

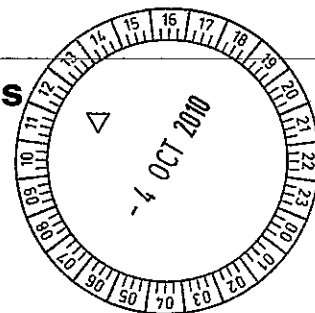


PUBLIC

Minister for Transport; Disability Services

Our ref: 29-15366

Hon. Simon O'Brien MLC



Hon Brian Ellis MLC
Chairman
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Legislative Council
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Chairman

Thank you for your letter dated 9 September 2010 in which you refer to Petition No. 90 regarding opposition to the closure of the ACTIV Business Service in Busselton. I offer the following information in relation to this matter.

Background

The Disability Services Commission currently allocates \$26.1million per annum to Activ Foundation for the provision of a range of disability services. Activ also receives funding from the Commonwealth Government for the provision of employment services for people with disabilities.

For many years Activ Foundation has been funded by the Commonwealth Government to operate business services (previously known as sheltered employment) in Perth and in Busselton, Manjimup, Narrogin and Kalgoorlie. Hundreds of employees with intellectual disabilities benefit from these employment services. Many of the employees have been working at these locations for many years and are also residents of Activ accommodation facilities.

On Wednesday 2 June 2010 employees of the Busselton Business Service were advised by the management of Activ that steps would be taken to close the Busselton site because it was no longer possible to provide meaningful on-going employment.

The Disability Services Commission was not given any notice of the announcement of the closure of the Busselton business service. On Thursday 3 June 2010 the Director General of the Commission, Dr Ron Chalmers, contacted the Chief Executive Officer of Activ Foundation, Mr Tony Vis, to seek an explanation for the decision by Activ to close the Busselton workshop. Mr Vis advised that the action was taken by the Activ Board as a business decision, prompted by an inability to secure on-going employment contracts.

Dr Chalmers contacted the State Manager of the Commonwealth Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), the funder of Activ's Business Services, to obtain a briefing on the planned closure of the Busselton workshop. The State Manager stated that FaHCSIA would not intervene in the matter.

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The announcement by Activ Management of the closure of the Busselton workshop was not received well by the workshop employees, their families and members of the Busselton community. Members of the Busselton Support Group for Activ Foundation sought the assistance of the local media and the Member for Vasse to support their case to have Busselton Business Service remain open.

Mr Ian Barker and other members of the Busselton Support Group for Activ Foundation sought the support of local community members to petition Parliament regarding the Busselton workshop.

On Tuesday 8 June the Minister for Disability Services met with the Chief Executive Officer of Activ to seek advice on the decision taken by Activ to announce the closure of the Busselton workshop and to express his concerns about the impact of this decision on the employees with disabilities.

On Friday 11 June 2010 the Minister travelled to Busselton to visit the workshop and to hold a series of meetings with a range of people associated with the Busselton Business Service.

The Member for Vasse, with the support of the Minister for Disability Services, has taken an active role with the local business community to generate employment contracts which will increase the viability of Activ's Busselton Business Service. This initiative has been supported by a concerted media campaign to keep the workshop open. As a result of this advocacy the Shire of Busselton and local businesses have approached Activ with short-term and long-term contract opportunities.

On Tuesday 31 August 2010 the management of Activ released a media statement to announce that it would postpone the closure of the Busselton workshop for six months. The media statement included the following comments:

"The reason for this postponement is that there has been new activity presented over the last two months that has the potential to offer meaningful, sustainable and valuable work for the majority of Activ's employees into the future."

"This extended time period is to ensure an adequate opportunity is provided for these sales prospects to be fully evaluated and consolidated into the Busselton workplace."

"While there is some way to go in securing the long term future for Activ Business Services in Busselton we have now made a positive start down this road. I would urge the community to keep up the momentum that has been generated in finding meaningful work for Activ's employees."

Dr Chalmers has met recently with Mr Tony Vis and with the Chair of Activ on three occasions to discuss the workshop issue and to seek assurances about safeguards for the employees.

While the ultimate decision about the future of the Busselton Business Service rests with the board of Activ and their funding body, the Commonwealth Government, the Disability Services Commission will continue to advocate for the workshop to permanently remain operational.

Comments on the terms of Petition No. 90

1. State Government work with ACTIV Foundation to ensure that ACTIV Busselton remains open.

ACTION:

The Minister for Disability Services, the Member for Vasse and the Disability Services Commission have been directly involved in promoting the on-going operation of the Busselton Business Service (see Background notes).

2. Instruct all Government Department and Agencies with offices in the Capes regions identify jobs and tasks that can be contracted out to ACTIV Busselton and to enter into contracts with ACTIV Busselton for the delivery of those services

ACTION:

The Member for Vasse, with the support of the Minister for Disability Services, has taken an active role with the local business community to generate employment contracts which will increase the viability of Activ's Busselton Business Service. This initiative has been supported by a concerted media campaign to keep the workshop open. As a result of this advocacy the Shire of Busselton and local businesses have approached Activ with short-term and long-term contract opportunities.

Disability Services Commission staff based in the Lower South West region were involved in the exploration of employment contracts which would be appropriate for the Busselton Business Service. This included engagement with local government and State Government representatives based in the Capes region.

3. Write to the Federal Government calling on the Federal Government to work with ACTIV Foundation to ensure ACTIV Busselton remains open.

ACTION:

The Minister for Disability Services contacted the Commonwealth Government's Parliamentary Secretary for Disability to discuss the Busselton Business Service and to advocate for the decision to close the facility to be over-turned.

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The Director General of the Disability Services Commission contacted the State Manager of the Commonwealth Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), the funder of Activ's Business Services, to obtain a briefing on the planned closure of the Busselton workshop and to advocate for the decision to close the facility to be over-turned.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon O'Brien', written in a cursive style.

**SIMON OBRIEN MLC
MINISTER FOR DISABILITY SERVICES**

1 OCT 2010

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