

Mr Mal Peters
Hurlstone Inquiry
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Dear Mr Peters,

I wish to submit this document to the Hurlstone Agricultural High School Enquiry on behalf of my wife Annette and daughters, one who has attended and one who is currently attending Hurlstone Agricultural High School (HAHS).

We live in country NSW with limited opportunities for secondary education other than boarding.

The summary of our submission is that the opportunities offered by HAHS are extremely important to country based students wishing to achieve excellent academic, agricultural and other cultural, social and sporting opportunities in Sydney.

There is significant opportunity for the DET to **use HAHS as the leading agricultural and environmental education centre for use by all schools in the Sydney area**. This could be partially funded by a public/private joint venture.

Solutions to many of the worlds problems; global warming, environmental degradation, food security, carbon sequestration will almost certainly be biologically based around agricultural production. We therefore propose that **not only should the DET retain all of the existing land at HAHS, it should invest in developing agricultural education facilities which will be required to meet these future challenges**.

Specific points relating to terms of reference are provided below.

2. Facilities currently provided at Hurlstone Agricultural High School,

Day School

- Some of the day school facilities are in need of refurbishment and upgrading, especially in the area of technology in the classroom.
- HAHS being a selective school provides country students who are academically talented to study and socialise with similar academically talented students from the city. If kept within their smaller country communities and schools these academically talented country students are unlikely to perform to the same level that they do at HAHS.

- **Opportunities for country students attending HAHS to participate in many activities outside of school hours are far greater than they could achieve in their smaller country communities.** Activities such as those at the Conservatorium of Music, Sydney Dance Company, McDonald College, are a few examples which our daughters and their friends have been involved with. Sporting events and facilities which are unavailable in country areas can be accessed by HAHS students; State representative sporting teams, rowing at Penrith, athletics and swimming at Homebush to name a few.

Boarding facilities

- Boarding facilities at HAHS allow country students to attend a selective school and avail themselves of the myriad of out of school opportunities which are available only in Sydney.
- The boarding school facilities are in need of some upgrading and refurbishment. **Internet access is grossly inadequate.**
- One of the problems with the running of the boarding facilities is that the staffing levels (cleaning and kitchen) were set when the boarding school was operating at peak numbers. Since the boarding school has been operating at lower numbers it has not been possible for the school principal to reduce staff numbers. We believe that this is due to Union issues. **This inefficiency in staffing has placed a large financial burden on the boarding school.**
- There have been suggestions that the majority of land at HAHS should be sold off, the boarding part of the school closed down and another boarding school constructed in a country area. This would destroy the opportunities for mingling of country and city students of academic excellence and prevent country students experiencing those cultural, social and sporting experiences which can only be obtained by living in Sydney.

Farm

- Having a 140 Ha site at HAHS enables the running of a fully functional dairy, a reasonable sized beef herd, some sheep, pigs, goats, hens and a couple of alpacas. The HAHS farm provides extremely good practical examples to students of how commercial farms with these enterprises function.
- There could be suggestions that HAHS may not need so much land to conduct practical Agricultural subjects. HAHS unquestionably provides practical agricultural demonstrations in animal production which simply cannot be provided by other schools in the Sydney area. The most

sensible approach should be to **make the HAHS farm available to other schools studying agriculture, so their students can gain as much as HAHS students.** The close proximity of HAHS to rail and road transport allows this to be achievable.

3. Educational and career outcomes of former students to ascertain the extent to which the facilities currently at Hurlstone equip students for their later educational and career paths.

A new Veterinary Science Faculty has been established at Charles Sturt University in Wagga in recent years. To gain entry to this faculty there is a need to have high academic performance, be able to demonstrate proven practical application with animals and enthusiasm to work with large animals. Within this faculty there is a disproportionately high number of ex HAHS students. The main reason for this is the **unique combination at HAHS of academic excellence with the opportunity for practical farm animal experience** and the ability to participate in beef and dairy handling through the Rural Youth program.

Young people with high academic achievements and practical skills are required by all agricultural industries.

4. Consider the future skills and knowledge demands for the agricultural sector, the appropriateness to those demands of the NSW agriculture syllabus and the role of Hurlstone Agricultural High School in meeting those demands.

5. Examine best practice in agricultural education, particularly in institutions whose aim is to produce future agricultural practitioners, to identify what facilities can be provided or otherwise accessed that are appropriate to the needs of students and the agricultural community in the 21st century.

Best practice in agricultural education will fall into three categories.

Productivity

- There is evidence that productivity gains in agriculture in Australia are slowing. This is primarily due to decreasing investment in agricultural research and education. **Investment in agricultural education and research needs to increase so that the stresses of global population growth and climate change can be addressed.**
- The more academically talented students who can be exposed to agriculture at high school level, increases the potential numbers who

further study agriculture at a tertiary level and ultimately enter agricultural industries. Being a selective agricultural school, HAHS plays a significant role in this process.

- A large percentage of the urban based population have never had any exposure to agricultural production, never been on a farm and have little knowledge of where their food comes from. Education is the key to changing this and HAHS is playing an important role in this education.

Food Security

- A very large percentage of the world's population is concerned with food security, even if this issue has not risen to prominence in Australia yet. To tackle this global issue we need people with a wide range of skills sets. The more of these people who have been exposed to some form of agricultural training the better the outcome will be.

Environmental

- Undoubtedly the biggest issue facing the planet at this stage is climate change. The affects of climate change will substantially influence agricultural production and public policies. It is essential that the broader community is aware of the implications of climate change on food and fibre production and security. **HAHS is ideally situated to play the lead role in agricultural and environmental education for all schools in the Sydney area.** The farm facilities at HAHS should be opened up to be used by both primary and secondary students from any school. The 140 ha at HAHS is sufficient to provide large scale displays of agricultural production and to accommodate many classes to visit the facility on a daily basis. There will be a need to upgrade facilities on the farm with increasing numbers of visitors. Funding for these upgrades could come from the DET or from a public/private partnership.
- Many of the world's environmental problems caused by industrialization are likely to be solved by application of agricultural practices. **Carbon sequestration** is most efficiently undertaken by biological processes in plants. This requires educated agriculturalists to best apply these processes.
- Agricultural industry has a difficult task in educating urban based populations about production and the environment. **There is a lot of goodwill and willingness to invest within commercial agriculture.** This could be harnessed to help develop a first class agricultural and environmental awareness centre at HAHS.

- There are tertiary institutions which have identified the challenges facing agriculture in the future and are actively trying to find solutions. At Charles Sturt University a post graduate training program is being developed through the Fred Morley Centre to provide practical training in broadacre agriculture to graduates from any discipline. There is a need for a combination of academic and practical agricultural experiences at all levels of education.
- The establishment of the Primary Industries Education Foundation is an excellent example of how commercial organizations are helping to fund agricultural education.
- This financial year Meat and Livestock Australia will double its expenditure (to \$2 million) on environmental education associated with the red meat industries.
- **There are opportunities for HAHS to be part of the solution to the world's most significant problems.**

6. Consider the heritage value of any land and buildings on the site, the interaction of any proposed changes with existing planning strategies for the area, and opportunities to enhance access to green space for the surrounding community.

There is a need for as much green space as possible within all urban communities. The most important part is to be able to use the green spaces effectively. An agricultural and environmental centre would be an extremely good dual purpose use for a green space at Glenfield.