



**Murray Mallee LLEN Inc.**

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Date: 11/4/06.

The Executive Officer,  
Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee,  
Level 8, 35 Spring Street,  
Melbourne Vic 3000.

Dear Ben Hardman,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Murray Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network (MMLLEN) to make a submission into the Parliament of Victoria Inquiry into retaining young people in Rural Towns and Communities.

The Murray Mallee LLEN is based in Swan Hill, Victoria, covering all or parts of the Local Government areas of the Shire of Gannawarra, Swan Hill Rural City Council and the Shire of Buloke.

The MMLLEN has a primary focus on education, training and employment pathways for young people aged between 15 to 24 years of age. The LLEN initiative was established by the Victorian Government in 2002 and has again been funded for a further 3 years in the 2005 State Budget.

The submission to this Inquiry will not dwell on the issues about the loss of youth from rural towns and communities as these issues are well documented throughout not only regional Victoria, but also regional Australia. What we will be presenting to the inquiry is a model we believe could be adopted in any regional or remote community to address these issues.

**The lack of suitably qualified and skilled people and the lack of appropriate up-skilling opportunities are biting hard in this region threatening the future of nearly 844 million dollars worth of projects over the next 2 years in the Swan Hill region alone. Add to this the high deferral rates of young school leavers and the loss of young people out of the region because of the lack of Vocational Training, the Murray Mallee LLEN brokered the formation of the Loddon Murray Community Alliance (see LMCA Business Plan).**

**The Alliance has some 28 partners from across the region and is presently seeking funding for a secretariat to enable the Alliance to provide project capacity and capability for several major Education and Training initiatives across the local government areas of Swan Hill, Gannawarra and Loddon. The LMCA is one of 3 “light house” projects in the Loddon Murray region for a Whole of Government approach.**

Under the strategic banner of the Loddon Murray Community Alliance (LMCA) and the auspice of the Murray Mallee LLEN the Mid Murray Higher Education Working Party (see attachment A: Increasing Tertiary Access in the Central Murray Region) was formed in an effort to increase the tertiary presence in a region which was experiencing this huge rapid economic growth and also high deferral rates amongst young school leavers (3 times the State average). The terms of reference for this working party was not only to increase the



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undergraduate opportunities in the Central Murray region, but also to increase amount of research being conducted in the region; both economic and social.

The report called for a model based largely based around the model used in Geraldton in WA. The model called for the establishment of the Central Murray Universities Centre where undergraduate courses would be delivered in flexible, but supported mode of delivery.

The MMHEWP called for expressions of interest from 23 Universities from across Australia to partner the LMCA in such an initiative. Four Universities showed strong interest with an interstate university selected in late 2005. At the time of this submission our University partner is seriously considering delivering 2 courses in flexible mode utilizing existing infrastructure possibly in 2007. Discussion is continuing with the other Universities about delivering niche courses in the region out of the Central Murray Universities Centre.

The LMCA is providing strategic and logistical advice to Swan Training Inc who has established an International School (Horticulture and Hospitality) in Swan Hill. It is expected that this school will have 100 enrolments by the end of 2006. The school is also looking at providing subsidized training to young local disadvantaged people in Horticulture and Hospitality similar to the "Pelican Pantry Training Centre" that has run so successfully in Hastings, Victoria.

The LMCA is also providing seeking funding to roll out stage 2 of the "Schools Community Water Resource Project". Stage 1 was established in 2004 with \$800,000 contributed by the local community, government and philanthropic organizations. The projects targets 65 young "at risk" students each year for 3 years from the Swan Hill, Kerang and Richmond communities (see SCWRP attachment). A key objective of the program is to make participants more aware of employment opportunities that exist in the Swan Hill/Kerang catchment areas.

The LMCA is also formulating a youth participation strategy for the region and its 28 partners. This will be completed by the end of June 2006. The key aim of this strategy will be to improve the leadership capacity of young people in the region.

May 2006, will see the LMCA conduct a feasibility study into the possible establishment of the Loddon Murray Network for Vocational and Enterprise Learning (see schematic). It is hoped that skills centres will be established across the 3 "LGA's" that will address regional skill shortages.

The Board of the LMCA is also exploring the possibility of funding at both Federal and State level to pilot a strategy similar to the one used so successfully in the Cradle Coast Region of Tasmania. The initiative entitled "Creating Attitudinal Change to Education and Training in the Loddon Murray Region" we believe will provide the "glue" to ensure all of the LMCA initiatives are sustainable in the long term.

One distressing issue I will raise in this submission is the exceptionally high rate of suicide in the Swan Hill / Kerang catchment areas. It is estimated that 27 suicides have occurred in 27 months across a population base (Nyah-Cohuna) of 25,000 people (4.5 times the regional average and 6 times the National average). Mainly male from the ages of 17 to 35. The Board



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of the LMCA believes that many of the above issues will not only address young people leaving the region, but also provide more resilience to those who remain.

In summary, the Murray Mallee LLEN as the auspice agency of the Loddon Murray Community Alliance are only too willing to speak further on the issues I have raised above and we look forward to entering into a dialogue with you on the best way forward for regional and rural communities in Victoria.

Glenn Stewart,  
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