

GNOWANGERUP AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE

42. Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE to the Minister for Education and Training:

Given that five agricultural colleges have experienced an increase in enrolments of 30 per cent since 2001 and now boast 522 students who have performed exceptionally well in the practical skills area, and given also that students will soon be required to stay in education or training until the age of 17, I ask -

- (1) Will the minister revisit the decision to downgrade Gnowangerup Agricultural College and consider including it in the Western Australian College of Agriculture?
- (2) Will the minister consider favourably the opportunity to purchase land near Gnowangerup Agricultural College to improve the viability of that college?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH replied:

- (1)-(2) I thank the member for the question. As the member might be aware, on 7 September 2005 I announced that Gnowangerup Agricultural College would no longer enrol high-risk students - because it was being used for entirely the wrong purpose - and would be utilised as a full-time residential facility in 2006. That school was closed at the end of 2005. On 1 January 2006, the Gnowangerup Training Centre commenced operation as a regional training centre for the great southern, offering short-term agriculture-related training courses focusing on 15 to 19-year-old students. That centre is line-managed by the principal from the WA College of Agriculture in Denmark. The steering committee, which comprises departmental officers, local community members, Great Southern TAFE and agricultural representatives, has identified a strategic direction for that centre. It has also developed a comprehensive management plan for the centre. I see no reason why the member cannot have access to that plan if he wants. The steering committee meets regularly. There is certainly significant interest from schools and industry groups in using that centre. More than 70 students from secondary and primary areas have accessed the site for courses. In addition, two very successful five-day shearing schools have been completed in conjunction with Great Southern TAFE. The member can see from that that the school is being used for a variety of purposes.

The courses currently offered at the Gnowangerup Training Centre are rural operations 1, a national training package certificate; industrial workshop certificate 1 and 2 in shearing and wool handling; cropping program as part of the national training package; and agricultural awareness and leadership program with primary students. The centre currently has a staffing allocation of 6.9 full-time equivalents. The operating budget breaks down into the farm operating budget, \$97 000; the residential operating budget, \$26 780; and the school resourcing budget, \$36 590.

I have not had the time to check on the acquisition of additional land. When I visited the centre, I was told that an adjoining property was for sale at a very reasonable price. Its purchase would create economies of scale for the existing facility. I was very keen that we should consider that parcel of land with intent to purchase. I am happy to follow that up, to establish whether the land has been purchased. I do not dismiss the prospect of this centre becoming a more formalised agricultural college, in the more traditional sense, in the longer term.