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To *Ms Rachel Simpson*..... Number *92707416*
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*To Follow Submission to the Inquiry into
the Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture (3 Pages)*

*Regards
Richard Chaffey*

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Response to the Inquiry into Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture

From: Richard G Chaffey
Deputy Chairman
C.B. Alexander Agricultural College Advisory Council

I am writing to you to express some concerns relating to the terms of reference of the inquiry into Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture. I would like to respond in particular to items (b) and (d) of that inquiry.

Item (b):

I am concerned at the total lack of industry and community consultation, preceding the announcement of the proposal to close the residential facilities at the college.

It also concerned me that Ministerial appointees to the Murrumbidgee College Advisory board were not consulted or notified in any form of the pending Government decision to close the college facilities.

Consultation with the relevant groups at the College may have lead to retaining the full-time training facility for the benefit of students and rural industry.

In the event of other changes to industry training establishments, where advisory bodies are already established, the Government would be well advised to utilise the existing structures and expertise to enable better outcomes for both industry and government.

Item (d):

With my comments in relation to item (d), I wish to reflect on twenty years experience and involvement in Rural Training in NSW. I have been involved with the TAFE system as a part-time teacher in Agriculture and a term as Chairman of the Council of New England Institute of TAFE. I have also chaired the NSW Rural Industry Training Committee for four years. I have also been involved in the development of rural industry skills training and establishing uniform competency standards as a member of the Rural Training Council of Australia.

My observations will be in two parts – firstly with regard to Tocal/ Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture and secondly, relating to TAFE.

Tocal/Murrumbidgee Colleges of Agriculture.

As an advisory member to Tocal, I believe the most important attribute of the college has been its direct involvement with NSW Agriculture. This has ensured continued relevance in training and Tocal has been able to directly assist NSW Agriculture in the delivery of extension services through training. A current example of this working together is the establishment of a resource centre at Tamworth Centre for Crop Improvement.

Of similar significance, is the support for the college by farmers and rural industry groups. As a major part of the training program at Tocal, students experience on-farm training. This comprises quality training on-site at Tocal as well as work with co-operating farmers across Eastern Australia.

Tocal College is proud of its employment record of its students. 95% of students go directly into employment after finishing their course. 90% of these students remain in rural industry.

Until recently, Murrumbidgee College and Tocal have been able to cover a broad range of Agricultural pursuits. Murrumbidgee College covering broad acre farming, sheep industry, pastoral management and flood irrigation. Tocal has specialised in beef industry/grazing, dairying, equestrian, general agriculture and most recently, environmental studies. Both colleges have been providing basic management training, leading into Diploma courses and, in turn, gaining credits towards degree courses.

Both colleges provide a fully commercial agricultural situation for students to get relevant industry basic training in a realistic environment.

Also, provision of accommodation on-site, has meant that rural students leaving school at Year 10, have an opportunity to further their studies in an appropriate environment.

From an industry point of view, both colleges have had the ability to change quickly to new industry requirements and remain relevant to industry needs of the day. An example of this change is the development of environmental studies courses at Tocal, a first for Australia, and a credit to the Principal and staff of the college.

TAFE NSW.

TAFE has a network of colleges across the state and is in an excellent position to provide training to industry. This is not happening. There are some concerns from an industry point of view with the TAFE system.

- Lack of appropriate resources.
- Lack of flexibility to meet industry changes quickly.
- Industry questions the outcomes of TAFE training that competencies obtained by students are below industry basic standards.
- Most of TAFE's rural studies courses have been centralised in the past ten years, allowing private providers to take over a major section of the training market in regional areas.
- Industry consultative groups are no longer working within the TAFE system.
- Whole college centres for rural training have been closed eg a large regional centre such as Tamworth, which had specialised agriculture training facilities, now runs no courses in Agriculture at all. By closing centres such as this at Tamworth, TAFE has lost industry sympathy and support.

Conclusion.

From my perspective, Tocal and Murrumbidgee College are different in their basic structure to anything offered by the TAFE system. They provide Certificate 3 and Certificate 4 training in a *real* environment.

The colleges' close ties with agriculture are evidenced by the extensive list of co-operating farmers. These farmers provide a multi million-dollar back-up network for the training of students.

In the interest of resource sharing, both colleges have worked with local TAFE colleges, providing courses to prevent duplication.

With the funding cut backs experienced by the Department of Education and Training over recent years, and the flow on effect to Agriculture study centres across the state, there is no guarantee that Tocal and Murrumbidgee colleges would not be placed in a worse economic position than they are now.

I cannot see any benefits to be gained by transferring the college system to the Department of Education and Training. The existing colleges provide unequalled training to rural industry, which is fully accepted by rural industry and is prepared to change as and when required to meet industry needs. This is not happening in the TAFE system.

Furthermore, closure of the residential component of Murrumbidgee puts in jeopardy the broad acre farming and pastoral management section of training in NSW. No other institution in NSW covers these areas to the extent it was at Murrumbidgee College.