

Coal River Products Association
50th Anniversary Dinner Address by Mr Richard Warner
Richmond, Saturday 23 September 2017

Good evening everyone and thank you for inviting Kate and I to this dinner to celebrate a wonderful achievement by the Association on reaching 50 years of positive service and support for the farming community of Tasmania, particularly here in the south east.

May I acknowledge among you here tonight:

- Her Excellency, the Honourable Professor Kate Warner, Governor of Tasmania,
- The Honourable Rebecca White, Leader of the Opposition,
- Mr Bill Casimaty, founder CRPA,
- The Honourable Robin Gray, former Premier of Tasmania,
- Mr Chris Gunn, President CRPA
- Mr Wayne Johnston, President TFGA
- Mr Doug Chipman, Mayor of Clarence,
- Mr Tony Bisdee, Mayor of Southern Midlands

As you all know Stage 1 of the South East Irrigation Scheme was completed in 1986 following effective campaigning from the Coal River Products Association to the Government of the day led by Robin Gray, who, I'm sure most may not know, is a graduate of Dookie College and has a degree in Ag Science from Melbourne University. It is worth noting that the Gray Government at the time endured significant criticism for proceeding with the project.

The South East Irrigation scheme, together with the Cressy Longford Scheme which commenced in 1977, provided the catalyst for the development of new irrigation schemes in the State which now total 19 either fully operational or under development. Of course, reliable irrigation water has provided the stimulant for the introduction and continuing development of many new and important agricultural enterprises not just here in the Coal River Valley but throughout the State.

Water has provided the foundation for increased opportunity and prosperity in agriculture in Tasmania. An essential element to being able to fully realise the potential the water offers is the need for more highly trained men and women to work in and manage, what is sure to be rapidly changing, increasingly sophisticated and technologically advanced agricultural sector.

Since Kate became Governor in 2014, I have involved myself in working with the University of Tasmania and the State Government in trying to increase participation in agricultural education. That year, 2014, there were only 9 enrolments in Ag Science at UTAS with enrolments increasing to 43 in 2015 and 38 in 2016. Of the 43 and 38, only 1 enrolment from the NW coast and 2 from the north, so a total of 3 north of Tunbridge. Not nearly good enough.

Active ground work to increase numbers engaged in agricultural education had been commenced by a group comprising Alan Barr of Roberts, Greg Bott of Rabobank, Chris Thompson of Macquarie Franklin, Ian Scutt of Serve-Ag and your own Anthony Houston. I joined the group which formed the basis of a representative industry lobbying body. We held two meetings at Government House of around 60 industry people, the first in July 2015 where the University heard from industry what was needed in the education offering and the second, one year later, where the University outlined their revised course offering.

To summarise the School of Land & Food changed course offerings, which commenced this year:

- four year Bachelor of Agricultural Science, top of the range degree remains unchanged,
- three year Bachelor of Applied Science (Agriculture and Business) now includes a strong business component,
- two year Associate Degree in Agribusiness commenced. I will come back to this and explain in a bit more detail.
- one year course called Masterclass in Horticultural Business.

The Associate Degree, a stand-alone qualification, I think is going to be extremely valuable in attracting more students to agriculture in future. The courses are shorter, more affordable, more flexible and I hope more closely linked to industry needs. The course is delivered through on-line learning, face to face, full time or part time, available to mature students as well as school leavers and those in between and critically important, the courses are available from all campuses, that is Burnie, Launceston and Hobart. This means the barrier of meeting accommodation costs and disruption of moving to Hobart,

is overcome. Students can continue to live in familiar surroundings while studying in the north and north west of the State.

The associate degree being a more accessible course can act as a stepping stone for those wishing to take education further and international experience suggests 40% of students will want to take their education further.

Blundstone generously provided scholarships for up to 30 students commencing the Associate degree program.

UTAS has also added the Masterclass in Horticultural Business, a national one year course for upcoming leaders in horticulture. This course is managed and delivered nationally by the School of Land and Food at UTAS with the course developed in association with Lincoln University in New Zealand and Wageningen University in Holland together with the support of Horticultural Innovations Australia.

Intake of students was limited to just over 30 in the first year and the course was fully subscribed.

Total enrolments in UTAS courses this year exceeded 100.

The University and its committed staff are to be congratulated for the turnaround.

In 2015, the Hodgman Government initiated a policy called “Creating Prosperity in Agriculture” with an objective to increase the total annual farm gate value of agricultural production from \$1.4 billion currently to \$10 billion in 2050.

Cultivating Prosperity in Agriculture policy includes a section called the Agricultural Skills Plan. Part of this plan has been the establishment of what is called the Agriskills Reference Panel. The Panel is made up of 12 industry bodies representing both agriculture and aquaculture.

As the independent chair of the Panel, it has been my privilege to assist bring together a series of recommendations to Government aimed at setting the future education and training priorities to ensure there is a job ready work force to meet the future demands of industry.

The Panel's recommendations, include support for the Government's Agricultural Education Framework, known as *Grow, Make, Protect*, whereby agriculture education is to be introduced into primary and secondary schools. Already two new courses have been trialled in years 11 and 12 in some schools.

The Panel has also recommended better access to and delivery of Vocational Education and Training sector courses and, critically, the Panel has recommended improved links and cooperation between all three education sectors including the University.

Another exciting initiative of the Panel's work has been the development of the Future Industry's Leaders Program which was run this year. Managed by consultants Macquarie Franklin and Shaping Change, 15 students aged from 25 to 50 something and from a wide diversity of backgrounds, completed the course. Just a few weeks ago, the Governor and Minister Rockliff presented the first graduation certificates and we are working now on being able to continue the program in 2018 and beyond.

It is a good time to be in agriculture with profitability up in a lot of sectors and recent national studies showing there are now 5 positions for every graduate. As Saul Eslake said recently on the economic importance of agriculture, and I quote:

“It's [agriculture] almost three times as important to us as it is to the rest of the country and agriculture is some thing we are good at'. Also quoting Mr Eslake 'In Tasmania our agricultural industry is efficient, it's smart and increasingly over the last 15 years, it has moved towards the production of differentiated products which command high prices.”

For the future, whether it's the family farm or corporate vertically integrated businesses, Tasmanian agriculture will need:

- to adopt and implement new technologies both on and off farm;
- to continue to innovate and develop new products,
- to find new markets for higher value differentiated products;
- to find viable ways to get to those markets;

- to meet growing public demand for environmental protection, animal welfare and safe high nutritional foods;
- to address the continuing decline in public understanding of agriculture and aquaculture;
- to analyse and manage financial, climate and other risks;
- and finally to offset the continuing rise in cost of production and ensure a profit is made.

To meet and fulfil all this and more, new skills and more highly trained people will be needed. Gaining supervised agricultural experience, although vital, will not be enough. We need to value formal agricultural education more highly than we have in the past. The Productivity Commission in its 2005 report indicates that one of the key drivers to productivity growth in agriculture will be the availability of appropriate tertiary education.

The last two years have been a good start but the momentum must continue.

Congratulations to all those involved in the start-up of your Association 50 years ago and to all those who have kept it proactive and relevant since. Keeping voluntary associations going is extremely difficult and you in the Coal River Valley have been very successful at it and present a model to others. Keep going as there will be issues ahead including maintaining political clout and promoting the value of increased agricultural education.

Finally, I would like to thank Clive Ockenden and Rob Salmon for making this building available for tonight's dinner. I will tell you of my involvement with Bejo which goes back to 1986. Kate and I went to England where Kate went to Cambridge to work and I visited vegetable seed companies with the aim of starting a seed multiplication business. I did manage to secure a few contracts with the main customer being Bejo seeds based in Holland. Some time later a telex arrived from Mr Piet Beemsterboer, the then Chairman of Bejo Seeds. The telex read something like, "Pick me up at the Devonport airport at 10 on Friday." This I did and we drove around Tasmania. Mr Beemsterboer told me he had worked in Tasmania for Edgells and had stored the idea that Tasmania would be an ideal place to grow vegetable seed.

The rest is history and I congratulate Clive Ockenden and all the team at Bejo for the outstanding success they have had in building what is now a significant business in Tasmanian agriculture.

Thank you.