition, the closure of the residential aspect of the college also impacts on the areas ability to host functions as there is no other residential housing available. Many community groups that have members from across Central, Riverina and Western NSW often use the facility due to its central location.

In our opinion, the transfer of both Tocal and Yanco to the Department of Education and Training, and the continuing operation of both institutions as residential agricultural colleges, would be in the best interests of the regional community of NSW.

Education is vital to sustainability of rural life and rural youth deserve a variety of regionally specific

education options.

On behalf of the RCCC I would like to thank you again for the opportunity to raise these important issues with you.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Diana Gibbs". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Diana Gibbs
Chair