



REPORT OF THE

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS**

IN RELATION TO

**DENMARK AGRICULTURAL SCHOOL –
REQUESTING THE RETENTION OF THE
BUILDINGS WHICH HAVE HOUSED
THE SCHOOL SINCE THE 1940'S**

Presented by Hon Murray Nixon JP MLC (Chairman)

Report 52

STANDING COMMITTEE ON CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Date first appointed:

December 21 1989

Terms of Reference:

- 1 The functions of the committee are to inquire into and report on:
 - a) the constitutional law, customs and usages of Western Australia;
 - b) the constitutional or legal relationships between Western Australia and the Commonwealth, the States and Territories,
and any related matter or issue;
 - c) a bill to which SO 230 (c) applies but subject to SO 230 (d);
 - d) any petition.
- 2 A petition stands referred after presentation. The committee may refer a petition to another standing committee where the subject matter of the petition is within the terms of reference of that standing committee. A standing committee to which a petition is referred shall report to the House as it thinks fit.

Members as at the time of this inquiry:

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REPORT OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS**IN RELATION TO****DENMARK AGRICULTURAL SCHOOL – REQUESTING THE RETENTION OF THE BUILDINGS
WHICH HAVE HOUSED THE SCHOOL SINCE THE 1940’S**

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 On October 13 1999 Hon Muriel Patterson MLC tabled a petition (*Tabled Paper # 244*) requesting that the Legislative Council will give consideration to the retention of the brick and tile buildings (dormitory and administration/dining) which have housed the Denmark Agricultural School since the 1940’s. The petitioners also requested that the Legislative Council “approve their use as a centre for the 21st century, where the heritage buildings are integral in the promotion of community education and innovation for sustainable living”.
- 1.2 In accordance with its standard procedure, the Committee sought submissions from the principal petitioner and Hon Muriel Patterson MLC.

2 SUBMISSION FROM THE PETITIONERS**Background**

- 2.1 The Committee received a submission from Mr Clive Malcolm dated November 8 1999. Mr Malcolm advised that the Committee’s letter to the principal petitioner had been passed to him for reply on behalf of the recently formed Ag School 2000 Committee which is now responsible for moves to have the old buildings retained.
- 2.2 Mr Malcolm advised the Committee that the Education Department of Western Australia (EDWA) is in the process of having a new district high school and a new agricultural college constructed in Denmark. The new district high school is close to the old agricultural college buildings.
- 2.3 The Committee was advised that consideration was given to converting the old buildings into classrooms and incorporating them into the new high school. The old buildings were also offered to TAFE. Neither of these alternatives proved possible due to funding problems and it was decided to demolish the buildings.

- 2.4 The Denmark Historical Society referred the buildings to the Heritage Council who indicated a desire for the dormitory buildings to be kept. The buildings are on the Municipal Inventory of Heritage of the Denmark Shire.
- 2.5 The Denmark Historical Society sought support within the Denmark community for the retention of the buildings. Mr Malcolm advised the Committee that the Denmark Shire has approved in principle the retention of the buildings on condition that they are not a financial burden to the Shire of Denmark and that they in no way prejudice the operation of the new District High School and the new agricultural college.
- 2.6 Mr Malcolm advised the Committee that there are, in addition to the Denmark Historical Society, 11 community organisations that support in principle the retention of the buildings. Mr Malcolm also informed the Committee that in the process of collecting signatures on the petition, it was noted that of those people approached there was at least a 90 per cent positive response and a general concern to have the old buildings put to a good use.
- 2.7 With the support of other organisations, the Denmark Historical Society organised a community consultation with a facilitator from the Department of Commerce and Trade. The consultation formulated a mission statement for the future of the buildings which forms the basis for the petition to the Legislative Council and which states:
- “To be a centre for the 21st century, where the heritage buildings are integral to the promotion of community education and innovation for sustainable living.”
- 2.8 Those organisations supporting the retention of the buildings have now formed the Ag School 2000 Committee to co-ordinate efforts to have the buildings retained and to oversee the preparation of a feasibility study concerning the implementation of the mission statement. The feasibility study will be conducted by Green Skills Inc.
- 2.9 Mr Malcolm advised that the Denmark Historical Society has requested the Minister for Education to place a moratorium on demolition at least until the community consultation process has been completed, but so far the Minister has refused.

The Old Agricultural College Buildings

- 2.10 In his submission, Mr Malcolm advised the Committee that the old buildings which remain consist of a dormitory block capable of sleeping 50 persons and a dining and administration building where about 100 people can be fed at one sitting. The Committee was advised that these buildings are brick and tile and have been assessed for the Heritage Council by Palassis Architects as a well designed and constructed example of post-war austerity architecture in generally sound condition.

- 2.11 In addition, there are two wood framed buildings behind the brick buildings which house two classrooms, a library and a recreation room.
- 2.12 Mr Malcolm informed the Committee that none of the buildings in stage one of the new district high school impinges on any of these buildings. There is minor coincidence with stage two which is at least ten years off and there is ample room for adjustments to the future layout to accommodate the old buildings.
- 2.13 In his submission Mr Malcolm also noted that between the old buildings and South Coast Highway are mature gardens which form an excellent entrance statement for Denmark. The EDWA plans show roads and car parks on the site of the old buildings and the garden.
- 2.14 Mr Malcolm submitted that the brick and tile buildings are of about 1350m² in area and would cost approximately \$1.5 million to replace. They form one of the most substantial building complexes in Denmark and have been generally well maintained by the EDWA. Contract and Management Services allow for yearly maintenance costs of three per cent of replacement value for buildings of this type and age. Mr Malcolm estimated that the maintenance costs for the buildings are therefore likely to be about \$45 000 per annum.
- 2.15 The Committee was informed that the Agricultural College currently lets out the buildings during school holidays. The returns are such that the Ag School 2000 Committee believes that it is likely that the maintenance costs could be covered by letting out the buildings provided they were available for the whole year.

The Proposal

- 2.16 Mr Malcolm advised the Committee that the Denmark community proposed that the buildings be used as a field study centre with the theme of Sustainable Living. The facilities would be available for school camps, group conferences, retreats, training courses, seminars and similar activities. Mr Malcolm submitted that the Committee envisaged that the facilities would complement the high school and the agricultural college and provide great benefit to the Denmark community through employment and commerce.
- 2.17 Mr Malcolm submitted that it is highly likely that if the facilities are saved, they will also be used by TAFE who are predicting major increases in demand for courses.
- 2.18 The Committee was advised that the Ag School 2000 Committee plans to have a feasibility study done to determine the practicability of establishing a centre which would be self-funding. There may be a need for a grant initially to repair the

buildings. It is hoped that the heritage status of the buildings will be sufficient to attract a grant from the Lotteries Commission.

The Feasibility Study

2.19 Mr Malcolm informed the Committee that the feasibility study will report on the following matters:

- definition and clarification of the vision, aims and strategy;
- literature survey on similar centres;
- assessment of the capability of the buildings and any work that is necessary to prepare them for the future use;
- review of the activities appropriate to the centre and an assessment of the demand for the proposed services;
- cost estimates for repairs, maintenance and running costs;
- an estimate of income generation from the proposed centre; and
- a management plan incorporating a proposed management structure.

Request

2.20 Mr Malcolm informed the Committee that the Ag School 2000 Committee, the organisations which it represents and the persons who signed the petition to the Legislative Council would greatly appreciate the assistance of the Honourable Members in persuading the Minister for Education to retain the old Denmark Agricultural College buildings for possible use as a Centre for Sustainable Living.

3 PROCEEDINGS IN THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL – QUESTION TIME, TUESDAY NOVEMBER 16 1999

3.1 On Tuesday November 16 1999 Hon John Cowdell MLC asked a number of questions concerning matters raised in the petition to the Leader of the House, Hon Norman Moore MLC, representing the Minister for Education.

3.2 Hon Norman Moore MLC told the House that “The Heritage Council of Western Australia has considered the Denmark Agricultural College buildings for placement on the state register of heritage places. A heritage assessment was prepared and it was decided that the buildings do not have sufficient cultural heritage significance at the

state level. Therefore, they have not been recommended for entry of the register of heritage places.”¹

3.3 Hon Norman Moore MLC also told the House that “The decision to relocate the school and buildings has largely been due to the buildings having reached the end of their economic life. The Shire of Denmark acknowledged that when discussions were held regarding the future of the present school. The decision to build at a new location and demolish the existing buildings has also been endorsed by the Denmark Parents and Citizens Association, the staff of the Denmark Agricultural College and Denmark District High School and members of the Denmark Agricultural Advisory Council.”²

3.4 Hon John Cowdell MLC also asked about the income currently derived from the letting of the accommodation. Hon Norman Moore MLC answered that “In the past 12 months, the facilities have been let to community-based organisations for a financial return of approximately \$8 000.”³

3.5 When asked what income could be derived from the letting of the facilities on a year-round basis, Hon Norman Moore MLC told the House that “Given their poor state of repair and that only irregular access has been sought previously, annual revenue from letting these premises on a year-round basis would be low. Furthermore, the new school facilities will be available for similar use and this will undoubtedly impact upon requests for access to the old accommodation.”⁴

3.6 When asked “Is it still the minister’s intention to cause these buildings to be demolished by June of next year for the purpose of building a driveway and bus bays?” Hon Norman Moore MLC replied “It is intended to demolish the buildings upon the completion of the new facilities as they have reached the end of their economic life. However, the site will not be used for a driveway and bus bays. This part of the site will be required for additions to the school in the future.”⁵

4 SITE VISIT

4.1 On February 15 2000 the Committee conducted a site visit to the Denmark Agricultural School and met with a number of the petitioners.

¹ *Parliamentary Debates (WA) (Hansard) Thirty-Fifth Parliament Third Session 1999; Tuesday, November 16 1999, p 3055*

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

4.2 The Committee spent approximately one hour at the site during which time the members took the opportunity to inspect the buildings the subject of the petition and the grounds of the Agricultural School.

5 HEARING

5.1 As part of its investigations the Committee conducted a hearing into the matters raised in the petition. The hearing was conducted on February 15 2000 at the Denmark Recreational Centre.

5.2 The witnesses who attended the hearing were:

- Mr Clive Malcolm, Convenor, Ag School 2000 Committee;
- Mr John Maxwell, Design Representative for the Agricultural College proposal;
- Mr Alan Carter, Assistant Co-ordinator, Green Skills Inc;
- Mrs Enid Conochie, member of the Ag School 2000 Committee;
- Mr Ian Conochie, principal petitioner and member of the Denmark Historical Society;
- Mr Pascoe Durtanovich, resident of Denmark;
- Mrs Pauline McHenry, resident of Denmark; and
- Mr Denis Zlatnik, resident of Denmark.

Witness Number 1 – Mr Clive Malcolm

5.3 Mr Malcolm addressed the Committee on behalf of the Ag School 2000 Committee which, he explained, was formed to represent the interests of 11 organisations in Denmark, all of which support retention of the old agricultural school buildings and their use as a Centre for the 21st Century.

5.4 Mr Malcolm submitted that there was inadequate consultation by the EDWA with the general Denmark community and the Shire Council before the decision was made to demolish the old school. Immediately the decision became known, steps were taken by the Denmark Historical Society to determine whether the Heritage Council had been consulted as required by Government policy. The Committee was told that it had not and that the Historical Society made a formal referral.

- 5.5 The Committee was informed that as soon as the EDWA indicated that it would not save the building for its heritage value, the Denmark Historical Society formed a sub-committee with representation from other groups to press for retention. Following community consultation the Ag School 2000 Committee was formed and linked to the Denmark Education and Innovation Centre.
- 5.6 As part of his submission, Mr Malcolm tabled an assessment of the buildings conducted by Palassis Architects for the Heritage Council of Western Australia. The assessment contains a Statement of Significance which states that the Denmark Agricultural College has cultural heritage significance for the following reasons:
- it represents the development of agricultural education in Western Australia and was the second purpose designed school of agriculture in the state;
 - the dormitory block is the oldest surviving student residential accommodation associated with a government school of agriculture in the state;
 - it provides a record of development of the school from a simple temporary facility to a large, sophisticated and varied agricultural centre and demonstrates changing attitudes to agriculture and education in the state; and
 - it contributes to the community of Denmark's sense of place and is valued by individuals who have lived, learnt and taught within it.
- 5.7 Mr Malcolm also tabled a report by a local builder and building designer, Mr John Maxwell, detailing the current condition of the buildings and the costs of restoration, possible modification and ongoing maintenance.
- 5.8 The report states that the buildings are in good general condition with no major structural cracking evident. The maintenance jobs that need attending to include painting, restumping part of the floor, and sealing roof leaks and damaged gutters. The report also states that the kitchen will need to be renovated to comply with current health regulations. The total cost estimate of works required to bring the buildings up to current regulation and maintenance requirements is \$218 000.
- 5.9 Mr Malcolm informed the Committee that the community had expressed a preference for the buildings to be used as a Centre for the 21st Century. This would involve its use for school camps, small conferences, seminars, training courses, field work for university classes and courses by groups such as TAFE. The Committee was informed that a survey is currently being conducted on the demand for these services.

- 5.10 As part of his submission, Mr Malcolm expressed the view that the “The juxtaposition of the old agricultural school, the new high school, the new Shire Administration Centre, the new Agricultural College and the various recreation facilities...creates a precinct with excellent potential for conferences, training exercises, educational activities and recreation events.” He also submitted that “The closeness of the buildings to the new Shire Administration Centre poses the possibility of using the old agricultural school buildings for accommodation for groups which would hold meetings in the Council buildings. There would be flow-on benefits to the community.”
- 5.11 Mr Malcolm concluded his submission by stating that the Ag School 2000 Committee believes there is a case for considering retaining the old Denmark Agricultural School buildings and using them for the purposes described.

Witness Number 2 – Mr John Maxwell

- 5.12 Mr Maxwell referred the Committee to a report he had prepared for the buildings detailing their current condition and the costs of restoration, possible modification and ongoing maintenance. The report is discussed in paragraphs 5.7 and 5.8 of this report.
- 5.13 Mr Maxwell advised the Committee that he could find no major structural problems with the building. He admitted that one of his concerns prior to the inspection was the possibility of poor cooking, kitchen and ablution facilities, but on inspection he found them “...all in very good order.” Mr Maxwell advised the Committee that “...the kitchen would need to be brought up to current health regulation requirements. The toilets and shower facilities are still in good order.”
- 5.14 The Committee was advised by Mr Maxwell that if the buildings were to be converted to some useful means, even with existing toilet facilities as they are, it could cater for 400 males and 100 females.
- 5.15 Mr Maxwell informed the Committee that maintenance is required on the building and that “...bringing the building up to current regulation standards and from a maintenance point of view would entail spending in the region of \$218 000.” Mr Maxwell also told the Committee that “...to demolish the buildings, considering that there are some salvageable materials, would probably still cost in the region of \$50 000.”

Witness Number 3 – Mr Alan Carter

- 5.16 Mr Carter spoke to the Committee about Green Skills Inc. and the roles in which he, as its representative, appeared before the Committee.

- 5.17 Mr Carter tabled a written submission which explained that Green Skills Inc. is a member of the Denmark Education and Innovation Centre and its Ag School 2000 Committee. The submission also advised the Committee that Green Skills Inc. is the consultant responsible for the conduct of a Feasibility Study into alternative uses for the Denmark Agricultural College buildings.
- 5.18 The Terms of Reference for the Feasibility Study are for Green Skills Inc. to consider the following issues:
- a definition and clarification of the vision (to retain the buildings and use them for the promotion of community education and innovation for sustainable living), aims and strategies;
 - a literature survey on similar centres;
 - an assessment of the capability of the buildings and grounds and any work that is necessary to prepare them for possible future use, including an examination of how the existing buildings will 'fit in' with the new Denmark High School from an aesthetic and practical perspective together with the issue of vehicle access and parking;
 - cost estimates for repairs, maintenance and running costs;
 - a review of the activities appropriate to the Centre and an assessment of the demand for the proposed services;
 - an estimate of income generation from the proposed centre; and
 - a management plan, incorporating proposed management structure and an outline of a business plan.
- 5.19 The submission states that "Funding of \$7 500 for the Feasibility Study has been obtained from the WA Department of Commerce and Trade, the Great Southern Development Commission and the WA Department of Training."
- 5.20 The submission also states that it was agreed that the Feasibility Study should proceed as soon as possible to enable an alternative strategy to be presented to the EDWA before the final decision on the future of the buildings is made. The Committee was advised that work has been under way since early in the New Year and that it is proposed that the final report will be available for release in early March 2000.
- 5.21 In the submission he tabled at the hearing, Mr Carter informed the Committee that as part of the Feasibility Study, a questionnaire had been sent to a large number of

schools, environment and recreation groups to gauge support for the proposed Centre for the Twenty-First Century. Mr Carter advised that general feedback had been very positive and they had received strong support for the idea of environmental education in the field.

5.22 Mr Carter's submission also stated that there are substantial economic benefits for the Denmark community if the buildings were retained and the Centre for the Twenty-First Century established. Mr Carter submitted that the Centre will be a direct employer of approximately ten people with a multiplier effect into the Denmark business community. In addition, there will be a flow on effect to the tourist and hospitality industry in Denmark and on the south coast.

5.23 Mr Carter told the Committee that "...the role of the Feasibility Study is to correct the lack of proper process that was undertaken by the Education Department. We feel that there was not proper consideration of the issues. Certainly,...the Minister's response to questions tends to bear that out in the Legislative Council."

5.24 Mr Carter referred to a meeting he had with officials from the EDWA and stated "That meeting confirmed my belief to which I referred earlier that they have not properly investigated the issues." Mr Carter also stated that "It seems that they made a decision and proceeded without properly investigating the issues that are involved. Certainly we feel that they were lacking in consultation with the community."

Witness Number 4 - Mrs Enid Conochie

5.25 Mrs Conochie advised the Committee that she took responsibility for organising the petition. She spent two sessions in the street collecting signatures, and found people very willing to sign. Mrs Conochie told the Committee that in most cases people "...expressed indignation at the planned demolition which was regarded as a waste of a valuable resource; that is the potential destruction of what is commonly regarded as the best of Denmark's built heritage, and a loss to residents and visitors of part of the town's attractive eastern entrance."

5.26 Mrs Conochie expressed the view that the response "...left no doubt that there is firm and widespread community support for retention, with the only condition expressed by signatories being that it should not be at too much cost to the Shire Council."

Witness Number 5- Mr Ian Conochie

5.27 Mr Conochie commenced his address by outlining to the Committee a number of examples where successive governments had donated buildings and land in the Shire of Denmark for public use where those buildings and land were no longer required.

- 5.28 Mr Conochie told the Committee that it should be noted that because the buildings were built to standard designs used throughout the state, not one of them is ever likely to be listed for heritage value at state level. Mr Conochie went on to say that “They have nevertheless been greatly appreciated by the Denmark community and have been put to good use.”
- 5.29 Mr Conochie then addressed the specific issues raised in the petition with respect to the Denmark Agricultural College and stated that “Now, when one of the most significant public buildings in Denmark, the only one built in brick and tile, is coming to the end of its use by the Education Department of Western Australia, rather than carrying on the tradition of donating unused buildings to the community, the current Minister for Education has determined that it be demolished.”
- 5.30 Mr Conochie expressed concern that it will cost the government many thousands of dollars to effect the demolition. He was also concerned that in making the decision to demolish the buildings, the Minister is denying the people of Denmark their first opportunity to gain a very substantial pair of buildings for community use.
- 5.31 Mr Conochie submitted that “The Minister justifies his position to demolish the buildings on the fact that they are not listed as being of state heritage value. We submit that this is not relevant.” Mr Conochie referred to the examples he gave at the commencement of his address where governments had donated buildings and land in the Shire of Denmark for public use, and stated that they had not been heritage listed at a state level.
- 5.32 The Committee was told that “As a result of its history, first as a mill town and later as a service centre for low income farmers, Denmark has never had the substantial government buildings found in more prosperous towns, which now benefit from some of those buildings being donated to the community.” He went on to say “The impending closure of the old agricultural college buildings represents the first opportunity for Denmark to gain such a public asset. Is this opportunity to be dashed without the people of Denmark being consulted?”
- 5.33 Mr Conochie told the Committee that the Denmark Historical Society sees the old agricultural buildings as having played a very big part in the history of the Shire of Denmark and the State of Western Australia for over half a century. He submitted that with knowledge and skills acquired from the college, farmers throughout the south west have over the years contributed greatly to the State’s economy. He also submitted that “In our estimation, the buildings...are of unique visual, historical, and cultural value to the people of Denmark.”
- 5.34 Mr Conochie also told the Committee that the Denmark Historical Society considers that noting that past donations of small buildings have been put to good use by the

local community, and taking into account Denmark's popularity as a resort and its rapidly growing population, there would be no difficulty in finding viable educational and cultural uses for the old agricultural college buildings should they be retained.

- 5.35 Mr Conochie concluded his address by requesting, on behalf of the Denmark Historical Society, that the government modifies its plans for the second stage of the Denmark High School and donates the old agricultural college buildings, together with a suitable area of land, to the Shire of Denmark for community purposes.

Witness Number 6 - Mr Pascoe Durtanovich

- 5.36 Mr Durtanovich informed the Committee that he was appearing before it as a ratepayer of the Shire of Denmark and wanted to raise two issues of concern he had regarding the possible retention of the buildings.

- 5.37 Mr Durtanovich stated that "Obviously, a facility of that type anywhere in the shire is of benefit to the community. I am concerned at the impost that may end up on the local council as a result of the ongoing maintenance of the facility..."

- 5.38 His second concern related to the access situation in the area. Mr Durtanovich said that "Already some concerns have been expressed about the conflict of vehicular and pedestrian access to the new high school, and the problems associated with the highway there."

- 5.39 Mr Durtanovich concluded his submission by stating that "In this process, as a ratepayer I would not like to see a facility of this type impact on the rates throughout the local shire. If some arrangements were made so that there was no cost to the local council, as a ratepayer I would not have a great problem with the facility."

Witness Number 7 - Mrs Pauline McHenry

- 5.40 Mrs McHenry informed the Committee that her attitude to the buildings was different from the other witnesses, and that her ideas "could be an adjunct to the vision that everyone has of its being used for camps." Mrs McHenry told the Committee that she was very aware of the costs involved in camps and the organisation that goes into running them.

- 5.41 Mrs McHenry suggested that the buildings could be used to house the tourist bureau, the town museum, or a museum to promote the buildings as the former agricultural school. She also suggested that the buildings could be used to run TAFE courses.

- 5.42 As part of her submission, Mrs McHenry stated that income for the facility could come from the tourist bureau by way of commissions, booking fees and the museum

entrance fees. The kitchen could be utilised as a coffee shop in conjunction with a craft shop run by the tourist bureau which could also organise bookings and fares.

Witness Number 8 - Mr Denis Zlatnik

- 5.43 Mr Zlatnik informed the Committee that he had helped to collect signatures on the petition and had encountered the various opinions of people who either signed or eventually refused to sign the petition. He said he was “rather surprised at the wholehearted support I received.” Mr Zlatnik also told the Committee that many people indicated that they were “...surprised at this move by the Education Department in the pending demolition of the building.”
- 5.44 Mr Zlatnik told the Committee that “Neither the state government as a whole nor this community, in particular, is so affluent as to be wasteful to throw this asset down the drain, no matter to what purpose it will be dedicated. That was stressed to me from many quarters as I went along.”

6 FURTHER WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS

- 6.1 The Committee received a number of further written submissions from members of the Denmark community at the close of the hearing. Submissions in support of retaining the Denmark Agricultural School buildings were received from:
- the Denmark Branch of the Country Women’s Association;
 - the Denmark Shire Ratepayers and Residents Association, Inc.;
 - the members of Denmark Artists Incorporated;
 - the members of Denmark Village Theatre Inc.;
 - the Convenor of the Denmark Education and Innovation Centre Inc.; and
 - the Executive Officer, Great Southern Area Consultative Committee.
- 6.2 The Committee also received a written submission from the Denmark Shire President, Cr Colleen Donnelly, in which she outlined some concerns regarding the long term financial impact on the community and ratepayers of the Shire of Denmark.
- 6.3 Cr Donnelly submitted that she would not support the retention of the buildings unless she was fully convinced that the ratepayers of Denmark would not have to fund the proposed project in any way. She also submitted that while the cost of managing, promoting and maintaining the building may be identified in the current feasibility study, the long term viability and management must be considered.

6.4 Cr Donnelly further submitted that "...my responsibility to the Denmark community encompasses ALL of its residents and ratepayers, not only those who choose to sign a petition before exploring the issue to achieve a practical and affordable solution."

7 LETTER FROM THE MINISTER FOR HERITAGE

7.1 Prior to visiting Denmark, the Committee wrote to the Minister for Heritage advising him that it was conducting a site visit and hearing in the town and inviting him or a member of the ministry to attend. The Minister did not attend the hearing, however the Committee received a letter from him dated February 17 2000 offering information on the issues raised by the petition.

7.2 In his letter the Minister stated that he was advised by the Heritage Council of Western Australia that the Denmark Agricultural School was considered as part of the Government Heritage Property Disposal Process (GHPDP). This process involves a Government agency referring a place to the Heritage Council to determine if it has cultural heritage significance before it is disposed of through sale, transfer, vesting, relocation or demolition.

7.3 In his letter the Minister expressed his understanding that the Denmark Agricultural School was referred by the EDWA under the provisions of the GHPDP and it was determined in May 1999 by the Register Committee of the Heritage Council:

- that the place not be recommended to the Heritage Council for entry in the State Register of Heritage Places as it did not meet the threshold for registration;
- the Committee recognised that the place has cultural significance for the local community and that interpretation was an important issue to be considered; and
- the Committee would like to see the dormitory, a soundly designed and constructed example of post-war architecture, retained and incorporated into the redevelopment.

7.4 The Minister also informed the Committee that he was advised that the Denmark Agricultural School was entered in the Shire of Denmark's Municipal Inventory in April 1999 with a recommendation to retain and conserve the place if possible.

7.5 The Minister concluded by stating that "My understanding is that this is an issue related to the local community's interest and not a State heritage issue."

8 LETTER FROM THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION

- 8.1 On March 13 2000 the Committee wrote to the Minister for Education informing him that the Committee is inquiring into the petition and outlining the issues raised in the petition.
- 8.2 The Committee informed the Minister that community groups are undertaking a feasibility study into whether or not it is economically viable to retain the buildings. The Committee requested that the buildings not be demolished until it has had the opportunity to consider the feasibility study, reported to Parliament on the issue, and the responsible Minister has responded to the Committee's recommendations pursuant to Standing Order 337 of the Legislative Council.
- 8.3 The Committee received a reply from the Minister dated March 24 2000. The Minister informed the Committee that he was advised that the Education Department will defer the demolition of the buildings until the Committee has had the opportunity to gather further information and consider the future of the buildings.

9 SCOPING STUDY INTO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CENTRE FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY IN THE DENMARK AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE BUILDINGS

- 9.1 On March 28 2000 the Committee received a copy of the Scoping Study into the Establishment of the Centre for the Twenty-First Century in the Denmark Agricultural College Buildings (the Scoping Study) from Mr Cameron Crowe, Convenor of the Denmark Education and Innovation Centre. The Scoping Study was prepared by Green Skills Inc. for the Denmark Education and Innovation Centre. The Committee had requested a copy of the completed Scoping Study at the hearing in Denmark in February 2000.
- 9.2 The Scoping Study states that the proposal to demolish the Denmark Agricultural College has received strong opposition in the Denmark community from a wide range of organisations and individuals. The Scoping Study was produced at the request of a number of those organisations in order to put forward a positive alternative to demolition.
- 9.3 The concept being proposed for the Centre for the Twenty-First Century incorporates five broad categories of activity:
- camps for school groups with environmental education activities and courses;

- residential and non-residential courses about various aspects of sustainable living, including continuing education programs and university extension courses;
- small conferences and meetings (residential and non-residential);
- boarding accommodation for isolated students attending the Denmark High School; and
- office accommodation for community groups or government agencies.

9.4 The Scoping Study states that preliminary market research has indicated that there are excellent opportunities for the development of business in all of these categories. It states that the concept of a Centre for the Twenty-First Century has strong support and could provide the basis for a viable and independent business enterprise within three years. It concludes that detailed market research and the preparation of a Business Plan is justified.

9.5 The Scoping Study states that “It is anticipated that funding for further study would not be difficult to obtain, particularly if the Education Department gives in principle support to the concept.”

9.6 The Scoping Study concludes that “In order to proceed further with detailed market research and the preparation of a Business Plan, the threat of demolition needs to be lifted and preferably the buildings need to be transferred to the National Trust to ensure their protection while the final concept is developed.”

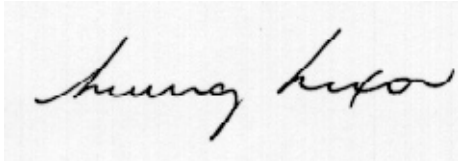
10 CONCLUSIONS

10.1 The Committee believes that the long term financial viability and management of the proposed Centre for the Twenty-First Century in the Denmark agricultural college buildings is a key element in the decision whether to demolish or retain the buildings. The Committee believes that the Denmark agricultural college buildings should be retained only if they are not a financial burden on the community and ratepayers of the Shire of Denmark.

10.2 The Committee concludes that on the basis of the evidence presented to it there is good reason for placing a moratorium on the demolition of the Denmark agricultural school buildings until the end of this year to allow time for the Ag School 2000 Committee to negotiate with the Denmark Shire Council as to the long term financial viability of the project and to secure the Council’s concurrence.

11 RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Minister for Education place a moratorium on the demolition of the Denmark agricultural school buildings until December 31 2000 during which time the Ag School 2000 Committee negotiate with the Denmark Shire Council as to the long term financial viability of the project.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Murray Nixon".

**Hon Murray Nixon JP MLC
Chairman**

Date: May 17 2000