14 March 2008

Ms Karen Ellingford
Executive Officer
Education and Training Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Ms Ellingford

SUBMISSION BY WELLINGTON SHIRE COUNCIL TO THE VICTORIAN PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO GEOGRAPHICAL DIFFERENCES IN THE RATE IN WHICH VICTORIAN STUDENTS PARTICIPATE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Wellington Shire Council has prepared this submission on the basis of some preliminary investigations into alternative ways of increasing access to Higher Education not only in Wellington Shire but also across the whole of Gippsland. The drivers for this investigation are both education and regional economic development.

The key findings of the investigation to date are as follows:

- The numbers of Year 12 students in Wellington Shire and the whole of Gippsland and East Gippsland are approximately 95% and 82% respectively of the state average;
- The university enrolment rates of Year 12 graduates in Wellington Shire and the whole of Gippsland and East Gippsland are 34% and 30.9% respectively (Melbourne Metro is 52.1% and the rest of state is 33.9%);
- The deferral rate amongst Year 12 graduates across the whole of Gippsland and East Gippsland is comparable with other non-metro regions of Victoria i.e. approximately 15% compared with 6.5% in Melbourne Metro;
- Of the 2007 Year 12 University Enrolments less than 30% enrolled at the Gippsland regional campus of Monash University at Churchill, with the majority enrolling at a university in Melbourne; and
- The number of domestic undergraduate students at Monash at Churchill is relatively low compared with campuses in other regional areas of Victoria. For example, the University of Ballarat has over three times as many domestic undergraduates per head of population of the regional area served as Monash at Churchill.

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These findings indicate that participation in Higher Education in the whole of Gippsland and East Gippsland is particularly low compared with other parts of the State. The Council's investigations indicate that the factors contributing to this low participation rate include:

- The cost of attending university in Melbourne or in other centres;
- The qualification rules of the Independent Youth Allowance Program;
- Low aspiration;
- Poor access to Monash at Churchill unless the student has access to or owns a car;
- Students wanting to stay close to their families; and
- The drought.

The key findings of Council's investigation to date is that research into alternative ways of delivering Higher Education in Gippsland and East Gippsland needs to be carried out. Council is currently initiating such research. Council has established a Roundtable of interested parties drawn from local employers, educational institutions and community groups to oversee this research. Council envisages holding discussions with selected TAFEs, regional and metropolitan universities and other registered Higher Education providers as it undertakes its study.

Attached is an Appendix which reports on survey results of young people in Wellington Shire, highlighting reasons why we believe Wellington students have a lower participation level in higher education and suggesting strategies to address this inequity. It also outlines some consequences of lower participation rates and includes a case study.

Council would appreciate the opportunity to present in greater detail the results of its investigations to the Committee at a time convenient to the Committee.

Please contact Bruce Graham, Director Strategic Development, on 5142 3487 or bruce.graham@wellington.vic.gov.au if you have any queries about our submission.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

DARREN MC CUBBIN
Mayor

Our Ref: BDG:pld
Reply To: Bruce Graham