



BLAND SHIRE COUNCIL

P.O. Box 21, West Wyalong NSW 2671

Telephone: (02) 6972 2266 Fax: (02) 6972 2145 Email: council@blandshire.nsw.gov.au

ABN: 13 251 814 087

people pride progress

Our Ref: CF

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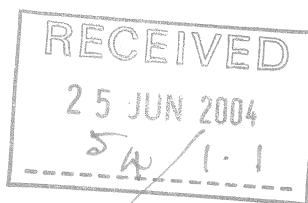
Date:

18 June 2004

Contact:

Carmen Formosa

23 JUN 2004



Mr Ian Cohen MLC
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Subject: Inquiry - Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture

Dear Mr Cohen

Bland Shire is located in Central NSW and as at the 2001 census, had a population of approximately 6,400 people. The Shire has a heavy reliance on agriculture and is supportive of the continued growth and development of this sector.

Bland Shires major population centre, West Wyalong, is located one and a half hours drive from Leeton. Western agricultural areas of the Shire are in closer proximity to the Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture and the facility is recognised as a local provider of excellence in agricultural education.

Council is concerned with a number of factors regarding the closure of the Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture and has addressed these issues in the attached submission.

Please contact the undersigned or Council's Economic Development Officer, Carmen Formosa if you require any additional information in regard to this submission.

Yours faithfully

Frank Zaknich
General Manager

Lack of community and industry consultation

Bland Shire Council is concerned with the lack of community consultation undertaken by the Department of Agriculture prior to their decision to close residential courses at the Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture being made.

The decision making process undertaken appears to be lacking in the element of transparency, potentially impeding the decision making process. The lack of consultation and transparency may demonstrate that the State Government is not committed to education or employment in rural and regional areas.

The impact on education outcomes in the district

Education and training of our agricultural workforce is important to the region as industry in the Bland Shire is predominantly agricultural with 38% of the workforce employed in the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sector (ABS Census 2001). Main commodities produced are grains, beef and sheep. Grain production has been expanding at the expense of livestock enterprises. The gross value of agricultural commodities produced totals \$121,456 million (1995/1996).

The agricultural sector is growing in terms of total area farmed and average farm size, indicating an increase in productivity as farms consolidate into larger and potentially more profitable units. These larger units are more reliant on skilled and qualified owners, managers and employees and a long term increase in the demand for courses provided by MCA is expected.

Agricultural Activity in the Bland Shire

	1993	1996	2001
Number of establishments	604	600	551
Area (ha)	751,980	756,850	775,357
Average area	1,215	1,261	1,407
Number of people involved	1,100	1,106	1,051

Source: ABS 1301.1 Regional Statistics NSW 1998-2003

Council is concerned that the closure of residential training at MCA will impact on the levels of training available to the residents of the region. Faced with the option of moving further from home, especially in times of drought and poor returns from farming, many younger students may not go on to undertake important training and skills.

The focus of the courses offered at Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture is broadacre agriculture, this has a great deal of relevance for our region and the predominance of large scale grazing and cropping enterprises. The ability of a facility located in Tocal to provide the same level of practical education services for this type of agriculture appears limited.

The potential impact that the closure of full time courses will have on the College's ability to provide quality continuing education courses is questioned. Farmers are faced with increase pressure, both from legislation and declining terms of trade, to improve their skills and knowledge. The closure full time residential courses at MCA may impact on the facilities ability to provide ongoing education courses on a part time residential and part time non - residential basis.