



Country Mayors Association of NEW SOUTH WALES

Chairperson: Cr Ken Keith OAM
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MINUTES

RURAL SKILLS FORUM

THURSDAY, 4 AUGUST 2022 AUDITORIUM, CLUB YORK, SYDNEY

The Forum opened at 12.50pm.

1. ATTENDANCE:

Ballina Shire Council, Cr Sharon Cadwallader, Mayor
Bathurst Regional Council, Cr Robert Taylor, Mayor
Bathurst Regional Council, Mr Aaron Jones, Acting General Manager
Bega Valley Shire Council, Mr Anthony McMahon, CEO
Blayney Shire Council, Cr Scott Ferguson, Mayor
Cabonne Shire Council, Cr Kevin Beatty, Mayor
Cootamundra-Gundagai Regional Council, Cr Charlie Sheahan, Mayor
Cootamundra-Gundagai Regional Council, Mr Glen Atear, Deputy General Manager
Dubbo Regional Council, Cr Mathew, Mayor
Dubbo Regional Council, Mr Murray Wood, CEO
Federation Council, Cr Patrick Bourke, Mayor
Forbes Shire Council, Cr Phyllis Miller, Mayor
Forbes Shire Council, Mr Steve Loane, General Manager
Gilgandra Shire Council, Cr Doug Batten, Mayor
Glen Innes Shire Council, Cr Rod Banham, Mayor
Glen Innes Shire Council, Mr Dennis McIntyre, Acting General Manager
Goulburn Mulwaree Council, Cr Bob Peter Walker, Mayor
Goulburn Mulwaree Council, Mr Aaron Johansson, CEO
Gunnedah Shire Council, Cr Jamie Chaffey, Mayor
Hilltops Council, Cr Margaret Roles, Mayor
Kiama Municipal Council, Cr Neil Reilly, Mayor
Kiama Municipal Council, Ms Jane Stroud, General Manager
Kyogle Council, Cr Kylie Thomas, Mayor
Lachlan Shire Council, Cr John Medcalf, Mayor
Lachlan Shire Council, Mr Greg Tory, General Manager
Leeton Shire Council, Cr Tony Reneker, Mayor
Liverpool Plains Shire Council, Cr Doug Hawkins, Mayor
Lockhart Shire Council, Cr Greg Verdon, Mayor

Lockhart Shire Council, Mr Peter Veneris, General Manager
Moree Plains Shire Council, Cr Mark Johnson, Mayor
Moree Plains Shire Council, Mr Mike Tobin, Acting General Manager
Murray River Council, Mr Terry Dodds, General Manager
Narrabri Shire Council, Cr Ron Campbell, Mayor
Narrabri Shire Council, Cr Catherine Redding, Deputy Mayor
Narrabri Shire Council, Ms Gillian Goddard, Small Business Liason Officer
Narrandera Shire Council, Cr Neville Schenka, Mayor
Narromine Shire Council, Cr Craig Davies, Mayor
Oberon Council, Cr Mark Kellam, Mayor
Oberon Council, Mr Gary Wallace, General Manager
Parkes Shire Council, Cr Ken Keith, Mayor
Snowy Monaro Regional Council, Cr Narelle Davis, Mayor
Tamworth Regional Council, Cr Russell Webb, Mayor
Tamworth Regional Council, Mr Paul Bennett, General Manager
Temora Shire Council, Cr Rick Firman, Mayor
Temora Shire Council, Mrs Elizabeth Smith, Director Administration and Finance
Uralla Shire Council, Cr Robert Crouch, Deputy Mayor
Wagga Wagga City Council, Cr Dallas Tout, Mayor
Wagga Wagga City Council, Mr Peter Thompson, General Manager
Warrumbungle Shire Council, Cr Ambrose Doolan, Mayor
Warrumbungle Shire Council, Mr Roger Bailey, General Manager
Weddin Shire Council, Cr Craig Bembrick, Mayor
Weddin Shire Council, Ms Noreen Vu, General Manager
To attract skilled labour
Wingecarribee Shire Council, Ms Lisa Miscamble, General Manager
LGNSW, Cr Darriea Turley, President
LGNSW, Mr Scott Phillips, CEO
Cr Jacob Cass Country Universities Centre

APOLOGIES:

As submitted

Welcome and Introduction of proceedings Cr Ken Keith OAM, Chairman, Country Mayors Association of NSW

Today's Forum evolved out of the Association members review of priority issues. Australia has dropped the ball on education and skills over the past 10 years and have created huge issues for rural NSW. With rate pegging councils do not have the resources and are unable to increase wages to compete for staff. Added to that in Parkes staff are being poached by government and the mining industry. Parkes Shire is working with the regional growth Development Corporation to develop a strategy to attract and retain skilled labour. There has been a dramatic reduction in the development of TAFE courses over the past five years. Course enrollments since 2016 have decreased on average by 12.7% although post COVID there has been a modest recovery. Only 29% of people enrolled in courses in 2021 completed their course. One of the main problems is the lack of apprenticeships and traineeships in rural towns.

Hon Fiona Nash, National Commissioner for Rural Education

The former government appointed her to the role of Commissioner last year and it is the first time there has been a national focus on Education and skills. As Commissioner she also looks at the workforce and how it is impacted. The role is diverse but is not involved in funding but giving advice to government on solutions to challenges. Solutions come from the ground up. There is a need to address workforce shortage on a local basis. Skills retention is a major focus and there hasn't been enough focus on how to grow workforces regionally. Access to education through schools and TAFE is very important. There needs to be better success to career advice. Access to childcare is a barrier. There is a disparity between the city and country across the board a country student is less likely to get a degree or complete higher education. There is a role for councils to connect with people leaving country communities and wanting to come back.

Hon Alister Henskens, Minister for Skills and Training

NSW has the most skilled workforce in Australia and delivered a major investment in fee free training. Delivery and opportunities are more than ever with \$3.1 billion provided in the budget for skills and training. The labour shortage is causing many problems. If you don't have people to train that is a major problem. There is provision in the budget for \$80 million over four years for additional fee for free places to be provided. There is a roll out of pathway programs in regional areas with programs in 144 schools throughout the state providing workplace placements as well as training at the high school level. The restriction that only one vocational subject could be a HSC subject has been removed. \$2 billion has been allocated for TAFE including a large capital investment. NSW is training 45% of all TAFE students in Australia and NSW has the largest take up in regional Australia. Councils across NSW will take time to rebuild flood affected areas and the Government is introducing flood specific courses at TAFE to increase skill needs. There is also other skills work with emergency services and with emergency management courses. Asbestos affected courses in flood areas are also being introduced.

Mr Tim Crakanthorp, Shadow Minister for Skills and TAFE, Shadow Minister for Tertiary Education

The economy is dependent on skilled migration which stopped due to COVID. TAFE enrollments have dropped. COVID had shortages but when it stopped job opportunities increased. Past cuts in skills and education budgets have caused downturn but increased budgets does not fix everything. The new Federal Government has a good skills and education policy. Now the 1 in 10 workers in construction has to be a cadet or trainee. Additional budget to skills and education has been promised. One aspect that has been overlooked is the formation of a national body that addresses skills and education needs throughout Australia. NSW Labor wants to revive the manufacturing sector which will create jobs. Completion rates at TAFE are not high. The purpose of educating is to get people into jobs but on-line education has pros and cons as connections are not good enough and many families do not have the technology. Courses have been reconstructed because of this. TAFE courses are being cancelled and rap around courses lost which is not logical. Courses have to be aligned. NSW Labor will ensure that 50% of railway

stock is produced in the State and will increase tender wages. We will establish a Job First Commission and will be taking on the recommendations of the McKell Institute. Labor wants to get students into training and have a skilled workforce. TAFE needs to be rebuilt to provide courses that students want. Labor invites Country Mayors to provide input into their future plans and policies.

Mr Edward Cavanagh, Director of Policy, McKell Institute

The McKell Institute is a research body that works with Government and Business to generate skill changes in communities. Their current project involves data input to identify what problems are being experienced in retaining and attracting skills to regional and rural communities. Generally communities identify their own problem areas but they are rarely solved. The project is about providing jobs in country areas and looking at the broad structural issues that affect the skills shortage in country areas. Migration to rural NSW has created new problems. The Institute is working with the University of Wollongong detailing community market trends and then build up a Local Government area database. The Institute wants to analyse all of the issues highlighted and they need councils to take the statistical realities to government. Its local solutions for local problems. The Institute wants councils to add to it with powerful stories and they will visit those communities as part of their field work in October and November this year. The results can be used in the State election context.

Cr Jacob Cass, Centre Manager, Parkes Country Universities Centre

The Country Universities model is a wide one and started in Cooma in 2013 to create opportunities for youth and encourage local high value jobs. The model has grown throughout the State and is a study space that provides high speed internet shared with other students and connects students with technology. It has a people centric focus. It is community owned and governed and funded by the three levels of government. The centres have several partnerships including cornerstone universities and industry support. 1462 students are registered across three states and 48% of students are first in their families to study. Students can study through any university and in fact they study through 140 different institutions. Most students are in the 20-44 years age bracket. The centres support learning and have academic and administration assistance. Pathways include tertiary education, traineeships, and apprenticeships. Parkes Young Professionals is a network of young professionals who can share experiences. Partnerships include universities, government, local business, schools, industry and community and the Parkes Business Innovation Hub is a 20 seat meeting room with video conferencing.

Cr Rick Firman Chairman and Julie Briggs CEO Riverina Joint Organisation to outline Riverina's Development Skills Shortages Project

The Riverina Workforce Development project has focus areas and works towards a regional workforce and an employer of choice. Four strands of activities cover high school students and university students. The career journey is professional placements, connectivity, a graduate program and "Start Yourselfes". "Start Yourselfes" involves start

your career here with work inspirational days, meetings between schools and council, resource materials, project officer support, work experience and a better understanding of councils. There are “Come and Try” days over a three day period. Come and try Civil Engineering, Civil Construction, Mapping/GIS, Horticulture and Town Planning and Building. There is professional placement with Charles Stuart University and Wollongong University, and credited placements and voluntary placements offered in any area of Councils operations. There is a student ambassador that showcases diversity at work. There are graduate programs aligned to specific purposes and a fast tracked pathway. That does not guarantee work. Challenges include council resourcing, finding enough placements, finding graduate placements, costs associated with “Come and Try” days, and the importance of partnerships like “Compact”

Suggestions for positive change

- Community service obligation allows for reduction in numbers in rural and remote LGA's based on the already established community service obligation that TAFE is committed to with flexibility of numbers for specific courses in communities
- That TAFE NSW specifically isolate metropolitan from regional, rural and remote in all areas like student courses, enrollments, completions, apprenticeships and traineeships and funding distribution
- TAFE NSW to deliver a more detailed and transparent annual report that highlights performance and outcomes for each LGA and when it distinguishes from metro and regionals to include industry profiles
- That the HECS debt mechanism be used as a catalyst to support and improve councils currently struggling to attract and retain skilled staff
- Identify what type of courses are undertaken in LGA's that involve face to face tuition
- More support and incentive for local business to train trainees
- Encourage the State Government to train their own trainees and apprentices
- Engage with the Minister and his advisors to promote and discuss problems facing regional and rural NSW
- Advocate for the aged workforce to return to the workforce and provide training and mentoring
- Reduce competition between the States for the skilled workforce
- The McKell Institute be supported by CMA in its endeavors to increase skills and to retain skills in country NSW

There being no further business the meeting closed at 5.05pm.

Cr Ken Keith OAM
Chairman Country Mayor's Association of NSW