

Submission to Parliament of Victoria Rural and Regional Committee

Inquiry into Farm Sector Workforce Capacity

Mildura Development Corporation (MDC) is responsible for facilitating economic development activity within the boundaries of the Mildura Rural City Council as well as supporting infrastructure development across the region. MDCs vision is “Supporting a Prosperous Region” and an important component of that is to support workforce development and skills capacity.

Regional centres like Mildura, while isolated by distance from the capital of Victoria, have much to offer. Positives include:

- a stable climate
- great amenity – National Parks & riverfront accessibility
- access to water
- service provision
- access to both Arts & Culture and sporting facilities,
- retail and wholesale choice
- diversity of industry across the municipality – horticulture, agriculture, mineral sands mining, manufacturing, and new sustainable energy leading to solar power developments
- education and training from pre-school to tertiary level
- people with passion and resilience
- health provision

Response to Terms of Reference:

The Mildura region is economically reliant on primary industry with a strong focus on horticulture, dry land farming and associated food processing, generating a Gross Regional Product of \$2.78 billion per annum.

Workforce and training issues within these sectors have been identified by key stakeholders and employers as an ongoing challenge. Perception of the industry sectors has been identified as a major impediment to attracting staff as has perception of the region itself.¹

¹ Workforce, Training and Skills Issues in Agriculture, Final Report, October 2009, p.14

Mildura Region Industry Workforce Development Strategy – Wine, Olive & Beverage Industry, Dec 2009, p26

In providing this submission to this Parliamentary Inquiry, and on behalf of Mildura Development Corporation (MDC), I would like to provide information on a workforce development strategy that our organisation has been involved with over the last two years.

In 2009 Mildura Development Corporation received funding through the former Department of Industry, Innovation and Regional Development (DIIRD) to facilitate an Industry Workforce Development Strategy for the Wine, Olive and Beverage sectors. Mildura Wines, a cluster of local wineries, had been advocating for this project for several years as a result of difficulties in attracting and recruiting staff for their industry sector.

The first stage of the project initially identified many of the issues associated with entry into the workforce and then developed a strategy to assist these industry sectors in their workforce recruitment.

The second stage of the project facilitated actions from the strategy document and worked with an industry led Project Control Group to prioritise these actions.

One of the key priority goal areas focussed on attraction and recruitment.

An excerpt from the final report of Stage Two demonstrates the importance the Project Control Group placed on this issue:

“Research conducted during the first stage of the IWDS highlighted an apparent lack of awareness of the diverse career pathways available in the wine, olive and beverage industries across the local community, particularly amongst young people in the region.

The Project Control Group decided that industry tours for teachers would be fundamental in breaking the barriers between education and industry in promoting industry careers in local schools. It was hoped that by conducting industry tours that teachers would be better informed to incorporate local industry awareness into their lesson plans. School excursions, school based apprenticeships and overall a greater awareness and potentially a greater interest from local students to work in these industries would ultimately result.”²

Prior to an industry tour being undertaken, two industry representatives spoke to the Career Teachers at a joint meeting, providing them with information on the wine and olive industries. This was a very successful meeting with great interest expressed by the teachers for an industry site visit.

An industry tour was conducted for all Career Teachers on Friday 13th May. Teachers were taken to Boundary Bend Olives and shown the technology and infrastructure required to operate a dynamic market based horticultural business which covers 3800 hectares.

“Participants claimed that following the tour they had greater knowledge of the olive oil industry and the career opportunities available. Many indicated that they would be able and indeed willing to share this information with students which could lead to potential work experience or school based learning placements.

Overall, the Teacher Industry Education Day was a huge success, continuing industry engagement with the education sector is pivotal in attracting people to the wine, olive and beverage industries. This engagement assists in breaking down the barriers between industry and the education sector and establishes opportunities to promote to industry the possibilities for future school based apprenticeships, traineeships, apprenticeships etc.”³

² Final Report Stage 2 Mildura Region Industry Workforce Development Strategy – Wine, Olive and Beverage, p.5

³ Final Report Stage 2 Mildura Region Industry Workforce Development Strategy – Wine, Olive and Beverage, p 6

Another successful outcome for the “attraction and recruitment” goal area was the development of industry career brochures. These brochures inform teachers, students, parents and industry participants about the training and career pathways that can be undertaken within and across industry sectors, from certificate to degree level. They also provide local examples of people working in that particular industry sector, detailing their background, their work and the training they have undertaken. With professional design and photography, the brochures are proving to be an ideal marketing tool to schools and to the wider community to promote the industry sectors and the array of careers that are available. The brochures can also be uploaded from the web at www.growmildura.com.au

There have been a number of other outcomes from the IWDS, including the ongoing development of a Skills Passport which is being worked on in conjunction with Skills Victoria.

There are several important points that have become apparent over the last two years when examining workforce issues for any industry sector.

Firstly, industry must be at the forefront of any decisions made. The Project Control Group worked exceptionally well, because of the involvement of passionate and committed individuals who were exceptional in selling their industry sector to schools and young people. Their explanations and showcasing of their industries provided a much clearer understanding of the sophistication of the sectors and level of training required. Rather than being viewed as industries that require unskilled labour, the reality of technology, logistics, marketing, business administration and other skills that are required for current farming and processing practices were on display.

Secondly, engagement with Local Learning and Employment Networks is critical, as a pathway to work with schools, training providers and tertiary institutes. The Northern Mallee LLEN worked closely with MDC in delivering this project. Their contacts with the Career Teachers network and the schools were pivotal in engagement between industry and training and ensuring that the site visit could take place. Bringing the training /education sectors and industry together is also extremely beneficial in determining the level and appropriateness of training required and how it should be delivered.

Thirdly professional researched marketing is also crucial. The career brochures are a result of many hours of research into the various training and career pathways that are available within these industry sectors. The content showcasing local people has proven to be very effective in engaging the wider community. With assistance from professional graphic designers and photographers, as well as having a web based application, these brochures have provided a new and exciting look into established food processing sectors.

There are many other issues that will be examined in the course of this inquiry in terms of attracting younger people into farming, many of which are documented in the Terms of Reference. At this stage of the review I will limit my comments to the findings of the IWDS project.

Thank you

Anne Mansell

Chief Executive Officer.