

Hon Matthew Swinbourn MLC
Chair
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Parliament House
4 Harvest Terrace
WEST PERTH WA 6005

Dear Sir,

I write on behalf of the Combined Agricultural Advisory Committee (CAAC) in regard to PETITION NO 058 -AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION FARM PROVISION TRUST.

The government Agricultural Education system for Years 10 to 12 through the five Colleges and Esperance Farm School along with other Schools providing practical agricultural experiences is held in very high regard by industry both within this State and across the Nation.

THERE ARE THREE MAJOR FACTORS WHICH HAVE CREATED THIS SUCCESSFUL MODEL

1. Students receive practical, hands on, experience as they operate a number of enterprises that are economically viable and existing within the framework of large scale commercial farms. This practical on farm experience makes them 'work ready' on graduation. Should they choose to enter an agricultural career after further studies, they are better suited to many jobs because of their wider practical experience than their peers.
2. The system enjoys a special and unique link to the industries that it provides education for through the Farm Advisory Committees at each College and School. These committees provide long term direction and guidance of best district practice. They give continuity of direction to a site, regardless of changes in staff. (In the last eighteen months one site has had four changes of Principal and three of Farm Manager).
3. The Farm Provisions Trust allows individual-sites experiencing difficulties from seasonal or market forces to be supported by sites experiencing better times. This maintains an equal educational opportunity for a student regardless of the site they attend.

EACH OF THESE THREE FACTORS WHICH HAVE CREATED THE SUCCESSFUL MODEL ARE AT RISK IF THE GOVERNMENT TAKES 20% OF THE INCOME TO THE FARM PROVISIONS TRUST FUND.

The CAAC administers the Trust Fund. Approximately 40% of funds are spent on 'fixed cost' items including, but not limited to, state fleet lease, licences, vehicle repairs and maintenance, insurance, machinery lease and contingencies. These expenses are paid on behalf of the Colleges and Schools. They vary a little year to year but are fixed costs to the Trust.

The remaining funds are then distributed to Colleges and Schools according to identified needs. In a sense these are 'Discretionary Funds' as distinct from 'fixed costs' because CAAC does have discretion as to where they are spent.

Let us take a look at the example of the CAAC receiving \$1,500,000 from the contributing Colleges/School. (Approx current level) This is the amount from which the Government intends to take 20%. ie \$300,000.

CAAC needs to spend 40% of this \$1,500,000 amount on the 'fixed costs' portion of its budget ie \$600,000. Leaving \$900,000 for discretionary expenditure.

On this basis the government intends to take away one third of the funds available to CAAC for Distribution.

CAAC believes this reduction of funds will seriously effect its capacity to maintain modern plant and equipment for student education on the sites: maintain to an acceptable standard the government owned infrastructure: maintain safety standards and required upgrades on aging plant and meet soil amelioration strategies to support improved production.

The effects will not be immediate but they will be cumulative. They can best be compared to the effects of long term drought. Plant machinery and infrastructure will become 'run down'.

The current level of Industry support to the Farm Advisory Committees is at risk because industry volunteers are already expressing the opinion that "They are happy to give of their time to assist in the education of the next generation for the industries that have given them their life, but they are not prepared to become unpaid servants to make money for the government."

The reduction in funds available for CAAC to distribute will place at risk its capacity to maintain an equity in the educational opportunities between sites in periods of adversity at a site.

CAAC believes that the integrity of our successful system is reliant on it remaining completely intact and that this taking of money from the Trust is putting the future of the whole system at risk. The claim that it is for the period of Budget Repair bears strong resemblance to "I will do it tomorrow."

The Minister appoints the members of the CAAC to give her advice, but at no stage was CAAC consulted for advise on what the effects the taking of 20% of CAAC funds would have on the capacity to deliver the quality of practical on farm education that the Western Australian agricultural industries expect.

I am happy to provide further information or clarification if required.

Murray Williams
Chairman CAAC.