

**Submission  
No 61**

**INQUIRY INTO ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT  
IN CENTRAL WESTERN NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Organisation:** Royal Agricultural Society of NSW

**Date received:** 22/12/2011

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Royal Agricultural Society of NSW

Hon Rick Colless MLC  
Chairman  
Standing Committee on State Development  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000

20 December 2011

Dear Mr Colless

Thank you for your recent letter inviting the Royal Agricultural Society (RAS) of NSW to provide a submission to the current inquiry into the economic and social development in central western NSW. As was identified by stakeholders during your round of public meetings, the RAS of NSW runs a number of active programs in the areas of education and youth development reaching into regional NSW, including the central west region.

Since it was founded in 1822, the Royal Agricultural Society of NSW (RAS) has been a powerful advocate for the development of agriculture in Australia by ensuring that agriculture is recognised and appreciated for the vital role it plays in the health and wealth of Australia. The Society measures and celebrates excellence in agriculture through the staging of events, rigorous competition and educational activities and support to ensure that rural communities and agricultural industries continue to thrive.

A large focus of our work in this area is activated during our largest event, the Sydney Royal Easter Show held annually, although our out of show activities and year round program in this area is increasing each year.

We believe that our activities are relevant to the following of your terms of reference:

- a) the provision of health, education and cultural facilities
- b) the reasons of population decline or growth in different areas
- d) ways to encourage development of local enterprises and the potential of the region overall
- g) any other factor restricting economic and social development in central western New South Wales.

Enclosed please find a brief overview of the RAS programs relevant to your current inquiry and those terms of reference as highlighted above. Primarily these are those education and youth programs delivered by our Agriculture department, and the outstanding work of the RAS Foundation.

It is important to note, that whilst the RAS endeavors to make a significant contribution to regional NSW and agriculture in Australia through all of these programs, and we achieve outstanding results each year, we are limited in the resources that we are able to invest in these programs. We have the mechanisms in place, and the RAS charter ensures that these activities are retained as our key deliverables, our reach is limited to the resources we have available.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. We wait eagerly to hear its outcomes and would be happy to provide additional information at any stage if this were deemed valuable.

Yours sincerely,

George Davey  
General Manager - Agriculture



16 December 2011

**Royal Agricultural Society (NSW) Foundation (RASF) Submission To;**

**The Legislative Council Standing Committee on State Development's Inquiry into economic and social development in central western New South Wales**

Terms of reference the RASF's work addresses with regards to factors restricting economic and social development in central western New South Wales;

- a) the provision of health, education and cultural facilities
- b) the reasons for population decline or growth in different areas,
- d) ways to encourage development of local enterprises and the potential of the region overall,
- g) any other factor restricting economic and social development in central western New South Wales.

**Background**

The RASF was established in 2007 by the RAS of NSW as their charitable arm through which they and other donors could positively contribute to the enhancement of vibrant and healthy rural NSW communities

In just three and a half years the RASF has disbursed \$571,000 across the areas of; Scholarships, Rural Youth Leadership and Community Development as well as our recently retired E3 numeracy and literacy program so as to give greater focus to the first two programs.

Follow is an overview of the RASF's two programs;

## Rural Scholarships

The great distance rural students often need to travel to access post high school education and training opportunities can be so great and come at such a cost that for many, their aspirations can never be realised due to lack of financial resources, information, social capacity and other such issues.

The RASF's Rural Scholarship program provides scholarships for rural students to cover some of the costs directly related to their further education and training goals.

### RASF Rural Scholarships Support;

- Students who demonstrate a passion for rural issues and opportunities and are committed to playing a part in shaping the future of rural and regional NSW
- Students who need a financial helping hand to achieve their further education goals and aspirations
- Students of any age undertaking part time or full time post high school study or training (university, VET courses, and apprenticeships). Note: Very few scholarships exist for mature age students
- Scholarships can be for any year of further study or training and for a diverse range of education and training pursuits.

### Rational for the RASF Rural Scholarship Program

- To help address the skills and labour shortfall in rural and regional NSW through the provision of financial support for country students to allow them greater access to post-high school education and training opportunities
- In 2011 the RASF offered Rural Scholarship for the first time in response to the identified need for more support for rural students. 619 applications were received and the need for assistance greatly outstripped the number of scholarships available. The RASF is building financial capacity to be able to assist a greater number of students in 2012 after recently receiving 865 applications for assistance next year.

### Supporting Evidence

ABS data shows that the participation rate of rural and regional youth in tertiary education is only 17 per cent – compared to 26 per cent for young people in metropolitan areas.

Of those rural students who do secure university places:

- 15% defer their commencement, and 30% of these never actually take up their studies. The Victorian Government's On Track data shows that regional students cited financial hardship as the reason for their forced deferral
- More than 81% are in the lowest two quartiles according to socio-economic status (Source – DEECD)

Research released by Queensland University of Technology in 2010 shows that rural students in first year university studies had an attrition rate of 15.85%, but for rural students on a scholarship this rate halved to 7.56%. The primary reason for students dropping out was economic hardship and related anxiety.

Research shows the greatest indicator of where someone will live in the future is where they grew up. Supporting more rural students to achieve a higher level of skill and education provides them with greater choice about where they live in the future and the opportunities available to them.

Without further education and training it is often difficult for young people to remain in rural areas as they generally need to move to larger urban centres to find low skilled work opportunities. A higher level of education or training allows young people to live in their preferred rural area and engage in a career that is meaningful to them.

For rural students to undertake post high school education and training such a goal often involves relocating long distances from home for short or longer periods of time at substantial cost. Research completed in 2010 shows that it costs between \$15,000 and \$20,000 for a student to live away from home. On top of this are the initial establishment costs.

Scholarships send a strong message of support and let a student know that the giver of the scholarship sees great value purpose in their education pursuit and is supportive of their goals and aspirations.

Studies show higher levels of education result in improved health outcomes, life expectancy and general wellness

### **Scholarships Offering and Expectations**

Applications open annually from July 1<sup>st</sup> and close September 30<sup>th</sup>

Full time scholarships - \$5,000 (paid in two installments – one each semester)

Part time study scholarships - \$1,500 (paid at the beginning of semester one)

Scholarship recipients are required to submit a midyear progress report

Scholarships are for one year only but previous recipients are able to reapply each year where their application is considered on its merits

Scholarship recipients are encouraged to attend (and almost all do) our annual regional or Sydney based scholarship presentation and alumni events

### **Benefits to Scholars**

Relieves financial anxiety associated with continuing education and training

Empowers and gives confidence

The RASF Rural Scholar Alumni opens professional networks and provides additional learning and self-development opportunities

Provides life skills such as; report writing, press interviews, public speaking

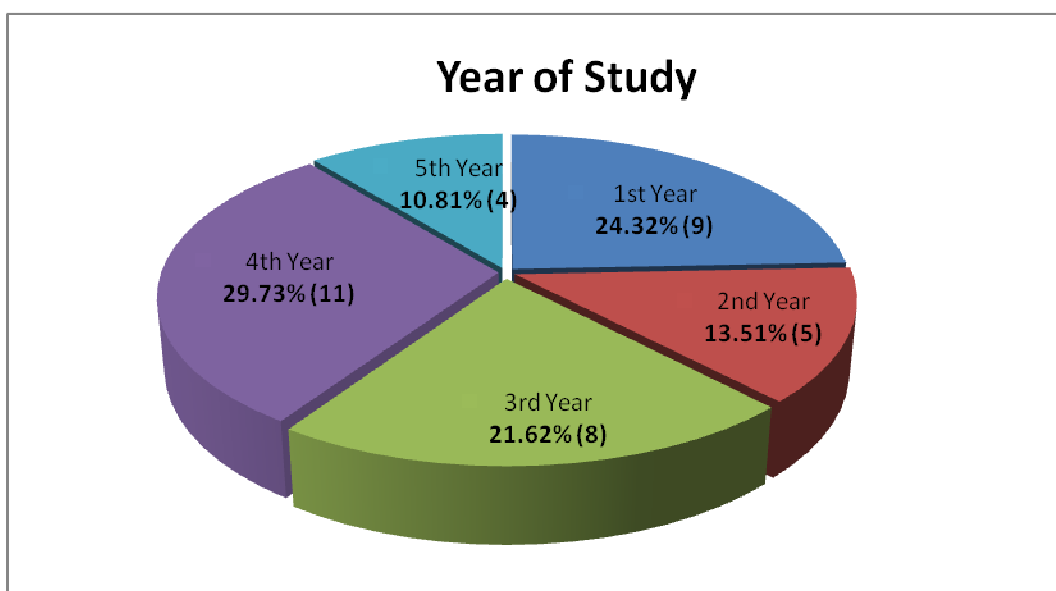
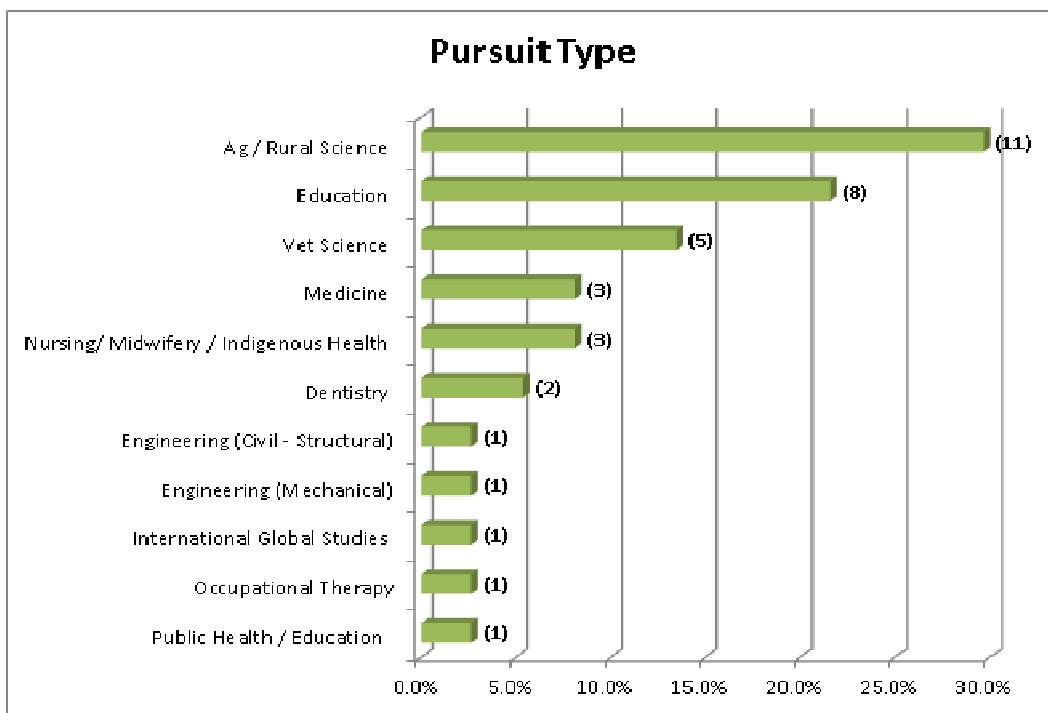
Complimentary three year RAS membership and entry to the Sydney Royal Easter Show

Potential mentoring opportunities with scholarship sponsor

## 2011 RASF Rural Scholarships Overview

RASF Rural Scholarships commenced in 2011. Below is a breakdown of the scholarships awarded and the students' area of education pursuit

- Total Scholarships Awarded - 37 (34 Full Time Scholarships – 3 Part Time Scholarships)
- Scholarship Recipients – Female 29 / Male 8





## RASF Community Futures Grant

The RASF provides grants of \$25,000 to fund youth (35 years and under) lead projects or programs in rural NSW communities that address a local need or issues. Once complete the projects need to result in enhanced social and economic outcomes for the broader community. Projects and programs are delivered through partnering with a community organisation.

The Community Futures grants encourage and celebrate rural youth leadership and recognise the way young people like to give back to their community today unlike their parents who typically joined organisations such as Lions, Rotary, CWA etc through which they contribute to their community. Young people today give in a very valuable way, but it is often done in a very tactical issue driven approach. It is hoped that the increased confidence and skills young people gain through the delivery of these community projects that it serves to inspire them to continue to take a leadership role in their community and embark upon other project initiatives.

Selected projects have a clear plan and budget and comply with RASF reporting requirements.

## Previous Winners

### 2009 - The Big Red Bus



**Project:** The Big Red Bus

**Recipient:** Emily Burt

**Community Partner:** Port Macquarie Alive Youth Group

**Location:** Port Macquarie, Hastings Valley, Mid North Coast NSW

Port Macquarie-Hastings region is an area located midway along the New South Wales mid-north coast, 420km from Sydney and 510km from Brisbane.

The Port Macquarie-Hastings local government area has a number of small villages and the three main townships of Port Macquarie, Wauchope and Laurieton. The region's population is approximately 75,000 with more than half living in the Port Macquarie precinct. Port Macquarie serves as the regional centre for the inland area, particularly for the rural communities and the associated agricultural industries.

**Idea:**

Emily's idea was to provide a mobile youth centre in the form of a red 1960's Double Decker Bus that regularly visits towns and villages in the Hastings Valley region. 'The Big Red Bus' provides a safe and



engaging place where young people can 'hang out' together in a non-threatening environment, encounter positive forms of social interaction, form friendships and be introduced to positive role-models, while at the same time being exposed to opportunities to become involved in a variety of different community services initiatives. The bus is manned by a team of local youth who are mentored and supported by a local community organisation.

### **Issues addressed:**

Emily wanted to make a difference in the lives of young people in her area who are isolated by their physical, socio economic, emotional or geographic circumstances. Of particular concern to her were the relatively high youth suicide rates in rural communities and the increasing incidence of risk-taking behaviour that can have tragic immediate and long-term consequences. Emily wanted to make a positive impact on the lives and futures of these young people by creating a sense of community, belonging and purpose that would significantly contribute to young people making positive lifestyle choices. At the same time, she wanted to create opportunities for young people to develop leadership and community service skills and a sense of responsibility toward themselves and others which in turn will benefit the community at large.

### **What they did?**

The project team renovated a 1960's double-decker bus and transformed it into a mobile youth centre. The bus was fitted out with sporting equipment, a climbing wall, the latest computer games and a café. The Big Red Bus regularly visits the Port Macquarie foreshore, Laurieton and Wauchope.

The bus is staffed by volunteers from the Alive Youth Group; an organisation based in Port Macquarie for young people aged 15 to 25. The group has a history of hands-on community projects including after school programs, sports activities, fundraising for a variety of charities.

### **Outcomes**

The Big Red Bus has delivered the following outcomes for the local community:

- Provided a place for young people to meet and participate in fun activities in a safe environment e.g. 'hang out' in the cafe, listen to inspirational guest speakers, access the internet, play sport
- Up-skilled a team of young Alive Youth Group volunteers to run the bus and its youth programs
- Delivered programs and activities that enhance life skills and help young people feel a sense of belonging and connectedness to something worthwhile
- Empowered the young people who participate in the Big Red Bus programs, which has given themself-confidence and self-pride
- Created a strong sense of purpose and community involvement for the youth mentors running the bus
- Created a safe and positive environment for young people to form new and hopefully long lasting friendships

## 2010 – Animals on Bikes



**Project:** Animals on Bikes

**Recipient:** Rebecca Staines

**Community Partner:** Cumnock & District Progress Association

**Location:** Cumnock, Central NSW

Cumnock is a tranquil rural village centrally located between Orange, Dubbo, Parkes and Wellington, about 4 hours west of Sydney. Cumnock's primary industry is agriculture, namely wool production, sheep and cattle and grain growing.

**Idea:** To create 120km of paddock art sculptures, known as 'Animals on Bikes', leading tourists on a self-drive trail between Dubbo Zoo and Molong, via Cumnock and Yeoval. The route is free, open year round and is designed to draw traffic off the main highway onto the secondary road that connects these communities. The overarching objective is to improve the economy through increased tourist activity in these towns.

### **Issues addressed:**

The Animal on Bikes project addresses some of the challenges faced by small country towns including:

- Declining population
- Unemployment
- Struggling rural businesses – the result of drought and traffic bypassing towns
- Lack of tourist attractions to draw visitors

### **What they did?**

The Animals on Bikes project commenced in 2009 and was already a successful tourism initiative when Rebecca applied for RASF funding. Their grant application was to assist with the second phase of the initiative that will take the number of sculptures on permanent display from 40 to 100, running from Cumnock right through to Dubbo. The opening of the extended display marked the beginning of a bi-annual tourism and promotion event for the area.

Rebecca and her team are utilising the funding to involve local show societies from the region and local schools to make their own "Animal on a Bike" sculpture by supplying materials for the 2011 competition.

### **Outcomes**

The Animals on Bikes project has resulted in greater a numbers of tourists driving through and stopping in these small towns, rather than taking the highway direct from Orange to Dubbo. This has aided businesses such as cafes, petrol stations, general stores, hotels, motels etc. The project has enhanced community confidence and outlook and phase two will serve to increase this even more.

"We believe the number of tourists, especially caravanning couples has increased since the word has been out about the Animals on Bikes tourist drive. We have seen many tourists come through our doors especially on weekends which has helped to increase business for us in what has been a relatively tough time for local businesses in general" *Gail Curtis , Gift & Homeware House Yeoval.*

“There has definitely been an increase in the number of tourists passing through town. The presentation night was a great night for the Cumnock community and our business” *Stuart Fitzgerald, Royal Hotel Cumnock.*

“The morale of the farming families involved in the project has visibly lifted. It seemed to strengthen the community spirit of all of the towns involved” *Amanda Murdoch, “Tindoo”, Molong.*

### **Outcomes**

The following outcomes have been achieved since the project began:

- No local businesses have closed
- No further decrease in population
- Increase in road traffic, according to RTA and Council reports
- Increased media interest in the area
- Enhanced community involvement and participation
- Promotion and appreciation of native and on-farm animals
- Increase in show gate entries

### **2011 – Oaklands Community Health and Fitness Centre**



Michelle Bridges and RASF Community Futures Winner, Tamara Nixon

**Project: Recipient:** Tamara Nixon

**Community Partner:** Oaklands Community Health & Fitness Centre Incorporated

**Location:** Oaklands, Riverina NSW

Oaklands is farming community in the [Riverina](#) district, 1 hour north west of Albury and 615 kilometres south west of Sydney. Oaklands, part of the [Urana Shire](#), has a population of around 350 people. The main agricultural focus is wheat and rice production.

### **Idea:**

The region has suffered from drought for a number of years and more recently, in 2010, was affected by the widespread floods that affected much of rural NSW. The climatic extremes had a negative impact on the community, creating mental and financial stress for many. Tamara felt that the community would benefit from a not-for-profit, low-cost fitness facility as physical exercise plays an important role in maintaining mental and physical health. By providing a facility in the local community health and fitness would be more accessible for residents, regardless of the weather, and also provide a place to socialise.

## **What they did?**

Tamara set-up a committee to manage the project and identify possible funding sources including the Royal Agricultural Society Foundation. Funding has also been provided by the Australian Government - Department of Health and Ageing under the Rural Primary Health Service program and FRRR. In January 2011, the project commenced when the committee secured an unused agricultural merchandise store in the heart of Oaklands. By March 2011 the venue was fitted out and operational.

The centre is open sixteen hours a day and offers classes in pilates, yoga, zumba, as well as, specialist exercise classes for men, women and the elderly. The gym is fully equipped with cardio and strength training equipment including treadmills, exercise bikes and weight machines. Visiting health care professionals also use Oaklands Community Health and Fitness centre to host workshops on diabetes, nutrition and mental wellness.

The flexible opening hours allow members to exercise at a time that best fits their daily commitments. Members can also choose from a range of memberships to suit their budget. An on-site crèche facility, gives parents the freedom to exercise whilst their children play in a safe supervised environment. The centre also has a communal kitchen that is a popular gathering place for members before and after their workout.

## **Outcomes**

Within three months of the Centre opening more than one third of the area's residents had become members and now attend the gym on a regular basis.

The initiative to start a health and fitness centre has resulted in:

- Improved mental and physical wellbeing of the Oaklands residents
- Reduced the impact of social isolation by providing an activity-based community centre
- Reducing the cost to society of preventable diseases and mental illness through increased physical and social activity

Tamara said 'The Oaklands Community Health and Fitness Centre provides a hub for community health initiatives and for people to connect socially. It is somewhere our youth have become engaged in healthy exercise and part of group activities. It has given everyone a positive focus off-farm, without opting for social interaction at a hotel or club. It has really provided inspiration to many to make a positive change in their life to be "fit for the future" in both body and mind'.

Charles Sturt University has identified The Oaklands Community Health and Fitness Centre as a successful health and fitness initiative. Their students will conduct annual reviews of the centre to measure and chart its impact on the health of Oaklands residents.



## 2011 – Let's Put Aria Park On The Tourist Map



RASF Executive Officer, Jocellin Jansson with RASF Chairman Mr John Fairfax AO & Winner Mr Rowan Bromfield



Ariah Park's New Camp Kitchen

**Project: Recipient:** Rowan Bromfield

**Community Partner:** Aria Park Community Projects Inc

**Location:** Aria Park, Riverina, Southern NSW

Ariah Park is situated just 20 minutes west of Temora, one hour north of Wagga Wagga in the Riverina. This 1920s heritage village offers the traveller a glimpse of living history tucked away in modern rural Australia. The heart of a strong and diverse rural community which produces cereals, oilseeds, wool, beef, fat lambs, stud stock and pigs.

**Idea:** Committee members of the Aria Park Community Projects Inc identified enhancing local tourism as being a key way they could help local businesses to remain viable as well as creating a more vibrant community for the future. Improving the local camping ground by building a Camp Kitchen and renovating an existing ablution block, the increased facilities would draw more tourists off the highway to stay. Of tourist market of particular interest were the caravan and motor home holiday makers who typically stay several days to several weeks.

Numbers at the camping ground had been steadily increasing each year, however there was a real need is for a Camp Kitchen and new shower and toilet facilities for the use of campers

### **What they did:**

Rowan and his team gathered quotes for their camp kitchen and ablution block design and sought the necessary council approvals. Contractors were engaged and phase one of the project, the Camp Kitchen was constructed using products and services from the area.

The opening of the Camp Kitchen was held in October 2011 at the beginning of the annual Mary Gilmore Cultural Festival weekend and saw a record number of caravan and campers using the camping grounds.

The committee will now turn their attention to raising some additional funds and beginning phase two of the project, the ablution block.

### **Outcomes/Impact:**

Although only just complete, the forward promotion of the improved Aria Park camp site facilities has resulted in a record number of caravaners and campers for the annual Mary Gilmore Cultural Festival weekend.

With these visitors typically staying several days to several weeks, the anticipated outcomes are;

- Ongoing increase in tourist numbers at the camping ground because of improved facilities.
- Increased tourism spending at local businesses
- Increased usage of local facilities by tourists and visitation of local attractions