

9 November 2021

Via email: Matthew.Kenny2@education.vic.gov.au

RE: SUBMISSION TO VDSS DISCUSSION PAPER CONSULTATION PROCESS

Food and Fibre Great South Coast welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the VET Delivered to School Students (VDSS) consultation process in response to the Firth Review recommendations. Vocational and careers education is not just an area of interest for our organisation – nurturing food and fibre careers is a core strategic platform and underpins much of the work we do.

Food and Fibre Great South Coast (FFGSC) is the representative body for food and fibre in the Great South Coast. The Great South Coast is Victoria's largest food and fibre region, producing \$2.3 billion in agricultural output annually. The food and fibre industry accounts for 60% of the region's GDP and 21.6% of total jobs in the region.

Our region spans south-west Victoria, taking in the beautiful coastlines of the Great Ocean Road to the inland majesty of the Southern Grampians. We are the people, natural environment and industries of Corangamite Shire, Glenelg Shire, Moyne Shire, Southern Grampians Shire, Colac-Otway Shire and the City of Warrnambool – collectively a population of over 105,000 people across over 12,000 businesses that achieves a gross regional product of \$7 billion.

Our research indicates that by 2035, food and fibre jobs in our region will grow by 30%. Of these new jobs, at least 39% will require a vocational qualification, underscoring our stake in this process. This review offers a timely opportunity to incorporate food and fibre content and careers information into the Victorian senior secondary school curriculum, thereby strengthening the likelihood of students and graduates connecting to viable career pathways with transferable skills and progression opportunities across the state, but particularly in our growing region.

We share the following data as we have found that people outside of food and fibre have a poor and inaccurate understanding of the careers on offer.

The following proportion of Australian professionals work in the food and fibre industry:

- 21% of bookkeepers
- 14.1% of advertising, PR and sales managers
- 8.1% of auctioneers
- 10.7% of personal assistants and secretaries
- 74.2% of farm, forestry and garden workers
- 35.7% of nursery workers
- 9.5% of gardeners
- 11.4% of metal fitters and machinists
- 3.3% of motor mechanics

- 2.7% of electricians
- 2% of carpenters
- 1.2% of plumbers
- 80.1% of farm managers
- 9.3% of production managers
- 9.7% of specialist managers
- 6.1% of management and organisation analysts
- 41.7% of marine transport professions
- 6.7% of truck drivers
- 58.7% of agricultural and forestry scientists,
- 55% of agricultural technicians
- 10% of building and engineering technicians
- 9% of science technicians
- 54.5% of aquaculture farmers
- 6.7% of environmental scientists

Further, we note that contrary to common misconceptions, people of all ages make up the food and fibre workforce. Of workers in agriculture, approximately 41% are women.

In 2021-22 and beyond, we are focusing our resources on optimising our impact and unlocking opportunities to continue to grow the value and capacity of the Great South Coast’s food and fibre industry. Please find herewith our response to the VDSS Discussion Paper relevant to our organisation’s activities.

Our responses

- **We strongly recommend that *Agriculture and Environment* VET courses be considered a core VDSS offering rather than limited to regions of agricultural production.** The food and fibre industry shares some of the reputational challenges experienced by the VCAL program as identified by the Firth Review. Current perceptions of our industry, in particular its agriculture component, conjure strictly land-based, masculine careers with little opportunity for progression, diversity or impact. In fact, the food and fibre industry is a broad supply chain that incorporates traditional land-based farming as well as an expanding suite of careers in technology, especially new energies, management, communications, design, sustainability, and advocacy with increasing relevance to other areas of business and government. We consider *Agriculture and Environment* education central to a well-rounded comprehension of the world we live in, and this a timely opportunity to provide every Victorian student with an understanding of their food sources, production means and environmental credentials. Further, we contend that opportunities for young people in our industry are many and varied, and it would be unfair on urban students to sequester access to these opportunities to students in regions of agricultural production.
- We call on Government to extend the VET Champion program to include food and fibre representatives in order to strengthen the education sector and students’ connections to industry and career pathways. In addition, we recommend that the Department enable and empower industry representative bodies to facilitate grassroots, industry-led careers advisory programs through investment and upskilling. Grassroots industry representative bodies such as Food and Fibre Great South Coast boast strong regional and industry networks, providing an opportunity for

the education sector to invest in engagement that will upskill educators, raise awareness and ultimately convert a greater share of students towards viable career opportunities in a sector they would not have previously considered. It is well known with career choices that, 'you can't be, what you don't see.'

- We point the Review to our work in developing an inaugural Careers Advisory Panel program, which – while fledgeling - we consider an exemplar of industry engagement with the agricultural training and careers education sectors. The Careers Advisory Panel links agricultural and related industry participants from our network with students, graduates and teachers to improve overall agricultural literacy and careers advice provided in an education context. Our role is to provide suitable training to Panel members and devise high-value opportunities for industry to engage with education, including and for example, the provision of sites for excursions, in-class presentations and speaking engagements at Career Expos. We consider these activities an integral part of our responsibility to stakeholders, but note they require significant funding and education sector expertise to maximise their output potential. More information on the Careers Advisory Panel can be found here: <https://southcoastfoodfibre.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CAP-Member-flyer-Digital-1.pdf>

Food and Fibre Great South Coast commends the Department on engaging in a strong collaborative effort with relevant educational institutions towards its goal to deliver better outcomes for secondary school students in almost all aspects of secondary education.

As an organisation, we stand ready to assist in implementing, supporting and publicly promoting worthwhile reforms as well as partnering with education providers and departmental officers to ensure resources are allocated efficiently.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission on the VDSS consultation process. Please do not hesitate to contact us should you wish for us to expand on any of the above recommendations.

We look forward to the acceptance and implementation of these proposals.

Yours sincerely,



Georgina Gubbins
Chair



Natalie Collard
Executive Officer

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