

INQUIRY INTO SKILLS SHORTAGES IN RURAL AND REGIONAL NSW

Organisation:

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Theme:

Summary

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LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL OF NSW
STANDING COMMITTEE ON STATE DEVELOPMENT
INQUIRY INTO SKILLS SHORTAGES IN RURAL AND REGIONAL NSW.

I write from the perspective of being a highly skilled, trades qualified engineer residing in a depressed rural town in NSW. My qualifications include Aircraft Engineer, Workplace Trainer, Assessor and Welder. I am also self motivated, innovative and inventive. I have devoted my work-life to the implementation of quality, efficiency and output in all aspects of production. I have been directly involved in the development of many practical solutions to several problems that effect our society. These include self employment, materialization of practical ideas and the conversion of agricultural wastes into valued resources. I have designed and constructed a pilot plant to enable efficient biological conversion of these waste products into high response crop fertilizers and remediates for the detoxification of industrial pollutants. This process is able to reduce agricultural greenhouse gas emissions and nutrient contamination of waterways as well as providing a substantial increase in soil humus and fertility levels. These developments are totally ignored.

I moved to rural NSW in the mid 1970s as my contribution towards what was termed at the time "decentralization" and pursued a career in engineering in support of agriculture with the design and construction of utilitarian equipment and art based metal products including many public sculptures. I have works on display in many locations in this state as well as the Globe Theatre in London England. I was instrumental in the establishment of the Artist Blacksmiths' Association NSW Inc., and performed the role of secretary, president and committee member for many years. I was also responsible for the transfer of this organization into Timbertown NSW, where demonstrations and training of blacksmithing skills are made available to the general public. This facility has proven to be a great asset towards the success of the tourist park. I have provided the community with training in welding procedures, metal working and sculptural development through the CYSS program in Kyogle NSW and the Adult Education system in Port Macquarie and Wauchope for more than twenty years, as there were no local state provided engineering training facilities available in these areas. These classes no longer exist due to insufficient class numbers. Apparently alcohol, gambling and televised football are more interesting to the local population than gaining new and exciting skills.

My dilemma focuses upon the fact of my age, 55, is regarded as too old to be considered for any worthwhile employment, regardless of the expertise that I possess and have shared with the community. Local employers are reticent to engage any individual who might possess skills that could command wages beyond the bare "award". There is also the fact that employers in this area will not hire people who might know more about the intricacies of a particular occupation, as it may be an embarrassment for them to be

found deficient. I have been warned several times that this situation is endemic in rural areas. Also, employers do not want people who are more skilled than what the job requires from the fear that wage demands may increase. There is little incentive to put your very best into work that is required to cater to the demands of mediocrity. Community complacency is endemic. I have been advised to gain bar-tendering skills in order to secure a job as we are no longer a producer economy. This consumer society that has developed is killing skills, stifling enterprise and smothering innovation. The "China price" is the only criterion that determines success in the local market. I feel that at present in the climate that exists there is no place for people such as myself to move forward. There are no opportunities for exercising long developed skills unless you are prepared to cater to the fickle eccentricities of tourism. I look forward to emigrating to somewhere I can be of use and appreciated. There is certainly no place for me in Australia at present and I deplore this.

Peter Allison.