

Local Government
Association of NSW



Shires Association of NSW

Our ref: R90/1160.LG Out-17466

7 August 2009

Mr Mal Peters
Chair
Hurlstone Inquiry
C/-GPO Box 33
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr Peters,

The Local Government Association of NSW and Shires Association of NSW (the Associations) are the peak bodies for NSW Local Government.

Together, the Local Government Association and the Shires Association represent all the 152 NSW general-purpose councils, the special-purpose county councils and the regions of the NSW Aboriginal Land Council. The mission of the Associations is to be credible, professional organisations representing Local Government and facilitating the development of an effective community-based system of Local Government in NSW. In pursuit of this mission, the Associations represent the views of councils to NSW and Australian Governments; provide industrial relations and specialist services to councils and promote Local Government to the community and the media.

The Associations thank the Chair for the opportunity to make a submission concerning the inquiry into the future configuration of Hurlstone Agricultural High School (HAHS).

This submission remains in draft form until it is considered and approved by the Associations Joint Committee. The Committee will be advised if any amendments are made following the deliberations of the Associations Joint Committee in August 2009.

The success of the agricultural industry is crucial to the Australian economy. In 2007-08 the gross value of Australian farm production equated to \$41.2 billion with the agricultural industry contributing \$31.3 billion to the Australian export markets and the industry employed 303,000 persons¹. NSW already appears to be lagging other states in agricultural industry performance. In 2007/08 the average capital per farm in NSW was \$281,000 less than the national average and the average farm debt in 2008/09 was \$83,000 more.

These figures emphasize the significance of the agricultural industry to all Australians and the deficiencies already existing in NSW. A greater commitment to research and development, farm support and education is required to improve the performance of the NSW agricultural sector and bring it up to national standards.

As the agricultural industry confronts current and emerging issues, such as drought, the global food crisis, climate variability, bio-security, water shortages, the proposed carbon reduction scheme, and an aging workforce (in 2006 median farmer age was 52, with 18% over 65)², never has it been more important to provide varied quality

¹ Australian Commodity Statistics 2008

² ABS, Agriculture in Focus: Farming Families, Australia, 2006

practical education that's focused on the agricultural sector and inspire youth to pursue careers in agricultural industries.

The NSW Government should recognise that agriculture is critical to the future success of NSW and the nation, and must remain a policy priority.

The Associations maintain that ongoing practical education, training and specialised skill developments are vital to the future successes of the agricultural industry and rural communities.

The Hurlstone school farm provides a tactile understanding of agriculture and delivers practical skills in working a dairy farm, piggery, poultry, sheep and cropping. Additionally, the students conduct on farm practical research to learn how new innovative ways to improve agricultural processes.

The farm educates not only the future leaders and professionals of the industry but additionally is used to provide specialised training to the market garden operators in the Sydney basin, such as spraying best practice and is an excellent resource for surrounding schools for on farm demonstrations. We believe that the Hurlstone Agricultural School farm is a valuable asset for NSW and greatly benefits agricultural industries.

The unique quality of HAHS is that the school provides agricultural education to city and country students alike and allows remote rural students access to superior education with specialised agricultural training.

The Shires Association 2009 Annual Conference resolved to:

1. Lodge an objection with each member of the State Cabinet regarding the proposed sale of this land at Hurlstone Agricultural High School.
2. Call on all member council's of the Shires Association lend their support by opposing the proposed sale at Hurlstone Agricultural High School.
3. Lend its support to Hurlstone Agricultural High School Site Bill that is currently in State Parliament.

The Local Government & Shires Associations of NSW oppose any reduction in agricultural education and are seriously concerned that no alternate provisions to practical agricultural education in NSW have been announced by the State Government to substitute the loss of the specialised skill development that the Hurlstone school farm provides. We believe that reducing the school's farm will diminish the standard of agricultural education which will in turn negatively impact on the agricultural industry and rural communities.

Yours Sincerely



Cr Bruce Miller
President
Shires Association of NSW



Cr Genia McCaffery
President
Local Government Association of NSW