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### **Submission: Rural Research & Development Corporations – Productivity Commission Draft Report**

Charles Sturt University (CSU) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft report of the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Rural Research and Development Corporations (RDCs). As a regionally-based New South Wales institution whose core business includes a focus on research that serves rural industries, and whose mission is to conduct strategic and applied research more broadly, we have an active interest in the outcomes of this Inquiry and its impact on the industry sectors supported through the RDCs. We note the acknowledgment in the Terms of Reference to the Inquiry, that RDCs are funded by a co-investment model based on industry levies and matching Australian Government funding. We also note the acknowledgment in the draft report that “..this model helps to ensure that public money is not spent on research of little practical value...”.

The draft Report recommends establishment and significant funding for a new non-industry Research & Development Corporation to be called Rural Research Australia (RRA) which “...will sponsor broader rural research that is likely to be under-represented by industry-specific RDCs”. CSU believes that there is a clear need to support public good research to address the substantial health, safety, and social concerns currently faced by rural industries and communities. This includes the long-term issues of climate change and food security as well as land and water matters. Examples of programs that would fit the proposed remit of the new RDC include the ‘Dynamic Rural Communities’ program, the ‘Collaborative Partnership for Farming and Fishing Health and Safety’, and the ‘Global Challenges’ program. The research capacity and impact of work in these areas would be enhanced through an integrated trans-disciplinary approach.

We are seriously concerned, however, at the proposal to diminish funding to industry-specific RDCs to enable this initiative, and about the consequent impact it will have on the highly problem focussed programs that are currently in operation. Current industry levies are used by the existing RDCs to solicit research whose direction and outcomes are closely aligned with the needs of contributing members in that industry. The collaboration between industry and the university sector in this domain provides excellent examples of what is possible in the Innovation Economy. If the level and quality of industry-based research is to be maintained so that Australian rural industries retain their internationally competitive position and capacity for ingoing innovation, RDCs need ongoing security of funding and the associated targeting of the research programs by industry so that the specific research needs of industry are not compromised.

Professor Sue Thomas  
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