

Hon Wendy **DUNCAN** MLC
Member for the Mining & Pastoral Region

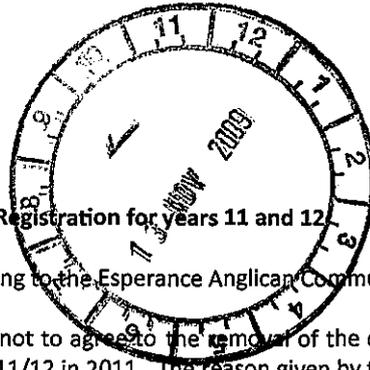
12 November 2009

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

BY EMAIL: lomar@parliament.wa.gov.au

Dear Mr Ellis

RE: Submission-Petition No. 45 Esperance Anglican Community School, Registration for years 11 and 12



I thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the petition relating to the Esperance Anglican Community School.

The petition is in response to the decision by the Minister for Education not to agree to the removal of the condition on the registration of the Esperance Anglican Community School (EACS) for Year 11/12 in 2011. The reason given by the Minister was that such an action would have a detrimental effect on the upper secondary (Year 11 and 12) educational program of Esperance Senior High School (ESHS).

The petitioners who represent families of Esperance and the surrounding regions serviced by the Esperance Anglican Community School believe that the Minister has erred in her decision and I support the view of the petitioners. The Minister, in making her decision, discussed four main reasons for her conclusion which I will address as follows:

1. Source of Year 11 Cohort for EACS

The Minister has concluded that the major source of enrolment for the year 11 cohort would be from ESHS and this would have a detrimental impact on current programmes.

However, in spite of the closure of the Ravensthorpe Nickel Mine, enrolments at Esperance Senior High School are significantly up, particularly in Year 11 and 12 in 2009 in comparison to the previous year. Year 11 has 236 students in 2009 compared to 200 in 2008 and Year 12 has 162 in Year 12 compared to 130 in 2008.

The expansion of the port, the Esperance Cleanup and Recovery process, the imminent harvest of 50,000 ha of tree plantations, the upgrade and expansion of infrastructure under the Royalties for Regions programme, the stimulus expenditure of the Federal government, the expansion of exports through the Esperance Port, the construction of many subdivisions and homes are all indicators of growth in jobs and activity that bring families to the town and are indicators of continuing and long term growth. Last week the first sod was turned on the new Galaxy lithium mine in Ravensthorpe which is another indicator of growth.

The increase in the number of students available for the Year 11 and 12 cohort can also be related to the government policy of requiring students to remain in school until the age of 17. Therefore I submit that there is an increasing cohort of students in Esperance or moving to Esperance that will enable the Esperance Senior High School to continue at or near its current level of enrolments for year 11 and 12 even if the EACS is granted the removal of the condition.



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2. Enrolments from surrounding district high schools

The Minister notes that ESHS does not receive many enrolments from surrounding district high schools. In her comments under point 1 the Minister also noted that there is no residential capacity available for them at Esperance Residential College. This fact is having a far more detrimental effect on the ESHS than the removal of the condition for EACS ever will. Therefore the argument that there is not a cohort of students available from surrounding District High Schools is flawed because of the substandard student accommodation available in Esperance forcing these students to find education elsewhere.

3. Likely Declining Growth of 15-19 cohort over the next 20 years

The Australian Bureau of Statistics themselves have admitted that the recent Census had serious deficiencies in regional Western Australia and they have advised that they are working to redress this in the next Census. The risk with the reliance on these predictions of population growth is that if the condition is not removed for EACS and student numbers continue to increase at ESHS as has been seen in recent years, the town of Esperance will need a second high school at some time in the future. If current trends in government capital expenditure are anything to go by, it is hard enough to obtain funding to upgrade existing high schools and residential colleges without government finding the capital to build a new school. The government has the opportunity to benefit from a private organization being prepared to provide the capital, bear the risk and add to the choice of education in the region. Without the removal of the condition, it is highly likely that this willingness to invest will not only be lost in Esperance but throughout regional Western Australia. Towns in regional WA of a similar size to Esperance, such as Broome, have a choice of non-government education. There are also towns smaller than Esperance like Manjimup with this educational opportunity. There is no reason why Esperance should not have a choice too.

4. Likely low growth in enrolments in Year 11 and 12

The Minister has noted that very little growth in enrolments in Year 11 and 12 is expected in the next five years due to projects in the region being insufficiently advanced to provide increased population.

In the short time since the Minister made her decision, there has been a significant change in the forecast for growth for Western Australia following the Global Financial Crisis. Even projects such as the Gorgan Gas Project have a flow on effect. There are many workers who choose to work in the Pilbara and base their families in places like Esperance and in recent weeks companies such as Bluescope Steel in Esperance have reported increased activity to me and have told me it is due to demand from projects throughout the State.

In addition to the recent Galaxy Resources project commencement, tenders have closed for the sale of the Ravensthorpe Nickel Mine and some analysts are predicting that the mine will be recommissioned in the first quarter of 2010. Cliffs have made application to nearly double their throughput to 11.5 million tonnes of iron-ore through Esperance. This company bases all its train drivers, maintenance crews and transport logistics people in Esperance. In addition to these projected increases in activity, there is considerable funding coming into the Esperance region under the Federal government stimulus package (particularly into schools) and the Royalties for Regions fund that will generate economic activity and jobs. ITC Limited is due to commence harvesting its 50,000ha bluegum estate in 2010 in the Esperance region and will export up to 400,000 tonnes per annum.

5. Conclusion

If the Minister rejects the application for the removal of the condition placed on EACS because that decision might be detrimental to an adjacent government school, then the logical extension of this is that no new schools can be opened in Western Australia. The creation of a new school anywhere and at any time, will automatically have a "detrimental" effect on neighbouring schools, as there is nowhere else to gain students from. It is not possible to "create" year 11's and 12's.

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There is widespread community support for the Esperance Anglican Community School as it provides choice of education, an opportunity for more individual attention for students with special needs, and the faith based learning that many parents prefer. Many parents have advised me that they will leave town if the school closes.

EACS has the support of the Shire of Esperance, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Goldfields Esperance Development Commission, resources companies, and local businesses as it assists them in attracting and retaining professional staff who make the decision to move to take up employment based on the choice of education for their children.

I would submit that the Minister must take all these considerations into account and reverse her decision not to remove the condition on the registration of Esperance Anglican Community School for Year 11/12.

Yours sincerely,



Hon Wendy Duncan MLC
Member for Mining and Pastoral
Parliamentary Secretary to Minister for Regional Development