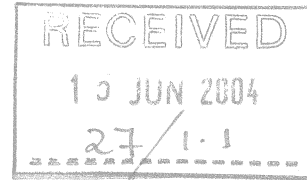


K.Fretwell  
"Glen Iris" RMB 27  
Barellan NSW 2665

11<sup>th</sup> June, 2004

The Chairman  
Standing Committee No 5  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000



Dear Sir,

**RE: Closure of the Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture – Yanco**

As a past student of the Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture (MCA) and as a member of the regional community, I wish to voice my disappointment, anger and arguments relating to the closure of the aforementioned college.

It seems as though the announcement made by the Hon. Ian Macdonald – Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries – on 4 September 2003 was done with very little thought as to the consequences it would bring to the Riverina or the rural community at large.

Made without any consultation with the administration, staff, students or local community, this decision appears to have been based upon low student numbers and the belief that all current students and courses can be relocated to CB Alexander College at Tocal. If this is the case, how is it that student numbers have actually increased this year and why were student numbers misrepresented by the Minister when justifying the closure? Past student numbers quoted (65) included part time trainees, 2003 numbers only quoted the 39 full time students – there are also 35 part time trainees this year which brings the total number to 74.

And how can this be a justifiable reason when Australia has just come through the worst drought in over 100 years? When you're trying to live on next to nothing something has got to give and for some potential students it would have meant the deferment of their education.

As for high running costs and relocating education services to Tocal....Firstly MCA is bound to have higher running costs when it runs far superior and more involved courses than CB Alexander College. Many of these courses and modules within the courses offered at MCA are simply not catered for at Tocal. There is also strong evidence to suggest that many students chose MCA over Tocal or finish their studies at MCA as the quality and component of the courses are better. Secondly, is the fact that money generates money. If the State Government doesn't spend money replacing important vacated lecturer positions or invest in the college itself, how can it expect to attract new students?

The effect of this closure is not just catastrophic for the students and 44 staff directly involved, but also the wider community. Nearby towns will lose valued members of their communities, direct wages of \$2.5 million and \$10 million overall in ripple effect. Added to this is the loss of money spent by students during their stay in the local area.

The ripple effect also means that further jobs could be lost in the community. Many MCA students undertake welding and woodclassing courses through TAFE - Leeton during their one to two years of study. With many of their student numbers now being taken away from them, TAFE may have to seriously consider either dropping courses or reducing staff levels.

Why close a college with so many resources and so much potential? MCA's location is perfect and one reason why it can offer better and more relevant courses to students wishing to enter agriculture west of the Great Dividing Range (which, let's face it is where most agriculture in Australia is carried out). It's proximity to all farming situations means that important work experience positions - and even jobs - can be more easily attained. Grazing in the western division, irrigation, horticulture, broad acre cropping, dairy, poultry, pork production, equine industries and forestry are all located in or very near the Riverina, one of the most productive agricultural areas in Australia. Why wouldn't you have an agricultural college located here?

The college is located on a Department of Agriculture research farm - it has so many resources to draw upon, experienced staff, awards in 1998 for NSW Training Provider of the Year and National Indigenous Peoples' Training Provider as well as an excellent 40 year history of teaching up and coming farmers. It has top class facilities - accommodation, stables, library, lecture rooms to name a few - all which will be wasted, including eight buildings built by the Commonwealth at a cost of \$3 million.

The closure of this college is yet another blow to the rural community - a loss of an affordable agricultural tertiary institution, a waste of resources, a huge monetary loss to the surrounding community - and an announcement based on seemingly very few facts. With the increased requirement of formal training in many aspects of agriculture today, this kind of institution is needed much more than ever.

In closing, I urge you to consider these arguments and to do all in your power to turn this decision around and restore the valuable services that Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture offers.

Yours sincerely



Kylie Fretwell