

INQUIRY INTO SKILLS SHORTAGES IN RURAL AND REGIONAL NSW

Organisation: Riverina Area Consultative Committee (RACC)
Name: Ms Peta Beelen
Position: Executive Officer
Telephone: 02 6964 5540
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Theme:

Summary

5 August 2005

The Director
Standing Committee on State Development
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Re: Inquiry into Skills Shortages in Rural and Regional NSW

I am lodging a submission to the Inquiry on behalf of the members of the Riverina Area Consultative Committee Inc (RACC). Attached you will find comments relevant to this Inquiry which covers:

- o Activities undertaken by the RACC in response to skill shortages
 - o Lessons learnt in facilitating responses to skill shortages
- The need for coordinated joint activity to address the issue of skill shortages

The matters raised in this submission are most relevant to the Terms of Reference items shown below:

- (c) The strategies and programs of local governments to retain and attract skilled workers including opportunities for strategies and programs in conjunction with non-government bodies such as regional business organisations and Area Consultative Committees and Regional Development Boards
- (e) Coordination between Local, State and Commonwealth Governments, to attract and retain skilled workers

Thank you for your consideration of the issues raised in this submission. Should you have any queries or require further clarification, please contact me on 6964 5540.

Yours sincerely,



Peta Beelen
Executive Officer

Activities undertaken by the Riverina ACC in response to skill shortages

The Riverina ACC has facilitated and supported responses to skills shortages within its region since 1994, with activities encompassing both long term and short term approaches, including:

- Between 1996 and 2002, the RACC was involved in promoting school to work programs, to encourage regional employers to build constructive and long term connections with the young people that will form the future local workforce, thereby encouraging young people to consider local training and employment opportunities – these activities were undertaken jointly with school to work organisations
- During 1995-1997 the RACC developed and distributed material to students that provided information about local skill shortages and training and work options available – it was recognised that it was also essential to inform careers advisers about skill shortages and training options - students and parents were encouraged to consider alternate training options to university, for those students leaving after Year 12
- Convening a Labour Seminar in conjunction with the then Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) and Griffith City Council in 1995 to explore issues around skill shortages and labour attraction
- Obtaining funding in 1995/96 through DEETYA National Office to fund a Skills Recruitment Campaign, which included activities to encourage unemployed people from a number of Melbourne centres to seek work in the Riverina – this activity was undertaken jointly with the then CES
- In 1997, it was decided by the RACC, Riverina Regional Development Board (RRDB), local councils and regional businesses, that a skills audit was necessary to determine the skills that were required within the region – subsequently funding was accessed through the Regional Assistance Programme to fund the audit, which encompassed 17 LGAs in the region and was conducted throughout 1997/98
- Additional Regional Assistance Programme funding was then received for the analysis of the data collected in the skills audit, and a report was produced in September 1999 (available on the RACC's website)
- The skills audit responded to the need identified within the region and reflected in the NSW Premier's 5 Point Plan for development in the Western Riverina
- In 1998/99 the RACC obtained funding through the Regional Assistance Programme to undertake a Labour Attraction Strategy, which involved the production of a range of materials that employers could use when

recruiting staff from outside the region – this need had been identified as part of the skills audit process and through discussions with employers – the theme of the material was “Take a Job – Get the Lifestyle, Riverina *naturally*” and the material developed included:

- **Local Government Area (LGA) Sheets** that provide an outline of 20 LGAs
 - **Community Information Guides** that listed facilities and services available in 6 LGAs
 - **Labour Attraction Strategy Pamphlet** that provided information about employment opportunities in 9 LGAs
 - **Folders** to use with the written material
 - **Video** that included testimonials from people about the benefits of working and living in the Riverina
 - **CD-ROM** that contained an overview of 9 LGAs in the region and their employment opportunities and lifestyle features
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- In 2001/02 the RACC provided financial support to the Career on a Plate project, funded by the Department of State and Regional Development (DSRD), which provided a structured work experience program for university science students in the Western Riverina – other support continued until the project was completed in 2005
 - In 2002/03 the RACC was involved in the Living Centres project, funded by the NSW Government to look at identifying some of the planning issues that impeded growth in the Western Riverina and impacted upon labour supply
 - Throughout 2002/03 the RACC provided financial support to and was a member of the Western Riverina Higher Education Community Working Party, formed by the RRDB, to look at ways to deliver flexible tertiary education in the Western Riverina, in order to increase skill levels – subsequently a Batchelor of Business course was developed through a partnership between the Riverina Institute of TAFE and Charles Sturt University
 - In 2004 the RACC was invited to join the Western Riverina Higher Education Steering Committee, which was formed to consider ways to expand the delivery of tertiary courses, following on from the successful Batchelor of Business course
 - Work continued with partners in the region to develop a project that could promote the region as an employment destination with lifestyle advantages - the C Change project was the result of this work – funding is now being sought from both Federal and the NSW Governments to support the next phase of this project

Lessons learnt in facilitating responses to skills shortages

Many of the lessons learnt over the years as a result of activity to facilitate responses to skills shortages are self evident, and Members of the Standing Committee will be well aware of them. In summary the major lessons gleaned include:

- Skills shortages have built up over a period of time, brought about by changes to work and training practices and the emergence of new technologies requiring new skills
- Locally, training bodies such as TAFE have responded well to more appropriately and flexibly meet the training needs of employers, however as new skill needs will continue to arise, training bodies must continue to meet emerging needs
- Parents, students, teachers and careers advisers continue to have a perception that university study is more highly prized than other forms of education such as traineeships – a mind shift is required to change this perception
- Strategies to address skill shortages need to be developed to meet both short term and long term needs, in order to maximise successful outcomes
- Attracting labour to regional centres can be quite complex and fraught – there are many factors that people take into account when relocating
- Governments at all levels and their agencies can only do so much to attract workers to an area – ultimately it is the decision of a business operator whether or not they hire someone for a position
- Governments have a role in undertaking broad marketing activities to promote regional centres and the benefits of living in them
- There is no quick fix or magic bullet to resolve skill shortages,

The need for coordinated activity to address the issue of skill shortages

The RACC considers it essential that strategies to address the issue of skill shortages are developed through partnership arrangements. The RACC has undertaken all of its activities in partnership with other stakeholders and considers that this provides the best chance of successful outcomes.

The Riverina is unique in that all levels of government and their agencies, training providers, employers, employer groups, school to work groups and schools have all formed strategic alliances to work towards ensuring that the local workforce is both able and available to meet the needs of industry. This is not to say that skill shortages have been resolved, but rather that the mechanisms are in place within this region to maximise outcomes and ensure that a coordinated approach is adopted.

The RACC has strong links with the RRDB, DSRD and regional organisations of Councils. This partnership has facilitated the development of the C Change project, which aims to encourage people to consider the benefits of working and living in the Riverina.