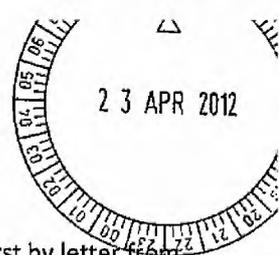




## Save the Denmark Centre for Sustainable Living Petition



### Issues raised in petition

1. Centre for Sustainable Living (CSL)/Denmark Education and Innovation Centre (Inc) (DEIC) served notice first by letter from Principal of the Denmark High School, 27 October 2011, and by letter from the Minister Liz Constable on the 8 December 2011 to vacate by 30 June 2012.
2. Community is opposed to the closure
3. The Centre is a unique and essential educational facility
4. The Centre provides valuable environment, social and economic benefits to the region
5. A decade of work and over \$1M spent on building and site facilities together with additional Education program funding making the Centre what it is today
6. The Centre is Denmark's vision for an interactive, engaged and sustainable community
7. A unique educational facility which cannot be relocated or replaced

***Request: We request that the Legislative Council ensure that the community value of the Centre is taken into consideration and that all parties to this decision enter into meaningful negotiations to seek a solution that meets the needs of the school and the community.***

### Centre for Sustainable Living - background to the parties involved

Three groups involved campaign to retain the Centre and/or obtain funding for facilities:

#### 1. Denmark Education and Innovation Centre (DEIC)

- The DEIC (established 1995), is the Lessee. Membership comprised of the principals of Denmark Education institutions, community organisations and community representatives. In February 2012 the College of Agriculture, Denmark High School and Primary School principals resigned.
- The DEIC received eviction notices 27 October 2011 (Principal of the Denmark High School) and 8 December 2011 (Minister Liz Constable) to vacate the Centre by 30 June 2012.
- DEIC replied to the Minister expressing concern and had a very brief response with no opportunity to discuss or negotiate.
- DEIC requested local member Terry Redman to help mediate with the Education Department, he declined to be involved. Denmark Shire President Ross Thornton met with the Principal who reiterated the Department's stand and declined a request to meet with anyone else.
- The DEIC feels duty bound to continue to assert its rights on behalf of the Denmark community as per its constitution for retention of the Centre and has received pro bono legal advice. Perth lawyers Hotchkin Hanly have provided their opinion that the lease is still in force as if the first option to renew had been exercised.
- DEIC has submitted a complaint to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations (Ombudsman).

#### 2. Green Skills

- Green Skills Inc manage the Centre and have 10 staff located at the Centre (8 of these moved to the Centre when offices in the Denmark Environment Centre burnt to the ground July 2009).
- Green Skills is a Not-For-Profit organisation that is registered as a training provider with policies and practices to ensure educational best practice and child protection.
- Giz Watson MP organised a meeting with the Minister Liz Constable 15 December, which Dr Louise Duxbury from Green Skills attended. The Minister knew very little about the context of the Centre for Sustainable Living.
- The Minister responded to the letter from Green Skills requesting her intervention sent 9 November 2011 with a generic response. DEIC received the same generic letter as have numerous individuals who wrote directly to the Minister.
- As agreed at the meeting with the Minister, Green Skills officers met with Milan Trifunovic, Education Department Director of Facilities Program Delivery, and Diane Cole, Principal Denmark High School, 20 March 2012 at the Centre (Our first meeting with the school since notification). Mr Trifunovic stated that he was "not meeting to extend an olive branch" but rather to clarify issues and facilitate site development. He was surprised at the extent and scope of the Centre and suggested that Minister Constable should be invited to visit the site. This has been done.

#### 3 Save the Centre for Sustainable Living Alliance

- The Alliance was formed in December 2011 to represent the community investment in the Centre and their interest in its retention as a community asset.
- In addition to the 400 signatures presented to the Legislative Council 20<sup>th</sup> March a further 545 have been gathered. These signatures, letters to ministers, local members and papers indicate the strength of community concern.
- Chair of the Save the Centre Alliance, Peter Polini, had an appointment to meet with the High School Principal early February (made in December 2011). The Principal cancelled, stating that it was not appropriate to meet due to "threat of legal action". This would have been the first meeting with anyone from the Education Department since notice was served.
- The Hon. Sally Talbot, WA Shadow Minister for Environment, visited the Centre and met with management 2<sup>nd</sup> March and subsequently tabled "Questions on Short Notice" in the WA parliament on 6 March on behalf of the community. The level of consultation (or lack thereof) regarding the Education Department's proposed expansion of the Denmark High School and

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closure of the Centre was highlighted.

#### **Timeline of historical events**

- The Centre owned by Education Department. Two buildings destined to be demolished after vacated by Denmark Agricultural College 1999, the Centre and the Denmark Great Southern Institute of Technology building.
- 14 community groups led by the Historical Society lobbied over four years to retain the building and put in the hands of the community to create an education facility focused on sustainable living.
- The community was successful and a lease between the umbrella organisation Denmark Education and Innovation Centre Inc and Education Department commenced 1 December 2003 for an initial 5 year period with 2 x 5 year options to renew. The Education Department did not fund any refurbishment but agreed to a peppercorn rent.
- The Denmark Education and Innovation Centre Inc (DEIC) omitted to send a letter requesting renewal of the lease in 2008. The Education Department did not raise this matter until the eviction notice in October 2011. This was despite the fact that the Education Department had representatives on the DEIC during this time. The Education Department did send invoices for the peppercorn rental of \$150/year and the DEIC paid them. (The annual rental increased from \$100 to \$150 in accordance with 2<sup>nd</sup> term lease requirements effective 2008.)
- The Centre for Sustainable Living has been managed by Green Skills since opening in December 2004. Green Skills prepared the feasibility study and business plan for the Centre, sought and managed the \$1million finance raised and volunteer labour from government and philanthropic sources and the community to refurbish the building and then took on the challenge to run the facility in a self sustaining way.
- This role was formalised through a management agreement between the DEIC and Green Skills in July 2003 and renewed in May 2011 (in the belief the lease was current). Green Skills has sustained considerable operating loss in expectation of the longer term lease period to recoup those losses over time. Business operational losses have been exacerbated by the threatened closure of the Centre.

#### **Submission**

To receive the eviction notice caused extreme shock and was originally met with surprise and amazement. DEIC and Green Skills were unable to understand this decision and lack of consultation in what they believed was a good working relationship with the Education Department's representative Diane Cole the Principal of the Denmark High School. In fact Ms Cole was a member of DEIC and as a consequence was privy to all discussions in regard to future plans for the Centre. No one could understand why the relationship had broken down. No opportunity for consultation or discussion on how the School and the CSL could work together to satisfy the needs of both parties was offered, and overtures to meet were declined.

We are left with a strong feeling that the Education Department and the Minister are not fully informed of the great work done at and through the Centre. We are concerned that as there was no consultation with the community, the Lessee or the Centre Manager on this matter. Decisions have been made from an ill informed base. This is something that should never have happened; especially from a Government Department. The Education Department has sought to take advantage of an oversight by a community organization to take control over a community run facility to its own benefit without provision of due notice or payment for facilities. The Education Department has not provided any funding for the Centre.

The CSL is a unique Educational facility that has grown in stature since its inception. It is a living breathing example of sustainability in action. A full scale model of where we need to go in the future if sustainability is the way of the future. The Centre is an asset to the Community, the School and the wider WA community. The Centre is of vital importance to the Denmark economy and its 5,000 Educational Visitors annually on average supports this. If the eviction is carried out the Centre and all it has to offer will be lost. There is no other facility available to carry on this community initiative. This will be a Net Loss in terms of education outcomes, the Denmark Community and the Community as a whole. How can this be allowed to happen?

What we would like to see is a way for the main players to work together. We believe this is possible. We are fully supportive of the extensions being undertaken at the School, it is good for the students and the community. We have been asking for an opportunity to establish a win/win situation where all parties can be accommodated both in the short term and the long term. To help achieve this all those who have not visited the Centre should do so as soon as possible. It will allow a better understanding of the benefits of retaining the Centre for Sustainable Living. The school does not even need temporary accommodation at least until third term 2012 or first term 2013, they have suggested in media that the facility could be shared by community outside of school hours, what does this mean? There has been no correspondence about this suggestion.

In closing we make a simple request. Please help us to do everything possible to secure the future of the Centre for Sustainable Living. If the Education Department proceeds with their eviction plans the Centre will be lost forever. It is ironic that the High School extension is funded through Royalties for Regions that has a primary aim to support rural community initiatives. In this case this funding will see the demise of a fantastic community initiative. Is this the way of the future losing such a valuable community asset or are we really serious about the benefits of sustainable living and best practice education being the way of the future?

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