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Tassie Principal steps up to National Education Agenda

Abbotsfield Primary School Principal has put aside his dream job to lead new push to encourage learning about primary industries in schools. Ben Stockwin has been appointed Interim Chief Executive to help establish the Primary Industries Education Foundation and it's first task is to represent primary industries to the new national curriculum which is currently out for public comment.

After 15 years of teaching and as a principal, working closely with schools and local communities, Mr Stockwin is taking his collaborative leadership approach to a national agenda. Mr Stockwin says, "It is a huge opportunity to leverage the combined effort by government, education and industry to produce education resources that meet the new national curriculum.

"The aim is to lift the awareness and understanding of the role of primary industry sector in our community, our economy and our long-term sustainability. It provides essential food, fibre and shelter to more than 90 million consumers in Australia and overseas"ⁱ.

Chair of the new Foundation, Dr Cameron Archer is delighted to have the Tasmanian on board. Dr Archer said, "The Foundation and its stakeholders have worked hard on the strategy and is looking to quickly establish a collaborative approach to education and training across agriculture, forestry and fisheries.

"Many industry bodies and organisations have long felt a need for a national organisation to encourage a more structured and systematic approach to learning about primary industries in the school system. Ben's work with the Australian Council of Education Leaders, his knowledge and understanding of the education sector and his qualifications in school leadership will be a significant boost to addressing this need.

Speaking at a Sustaining Rural Communities conference in Narrabri this week, Mr Stockwin noted the willingness for greater leverage and collaboration. "There are more than 200 individual education projects targeting schools on agriculture and related industries. Many of these projects are effective in their area but teachers are time poor and need a one-stop, accredited destination for resources", he said.

The Primary Industries Education Foundation (PIEF) is a not-for-profit company with equal governance from the Australian Government, industry organisations and the education sector. Through its unique structure and a skills based board it will be an 'honest broker' to provide credible and informative resources for schools.

Organisations which established PIEF include the Australian Government (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry), with National Farmers' Federation, Meat & Livestock Australia, National Association of Agricultural Educators, Australian Council of Deans of Agriculture and the CB Alexander Foundation.

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ⁱ, NNF National Conference (2009), M Keogh, Australian Farm Institute