



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

# Official Committee Hansard

## SENATE

EMPLOYMENT, WORKPLACE RELATIONS AND EDUCATION  
LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

**Reference: Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-  
front Student Union Fees) Bill 2005**

TUESDAY, 5 JULY 2005

ARMIDALE

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE



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**SENATE**  
**EMPLOYMENT, WORKPLACE RELATIONS, AND**  
**EDUCATION LEGISLATION COMMITTEE**

**Tuesday, 5 July 2005**

**Members:** Senator Barnett (*Chair*), Senator Marshall (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Johnston, Stott Despoja, Tierney and Wong

**Substitute members:** (As per most recent Senate Notice Paper)

**Participating members:** Senators Abetz, Bartlett, Boswell, Brown, Buckland, George Campbell, Carr, Chapman, Cherry, Colbeck, Collins, Coonan, Crossin, Eggleston, Chris Evans, Faulkner, Ferguson, Fifield, Forshaw, Harradine, Hogg, Humphries, Hutchins, Knowles, Lightfoot, Ludwig, Lundy, Mackay, Mason, McGauran, Nettle, O'Brien, Payne, Robert Ray, Santoro, Sherry, Stephens, Watson and Webber

**Senators in attendance:** (Insert, in alphabetical order, the names of senators provided by committee secretary)

**Terms of reference for the inquiry:**

Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Student Union Fees) Bill 2005

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**Committee met at 9.04 am**

**CHAIR**—Welcome to this public hearing of the inquiry into legislation to end compulsory payment of student union fees. On 11 May 2005, the Senate referred to this committee an inquiry into legislation introduced in the House of Representatives to end compulsory payment of student union fees. The committee is due to report on 9 August. The committee will consider in particular the effect of the legislation on the provision of student services and related consequences and the experience of universities and students where legislation has been adopted to regulate student unions, such as in Victoria and Western Australia.

The legislation introduced this year is the third attempt by the government in the space of six years to have its policy of freedom of association recognised in universities. The arguments of the government in support of this measure and the legislative provisions remain substantially the same. It has always been the government's view that compulsory payment of fees for non-academic services cannot be justified, especially given that the changing role and culture of universities today is a reflection of social and economic change.

The committee is aware that this is controversial legislation. It is also aware that university administrations as well as representatives of student organisations have raised practical difficulties which may arise in the event that the legislation is passed. We will be listening carefully to those and other views expressed here today.

[9.06 am]

**MOSES, Professor Ingrid, Vice-Chancellor, University of New England**

**CHAIR**—Witnesses appearing before the committee are protected by parliamentary privilege. This gives them special rights and immunities, because people must be able to give evidence to committees without prejudice to themselves. Any act which disadvantages a witness as a result of evidence given before the Senate or any of its committees is treated as a breach of privilege. I welcome our first witness, Vice-Chancellor Professor Ingrid Moses. Firstly, I thank you on behalf of the committee for having us at UNE. This is the one university which everyone on the committee agreed we should visit. Thank you for your submission. I now invite you to make an opening statement before we begin asking questions.

**Prof. Moses**—Welcome to the University of New England. We are very pleased that you have come here. We are always pleased when members of parliament, the Senate or anywhere else travel to Armidale and realise how isolated we actually are. The nearest university is four and half hours away by car, without any flight connection. That is Newcastle. The other one is the University of Southern Queensland, which is also four and half hours to five hours away by car, with no train or flight connection. Brisbane and Sydney are further, so we are very isolated. It also means that, when our students come here, they have Armidale as a community with nowhere else to go.

UNE is a very special university in that it is an old university which amalgamated in the late eighties with the Armidale College of Advanced Education. Thus, it has a traditional core and professional courses taken over from the ACAE. Both of these institutions engender very great loyalties in their graduates. It is our alumni, our university community and most of the students—not all, I have to say, as I know from the submissions—who are worried that the Armidale experience, which our past and present students have enjoyed, would be diluted by the introduction of the VSU.

We do believe in choice. Our students have an enormous number of choices. First of all, they choose which university they go to, if they qualify, and which course they take. Within each course, there are an enormous number of choices. The university, however, is a community. Like all communities, whether it is the Australian community, the Armidale Dumaresq Council area or the state of New South Wales, members of a community pay for services whether they use them or not. The general student service fee that we charge our students is used to provide infrastructure and services for all students to use, but it is up to the students to make use of them. They do not fund political activities per se, even though UNESA, which is the undergraduate student association, traditionally has political clubs and is often dominated by political groups. When it comes to student elections, one or the other group will win.

While I want to make a case for treating regional and rural universities differently under the proposed legislation, I do want to put on record that I believe that student associations provide a training ground in democracy and for student leaders. When you look around the Australian parliaments, both federal and state, you will see that many of the members of parliament have been student leaders—on all sides. It is not confined to one political party. It

is a tradition within Australia. At the moment there are things happening in our student organisations where you can see democracy in action, and it is only a matter of time until there will be new councils within the student organisations which will represent different groups of students. But we do believe that it is important for students to be able to take responsibility, exercise responsible leadership and also suffer the consequences when they abuse those privileges.

When Dr Nelson came to UNE very early in his tenure, I arranged meetings with him, including meetings with students. He asked those students, ‘Do you mind having to pay the general services fee?’ and they said ‘No, because we are getting value for money.’ Half of our internal students live on campus and 75 per cent of our first-year students live on campus, and they use the facilities and they do not mind paying for them. Dr Nelson also has said publicly quite a few times that he realised that regional universities were in a different situation from metropolitan ones. He talked about getting a sausage roll, I think, rather than a hamburger from across the road. There is no ‘across the road’ here, which you can see when you drive in here. To say that all the students can go downtown is really quite unrealistic, as the UNESA submission claims.

The bus service is actually every half-hour—our submission was wrong about that: it is every half-hour, not every hour—but not all of the students have cars, so you do need outlets on campus. The submission which we made did not focus just on UNE; it focused on regional universities and it was written in consultation with Southern Cross University and Charles Sturt University—the other two regional universities in New South Wales. We believe that medical and dental services, child care, sports facilities and also security buses would be in jeopardy.

I think it is noteworthy that the Armidale community is very concerned about what might happen to the university if VSU were introduced. When we sell Armidale to international students—and we are in a town of 22,000 people where you have to attract students from further away to come to university here—we sell uni as a package, and the package includes the facilities and services which we provide. We already have very great difficulty attracting international students because we are inland and in a small town. Not many international students choose to come to such a place; most want to be near a beach and in a big city, and they want to have employment.

Armidale already has a problem with providing employment to domestic students, even more so to international students. The student associations themselves are employers of permanent staff, of casual staff and of part-time staff, and they make a significant contribution to employment in the town and to the local economy. Clearly the town is not only worried about the facilities and their use of our facilities but concerned about what it means for the employment situation. Would you like me to stop there? I could talk about the cost shifting. I was asked to address that.

**CHAIR**—We would like to have on record whatever you would like to say, Professor, so feel free to go on.

**Prof. Moses**—The university funds a child-care centre and a medical centre. These are not funded from the GSF, from the student general services fee, but by the university. In 2004 we

subsidised the child-care centre with \$118,000 and the medical centre with \$94,000. If VSU were introduced, as it stands now we would have to look at all of our student services and say, ‘What can we afford in the future?’ For instance, Sport UNE would need about \$469,000 per annum from UNE. They have done a calculation: they could meet half of the budget or they could cut items, but they would still need a subsidy of nearly half a million dollars. The UNE Union has spent \$1.75 million over the past five years upgrading facilities. If there were no student fees income, the university would have to take that over, which means that we would look at all of what we provide to students in order to take on these maintenance and upgrading responsibilities. So while I think we are quite exemplary in providing student services both from university funds and from student funds, if we could no longer levy services or amenities fees, we would have to look at all of what we provide and say, ‘What is essential and what can we do without?’ Our worry is that it would diminish the student experience.

In 2004 we collected \$2.983 million from the GSF. Of that—and these figures are round up or down—the UNE Union got the largest proportion, which was \$1.146 million; Sport UNE got \$933,500; UNESA, the undergraduate student association, got \$530,000 and they also raised a dental levy of \$167,000; and UNEPA, the postgraduate student association, had about \$133,000. UNE reserved about \$30,000 for administrative costs.

I think the AVCC has asked all of the universities in Australia—and 32 responded—to show how the money was spent. I would like to reiterate that a very small proportion is spent on what you might call political activities or clubs and societies. The rest is spent on facilities and on student welfare, and it is those facilities and student welfare institutions that we would like to preserve.

**CHAIR**—Could you explain the relationship between the payment of the service fee and membership of the student union? Does the service fee payment give the student membership of the student union, or is that a separate body?

**Prof. Moses**—It is not a separate body. The university collects the fee and distributes it to the student organisations. We went to the Australian Taxation Office—it was about the GST really—to see whether we could be tax exempt, and it is not an automatic membership fee. The students get it, so to speak, in addition. Staff can also buy an associate membership in the union and in Sport UNE. It is regarded legally as a separate membership.

**CHAIR**—So does payment of the amenities fee give the student membership of the union, or do they pay a separate fee to become a union member?

**Prof. Moses**—No, they do not pay a separate fee.

**CHAIR**—A large proportion of your students are distance students. Could you give us the percentage of your students who are distance students?

**Prof. Moses**—In terms of bodies, it is about 75 per cent.

**CHAIR**—Do they pay the amenities fee?

**Prof. Moses**—They do pay it, but they pay it at a reduced cost. It is quite ironic that it has been us in the university management who have been saying to the student associations year after year, ‘What services are you giving to external students?’ because they only come occasionally onto campus. We have kept the external fee constant for quite a number of years.

This year it is \$185 per semester for on-campus students and \$80 per semester for off-campus students.

**CHAIR**—Would there be some distance students who never visit the university?

**Prof. Moses**—I know that UNESA claims that. I have not seen any statistics for that. There is no doubt that the UNE model of distance education has changed. UNE was renowned for its model; indeed, the Open University people came here when they were establishing the Open University to look at how UNE was organising its distance education. At that stage and for many years every student in every unit had to come to UNE for residential school. When I came here in 1997, there was still a university policy to that effect, but in effect in the faculties it had been subverted. So there were a number of units already where it was either not offered or not compulsory.

We now have many more external students than we used to have—about 14,000. A number of them live in the Northern Territory or Western Australia and they find that the expense both to get here and then to find babysitters, get leave from work or whatever is very high. We know anecdotally that some students do not choose UNE if there is a compulsory residential school, because it does not suit their circumstances. So the proportion of units with compulsory residential schools has gone down. But for a student not to have come on campus at all would be very rare, because there are still very large numbers of units with compulsory residential school and in a whole degree course, of course, you have to consider a number of units. It is very unlikely. I have not seen any statistics to bear that out.

**CHAIR**—I know this would differ from course to course, but how many times during a three- or four-year or longer course would the external students visit the campus?

**Prof. Moses**—It does depend on the course. My daughter-in-law did the Dip. Ed. here by distance education and she came every semester. Often different units are bundled together to make it worth while for the students to come.

**CHAIR**—Do you believe that if VSU was introduced and the compulsory fee was abolished there would still be the willingness to pay the fees voluntarily?

**Prof. Moses**—It is conjecture. We know of the Victorian and Western Australian examples where large numbers of students chose not to. I do not know. As I said, half of our internal students live on campus and it could well be that the fees they pay to the residences might include membership, let us say, of Sport UNE, just as a selling point. I do not know whether the students living in town would choose to do that. I would say the vast majority of external students would not. I do not get very many complaints by external students about the GSF. I do know that we have a significant number of students who struggle with paying HECS, so every other payment, particularly if it was up front, would worry them. My guess is that the vast majority of external students would opt not to do it and opt to pay for particular services when they came on campus.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—Good morning, Vice-Chancellor. Thank you for having us here. I may not be a graduate of UNE, but I am very proud of the Stott association with UNE Armidale. I have also got your child-care worries fixed if VSU is introduced—because Dr Michael Macklin is clearly an expert! I will begin by asking about a point you raised. The AVCC has indeed done a calculation that around 15 per cent of money goes towards so-called

political activity. I am interested in your philosophical view. Is it really such a bad thing that students are engaged in representation, advocacy or a range of media and other creative activities?

**Prof. Moses**—No. I said that at the beginning. I am arguing here for being allowed to charge a service fee. I actually do believe that it is a very good thing to have debate and to sponsor student associations within universities. If we cannot raise a student service fee in the future, we will have to look at how the university can facilitate student engagement. Student engagement not only with the curriculum but also with other activities is very much part of the learning experience, particularly of young people. The majority of our on-campus students are young.

Our radio station is a nucleus and training ground. With broadcasting, we offer a Bachelor of Communications. It is not really into TV or radio, but some of the students want to be journalists or want to work in radio, and the radio station has given experience to lots of students. If you have a medieval club or a chess club, I think the societies can organise themselves. I do not think they need the university subsidy, but there are other activities which you would hate to see go from campus.

How much students are willing to engage, I do not know. I will give you an example from a different area. A number of Australian universities are members of what is called the Golden Key International Honour Society. It is an American honour society. All the students with a particular grade point average are eligible. One of our students in law—a very bright young lady—asked me whether we could join this honour society as a university. Students themselves are meant to organise events and engage in service activities and so on. We joined the society and we had a big induction ceremony in Lazenby Hall with hundreds of students and their parents and big speeches. While Amanda was president it worked but, the next year, the executive did not do anything unless the university was pushing it. I was very sorry about that. We are now resurrecting it because again there is a president. I keep saying the university can send out these letters because we have access to student records and we have the addresses, but the organisation has to come from the students.

I am just worried that young students are finding it extremely hard to do things without getting help from somewhere. A lot of them are not only studying but also working. There is data on the financial situation of students which points to the fact that a large number of students work part time not only to buy luxuries or to service their cars but also in order to pay for accommodation. I really do not know how many of the societies will survive if there is no-one to help them, because at the moment there are paid employees in the student organisation to organise things.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—That was not a dorothy dixer, but I am an honorary patron of the Golden Key International Honour Society—and I do say ‘honorary’. I will ask a couple of quick questions, because I realise that we are short of time. Senator Troeth asked you about the distinction between paying the amenities fee and whether or not you automatically became a member of the union. Obviously, you explained that you do not. I just want to clarify whether there is an opt-out or an opt-in provision in your constitution—I am assuming there is—and whether students are not compelled to join a union if they choose not to.

**Prof. Moses**—They are not joining a union. They have access to the facilities. It is a bit semantic. I have trouble with it myself, I have to say. Under the ATO ruling, it was very clear that it was not a membership fee. They have access to facilities.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—Yes, and I think there is a court case that tells us ‘union’ is the wrong word anyway but, because that is the common parlance, I use it in this context.

**Prof. Moses**—It is the university which collects it and it is universities which say: ‘If you don’t want to pay this for this purpose then you can pay it into the student loan fund, or something like this.’

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—Yes, but they still pay the fee.

**Prof. Moses**—Yes.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—I asked the AVCC representatives about this yesterday but do you have a view on the penalty provisions in the legislation—something like \$100 per student place breached? This is an interesting move, I think.

**Prof. Moses**—I do not think much of it at all. I think penalties are really not worthy for a cause like that. I thought that the government had been highly successful in bringing in reforms through incentives, and I think it is through incentives that you get people to actually comply with it happily and support the spirit of legislation. I think penalties are not appropriate.

**Senator FIFIELD**—You mentioned at the outset that you thought that students did enjoy choice because they could choose the institution they attend, they could choose their degree and they could choose their courses. Then, in effect, you drew a line and said, ‘Choice ends there.’ Why don’t you think students should have the capacity to choose or the capacity to decide whether or not they belong to a student association or whether or not they pay a fee for services that they may not want to use?

**Prof. Moses**—Our whole society works on that system—that we pay as members of the community and then it is up to us to use the facilities. The Pacific Highway is going to be upgraded. I never use the Pacific Highway. It is taxpayers’ money which pays for it. Our students do not have to vote. Very few of them do in the elections. They do not have to join any of the groupings but they pay so that they can if they want to. I say that they should not have choice in having to pay a service fee. They have absolute choice in what of it they use. That is how society generally works. It is not a union like a trade union.

**Senator FIFIELD**—That is certainly how government works, and we tend to reserve for government the capacity to tax. Tell me what you think but I think it is a little more analogous to going to a church. You might go to a church, you might use those facilities and you might be part of that church community but we do not give churches the ability to compel fees from people who are part of those communities.

**Prof. Moses**—No, I do not agree with that. The students, by enrolling in a university, are already part of that organisation.

**Senator FIFIELD**—Just as you are if you join a church: you are part of that organisation, but we do not give churches the capacity to tax.

**Prof. Moses**—In some other countries they do. I come from Germany where if you are a member of a church you pay church tax. It is a democratic society. It is actually collected through the income tax system. You can opt out but unless you opt out you are automatically in. That is a bit like it. I think we just have philosophically different viewpoints on this. I really strongly believe that the fees which provide the infrastructure are affordable and are not really outrageous. I do believe that the choice is there with what the students themselves affiliate within the university.

**Senator FIFIELD**—So it is freedom of association in theory, but only so far?

**Prof. Moses**—I do not think this is really freedom of association. Freedom of association is really much more about having or not having to join a union or being forced to join something, but here you are not joining a political body.

**Senator FIFIELD**—If you are paying money you are joining something.

**Prof. Moses**—How the university actually uses the money is going to change. The student associations provide services at the moment. We have already been discussing that with all four student associations over the last few years, so it is not new. In New South Wales, the way the state government and the auditor look at associated and controlled entities and the risks they present has led to the university considering putting the student associations together in a company and then having service-level agreements. That means that the university would decide who provides a service and how much the university would hand over for it.

At the moment there is an agreement on how the money gets allocated to the different student associations, and the audit and compliance committee of our council looks at that. The student associations are accountable. It is not as if a particular proportion of the GSF automatically goes to each of the associations. They actually have to make a case. So in that way it is not like a membership; it is about services which are being provided. The university looks at it, says ‘okay’ and discusses it. We have had student representatives coming to the audit and compliance committee of council.

**Senator FIFIELD**—I guess my point is that you are being forced to financially associate in a way that you might not choose to. We will leave it there. You mentioned that UNE, as a regional campus, is isolated. Obviously you have a higher proportion of students living on campus than at other universities. Take a campus like Monash University Clayton, which is perhaps the most isolated campus because it is so physically isolated from other services. You cannot just walk somewhere, much like at UNE. What sort of different challenge is there or would there be for UNE compared to, say, Monash University Caulfield in terms of isolation? Here you are a car ride from one of Australia’s great inland cities.

**Prof. Moses**—I have been to that campus and there is public transport to go there. It is pretty far, but it is still outer Melbourne and it is still commuting distance for students.

**Senator FIFIELD**—Sure.

**Prof. Moses**—Apart from the philosophical questions, for us it is all a question of money. If we had money we could do anything—we could maintain these facilities, have new sporting fields and have this and that—but we do not. We are using the operating grant which

we receive very carefully, to support students and student learning. We are still a university with one of the highest reliances on Commonwealth funding, but the Commonwealth funding is only in the middle forties; the rest comes from elsewhere. We have very few discretionary funds and our worry is that, in order to be able to continue to provide students with a satisfactory and, indeed, an attractive on-campus experience, we will be disadvantaged.

The UNESA submission talked about our courtyard. You might look at it at lunchtime. When I came here eight years ago, the university had \$23 million in deferred maintenance funding for the residences. We had a loan from Tcorp—that is, the New South Wales government—which had been taken out to finance other buildings. In those eight years we have not built one new building. We have addressed only the maintenance issue and paying off the loan, which we are doing. We will be finished with that next year. In order to make this campus attractive and in order to also attract international students, you have to have an attractive campus. The first time we actually put money into the infrastructure was for the courtyard.

**Senator FIFIELD**—I guess I was just trying to flesh it out. Something we hear a bit is: ‘Ours is a regional campus and will face a special challenge as a result of this legislation.’ It is an easy thing to say—that all regional campuses are different—but I was just looking for specific instances of where, why and how a regional campus would face a particular challenge as a result of this legislation.

**Prof. Moses**—One example is that it is very much a community facility.

**Senator FIFIELD**—Metropolitan campuses say exactly the same thing.

**Prof. Moses**—Yes, but they can make the case for themselves.

**Senator FIFIELD**—Yes.

**Prof. Moses**—I do not know what is happening out at Monash, but here there is no doubt that it is a community facility and, as I said, our organisations provide employment. Our experience is that commercial operations are not viable on campus because of the shifting campus population. Two banks have closed down. The post office was only about to survive as an agency because it was in the union shop. We have had other businesses close down. It is just not viable. It is the isolation from town which makes it difficult, but even if we were in the middle of the town it would still mean that the community would use, and rely on the UNE providing, facilities.

**Senator FIFIELD**—Thank you.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—It seems that, in terms of this issue, the underlying purpose behind the shift to voluntary student fees is a perception that somehow or other that will curtail the political activity of students. Is it your view that it will do that or is it more likely to actually restrict the number of students who will be involved in political activity and narrow the democratic base, rather than broaden it, within university life? Those student activists who are politically active are going to continue to be politically active whether or not they are funded by the university.

**Prof. Moses**—A lot of the political activity, of course, comes via clubs, which can survive anyway, I think. They probably do not need that subsidy. It comes back to the fact that the

only experiences we have are in Western Australia and Victoria. We do not really know what is going to happen here. Students are entitled, as is anyone else, to form political and other associations, and we would not stop them. I would be sorry to see students having a completely utilitarian approach to university education and just saying, ‘I want to get my piece of paper’ and not getting anything out of the on-campus experience. Otherwise, you would ask, ‘Why doesn’t everyone study externally?’ To be on campus means that people meet, talk and possibly take action together. What impact it will have here I really cannot predict. I think that because there is already such an enormous social and sporting use of the facilities here, and cultural activities in our residences, we do not actually know what will happen on campus.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—Is the danger, if this legislation is enacted, really of us throwing the baby out with the bathwater: cutting off access to a whole range of legitimate services at university—mental facilities, health facilities, sporting facilities and whatever, which are provided for through the GSF—in order to curtail a very small range of activities that students get involved in? As you said, the essential services required to maintain university community life would suffer as a consequence. We had it proved to us yesterday by one witness that the provision of services and political activity were getting confused to the extent that we were not seeing the wood for the trees, so to speak.

**Prof. Moses**—Yes, there clearly is an ideological or value based position here. I would have thought it was unnecessary for the government to interfere at this level. My own field of research is higher education and there was a time, when I went to international conferences, when Australia was at the forefront of reforms in higher education. Interference at this level, like the proposed legislation, is really not necessary. I really think it is interfering at a micro level in how universities deal—it is not even using government money. If we were misusing government money, it would be one thing, but we are not; we are levying a service fee on students. Why universities should not have the right is really beyond me. I do not think it is necessary. I would have thought that the government’s role was to set the broad framework in which universities worked and were accountable, and it has instituted reforms which do that, but this is coming down at a micro level, which is inappropriate. While I can see that in some form it will go through, we are arguing that at least we should be able to charge an amenities and service fee which has no political connotation at all.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—It was argued at our hearing in Melbourne yesterday, I think by a student from Melbourne university, that this fee is simply a cost of going to university in the same way that paying HECS fees and other fees were a cost of going to university—paying for your textbooks—and it should be seen in that context, not as something separate, special or different. I suppose the other side of it is the freedom of association argument. You really exercise a freedom of association when you make the choice of which university you want to go to rather than, at the end of the day, what the costs are of going to that university. It is the same when you join a political organisation, you join a trade union or you join a church. Once you exercise that right to freedom of association with that body, you then abide by the rules that body has if you want to maintain that association. The use of the freedom of association argument in these circumstances seems to me to be a bit

spurious, to say the least, but the argument of this being seen as part of the overall costs of going to university is a valid one.

The other issue I wanted to raise with you is that it seems to me to be significant that, in all of the political comment that has been made about this particular legislation, the vast majority of members of the National Party have been expressing real concerns about this legislation because of the impact not only on regional universities, but also on regional communities. Have you talked to the local council here about the potential impact that this change, this legislation, will have on the community in Armidale as well as the university? I heard you talking about pumping something like \$4 million a year into the local economy, as well as providing services and infrastructure to the local community.

**Prof. Moses**—The submission which came from Sport UNE had letters from the community on this. I am on what is called the Regional Women's Advisory Council, which is an advisory council to the former Deputy Prime Minister in his role as minister for regional services. It had not been very high on his agenda—we are talking about a little while ago—but he did see that we are different in the country; he did think it would have a bad impact. I think The Nationals would be concerned that services are going to again be cut down in the country. It comes back to that. Already on campus, we have had to cut services down because the commercial organisations like banks would not be here. In smaller communities, universities provide very important infrastructure.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—If, for example, at this university the impact of this legislation saw half of the students in the union and half of them out—I think in Western Australia it was about 30 per cent that initially stayed in—how practical would it be for the university to try to continue to run services for half of the student community and perhaps charge the other half fee-for-service for those services they use? Is that a practical solution to this set of circumstances or not?

**Prof. Moses**—It would provide us with great financial difficulties to have to maintain the facilities and provide the services at the same level. I do not doubt that there are some things which could be cut. But we are really talking about peanuts—within the whole \$3 million budget we are talking perhaps about \$50,000 or \$80,000 which we could say was not necessary. But if the university would have to pick it up or would have to treat different students differently, again, that is an administrative cost.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much.

[9.52 am]

**ABELL, Ms Romane Victoria, Senior Vice-President, Management Committee, Sport UNE**

**DAVIES, Ms Diane Jane, Research and Liaison Officer, University of New England Postgraduate Students Association**

**MCCORMACK, Ms Cathryn Louise, Vice-President, University of New England Postgraduate Students Association**

**PAINI, Mrs Susanne Annette, Chief Executive Officer, University of New England Union; and Secretary, Combined Student Organisation**

**CHAIR**—I welcome witnesses representing the UNE Union and the UNE Postgraduate Students Association. Thank you for your submissions. You may indicate if you wish any of your evidence today to be given confidentially. I invite you to make a brief opening statement.

**Ms McCormack**—The University of New England Postgraduate Students Association represents, obviously, postgraduate students—those who are either studying by higher degree research or by higher degree course work. In terms of the student population this is quite a small number, and our student association budget for 2005 runs to the grand total of \$130,000. From this money we run a postgraduate centre and hire two full-time staff. Our staff are primarily involved in providing advocacy services for our students and in running the centre. The students themselves participate in many of the university committees in providing input to policy development and feedback on things that are happening around the university.

Our most important service is advocacy. I say that because, in terms of higher degree research in particular, there is a very close relationship between the supervisor and the student. To be able to provide an independent third party to assist with any negotiations if there is difficulty or conflict is an amazing support service for the student.

**Ms Davies**—As Cathryn said, we operate on a very small budget. We were founded, only about 24 years ago, by postgraduate students because they perceived that they needed this sort of foundation at the university. A lot of our students have problems from time to time with their supervisory arrangements. They have very close personal relationships with supervisors. Sometimes the problems arise by default on either side or through occasional conflict. Often students come to us for advice on how they might handle a situation and avoid any conflict.

If VSU were to come into this and our members had to decide whether to pay a fee upon their enrolment as an insurance policy against having a problem later on—and when people start out they always come with a very optimistic view of how they are going to proceed—I really do not think they would be prepared to put their money where their mouth is. We have been hearing about the opportunities for students to have choice. There would be no choice for them later on because if a student organisation cannot employ people and have a funding base which allows them to do that then at a time when the student might need the services—very specialised and confidential services, controlled by students rather than by the university, which gives them that sort of space—the student will have no choice. There will be no-one to advocate for them, and the possibility of their completing their studies—for our people, their

thesis or dissertation, or perhaps getting a postgraduate award which is going to get them a job—is diminished. That will not exist for them. Obviously there are so many other implications around that, but that is the bottom line. If you want to supply people with the choice to have services then you have to be able to provide a financial foundation for supplying those services, and I cannot see that happening under VSU. That is all I have to say at the moment.

**CHAIR**—Thank you.

**Ms Abell**—Good morning. I am the senior vice-president for Sport UNE. In addition, I am a postgrad student here and my day job is managing one of the student residences here on campus—we have 300 students and approximately 55 per cent of those are international students. We have heard a lot about choice this morning. To carry on from what Jane just said, it costs us \$2 million to run Sport UNE, \$955,000 of which comes from the up-front service fee. You cannot decide to just go down and have a hit of tennis or pop along to the gym at 5.30 in the morning if that infrastructure does not continue. We use the money to help us provide a quality service. There is an additional choice involved: the students, while paying that up-front fee that goes to the infrastructure, also pay a minimal fee to attend classes, go to the gym and be involved in certain sporting activities. We also provide a service for town; the town utilises this facility considerably and that is how we get the rest of our money.

I think it is really important to understand that, from the students' perspective, they are not here just for academia. It is important that they have a balanced and holistic life while here on campus. The services that we would lose without this funding would mean a reduction in the opportunities for students to mix and mingle—for socialising—through the activities that are held on the top of campus. By taking part in the cultural activities, overseas students can be better integrated into the Australian culture, and different cultures get to meet. Another activity that would be lost is the intercollegiate sporting opportunities. At the moment we have eight residences here on campus, with just over 2,000 students. They have a series of male and female sports, and mixed gender sports where they play off against each other. We compete at the university level and we provide scholarships.

In summary, we did a survey where we wrote to our 3,500 internal students both here on campus and in town. With a response rate of 22 per cent, only 2.5 per cent said that they supported this legislation.

**Senator FIFIELD**—Is that 2.5 per cent?

**Ms Abell**—Yes, 2.5 in support.

**CHAIR**—Of the 22 per cent who replied?

**Ms Abell**—Correct.

**Mrs Paini**—I am here representing both the UNE Union as its CEO and also, as the Secretary of the Combined Student Organisation, the professional officers component of that organisation which represents all four student organisations on campus. I would like to talk a little bit about what I see as the unintended consequences of the voluntary student unionism legislation. While I have a personal view in support of unionism of any organisation being voluntary—and in fact participation in any organisation being voluntary—where I have a

problem with this legislation is that it does not provide any alternative funding stream for the services that are actually provided through those organisations. And we obviously are one of those organisations.

What I believe is that without a guaranteed income stream of some description—and if the legislation does not provide it then we will certainly need to look to the university to provide it and divert funds from academic pursuits—then what will be lost is a very wide range of non-commercial services that are provided by the student organisations, including advocacy. I do not believe advocacy is a political issue. As Cathryn pointed out, advocacy is in fact a very important issue about independent student representation to the university. We will also lose a range of welfare and safety services, cultural activities and—in particular from the union's perspective—the ability to fund or provide low-cost entertainment, which helps attract and retain students in competition with metropolitan universities where students have a wide range of entertainment options.

We will lose a range of health services provided at the moment and the radio station, which is in its 35th year of service and I think is the oldest radio station on a campus in Australia. As well we will potentially lose, or be at serious risk of losing, a range of commercial services on campus. As the vice-chancellor pointed out, we have already lost commercial services by external operators on campus. The union took over the post office to retain that service. We have also taken over the hairdresser from two previous small business operators who were unable to continue or make it viable.

We provide a range of food services: we have five food outlets on campus. In a voluntary student unionism scenario when we simply convert that into a purely commercial operation I do not believe we will be able to support that number of food outlets on campus. We will be lucky if we can maintain one or two, depending on the volume of business that moves from one to the other when we close. Even our retail service, which is a very robust and highly financial business, will lose some of the range of services it provides. The simple fact that we do not have a guaranteed income stream for capital to provide inventory will mean that those lines that are not profitable at the moment will diminish. We will simply not be able to maintain the sort of \$100,000 worth of inventory to support something that might sell only once a year, so those services will diminish.

We will also lose the ability—through once again not having a guaranteed income stream—of being able to fund capital improvements and developments on campus. We are always looking at, 'How can we improve our service? What are students looking for now? How do we stay relevant?' But there is a significant risk associated with developing those types of options, so without that income stream we will lose those options.

In addition, this legislation will have a very significant human impact in terms of the loss of job opportunities for both students and permanent staff. UNESA believes that it will lose initially nine out of its current 11 staff, with a further one staff member going within 12 months. UNEPA will lose its two staff members. Sport UNE will lose six permanent staff—roughly half of its permanent staff—and about 80 per cent of the casuals it employs. At UNE Union we currently employ 40 permanent staff and around 110 casuals, with those casuals primarily being made up of students. We expect to see retention of a significant number of the

permanent staff that we employ, simply because we need to retain core capability, but a large number of those casual jobs for students will disappear.

ACUMA, which is the national body representing campus managers on something like 90 per cent of campuses nationally—of which the UNE Union is one of those members—estimates that around 30 per cent of the jobs will go across campuses. Certainly at UNE we will see that sort of attrition in the jobs that are available. Roughly 50 full-time equivalent staff roles are what we expect to lose. It is difficult to turn that into numbers because of the number of casuals.

Those jobs put around \$1 million worth of revenue into the local and regional economy. Obviously, losing that volume of jobs will have an impact on the students at the university, because it will be mostly student jobs that disappear. At the moment UNESA runs a student employment service, which essentially excludes the union jobs. So for people looking for non-union jobs on campus—last year they registered 400 students looking for work and were able to find work for 100 of those students, so 300 students already do not find jobs when they look for them—this legislation will significantly increase the number of students unable to find work.

The \$1 million that gets pumped into the local economy obviously will have a flow-on effect into other areas. Students will not be able to afford to rent accommodation. Some students will choose not to come to university at all because they cannot afford to, and other students will choose to go to a metropolitan university where there are better job opportunities available. All of these, I believe, are unintended consequences, but very real consequences, of the legislation as it stands today. I am happy to answer questions.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much. I would just like to ask the University of New England Postgraduate Association: what is the budget of your association?

**Ms McCormack**—This year we had \$130,000.

**CHAIR**—Is that totally from the general service fee?

**Ms McCormack**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—So there is no other form of income.

**Ms McCormack**—I think we managed to get \$20 by selling T-shirts. No, we had no other form of income and no potential form of income stream either.

**CHAIR**—Do the town people pay the same sorts of rates for using the sports facilities as students?

**Ms Abell**—No, they pay significantly higher rates.

**CHAIR**—Is that at a general level of commercial usage rates, similar to others?

**Ms Abell**—Yes, because there is another gym in town. We need to be competitive with them and match them.

**CHAIR**—I note the figures that you provided us with from the poll. Given that 22 per cent of the population replied, wouldn't this indicate to you a general level of disinterest in this issue?

**Ms Abell**—Yes. A lot of students actually do not know what all the fuss is over. They do not know about the legislation and they are not even aware of this concern about freedom of association and unionism. I can talk first-hand from the 300 students that I manage. Sport UNE embarked on a significant information program where we went and spoke at every college at dinnertime. We sent out with that survey very objective details about what the legislation is, and also let them know what the \$185 that they pay each semester is for, and where it goes.

The majority of students do not know and do not care. They have their budgets and they have to look at what they need for accommodation each week, being able to attend university, textbooks and their HECS fees. I still think that, as far as statistics go, 22 per cent is very good, because 2.5 to five per cent is what you would expect if you were doing marketing programs and you wanted feedback. That is why I mentioned that 22 per cent is really good, but the majority of students do not know.

I would like to take an opportunity to say one other thing on the issue of unionism. The area around the bistro and the bar, and where the majority of the services are, is called 'the union'. I think there is a bit of confusion over terminology, and that is one of the reasons that Sport UNE changed its name in, I think, 1997 from the sports union to Sport UNE. It is misleading.

**CHAIR**—The union here has undertaken a number of commercial type operations, has it not, with a function centre and—

**Ms Abell**—Sport UNE?

**CHAIR**—Yes.

**Ms Abell**—That is us. That is the UNE union.

**CHAIR**—Okay. I will reserve my questions for them. Given the general level of disinterest among your students of the ones who replied and the ones who said they would pay, do you think that extends to the general level of students? Do you think that is indicative of how many would be interested in paying a fee if it were voluntary?

**Ms Abell**—Once they realise that when they go to the gym it will be more—I think it is currently about \$2, so if they decide they have to pay \$12—they will not go. Once students are asked whether they know what it could mean, there is an 'Oh, no, we would have to pay for that' kind of awareness.

**CHAIR**—If the legislation is passed and you need to attract more payers to keep the service going, have you thought of any incentives or other measures you might use to attract students to use the service, even if they are paying more?

**Ms Abell**—We have started to do some costings on the students as to whether, if they want to be part of, for example, the gym, they would need to be paying for a gym pass rather than a small amount, whether we could still subsidise for students and whether they would get a discount. The first main area is the range of services we offer. At the moment, the gym is open from 5.30 in the morning and it is busy from that time. That would probably contract, so it would limit when students could come and go. So we have started to do some modelling on costing. The vice-chancellor mentioned that she thinks she would be able to fund 50 per cent

of that \$950,000 that we would lose. As Sue said, over there are the proposed developments we want to do with the facility—for example, the pool becoming more an aquatic centre—but we will not be able to do those things now.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—I might start with the point about 22 per cent—and I preface my comments by saying that some of us would kill for 22 per cent. If you interpret that as a lack of interest—and I am not so sure, because I do think that is a fairly reasonable survey sample size—do you wonder why the government is introducing this legislation? I am happy for anyone to make a comment on motivation.

**Ms Abell**—Was there something to say that my answer would be confidential? I do not know whether there is a flow-on from the move with industrial relations and getting trade unions to step back, making union involvement a choice in the workplace. There is a lot of talk about unionism and the political nature, but that has been a question for me personally and for the management committee that I sit on for Sport UNE.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—So you do not see the driving force as necessarily being from universities or campuses? So you are not aware of a grand movement that has begun requesting legislation that is anti compulsion?

**Ms Abell**—No. The only awareness that started to build in respect of this legislation was when we sat down—and this is over 12 months ago—to look at its financial impact and where Sport UNE would be under this legislation. Sport UNE has been quite proactive in informing students and staff alike at this university as to what this means and what it is. So the only movement from within has been in educating students and employees.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—Can I ask postgraduate representatives this question. You are in a unique situation, from what I can see, not only as to UNE specifically but across the nation. Do you have any idea of where postgraduates and their organisations are going to get money from if this legislation is passed?

**Ms McCormack**—We could all subscribe and pay lots more. Effectively, there is no other source of income for us. We do not act on any sort of profitable basis. We do run our postgraduate centre, which has a number of computer carrels so that students can come in and have a private area in which to work. It is open 24 hours a day so that if students are here trying to finish an assignment they can come in and work in a very private environment at whatever hour is convenient to them. That is part of the service that we offer. We could start charging for that but it is highly unlikely that students would want to pay for that. They would go to the free university computer rooms, which are less comfortable and less private. There is a whole heap of computers in big rooms, rather than a room having a quite private area where you can sit and put all your books down.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—So it is mostly your advocacy and/or representative role that would be completely lost?

**Ms McCormack**—Yes.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—Do you think people have an understanding of that? Otherwise, do you think that, because people have an understanding of that, they are pursuing the legislation?

**Ms McCormack**—I believe people do not have an understanding of that. As Jane said, you tend to look into the advocacy services when you need them. People do not think, ‘I’m starting my degree. Let me just check out what sorts of advocacy services all these different universities have so I can choose one that has the best.’ It is similar with representation. Over the years there has been an amount of input that students have had into various university policies, which have improved the way things have been organised around the university for students, that staff have probably never noticed because of their viewpoint. One of the other things that postgraduate associations have been arguing heavily for across the country is minimum facilities for postgraduates. That is something that we have had established here at UNE. New students who are commencing just see those things as things that are there. They do not come thinking, ‘Okay, what sort of representation do we have around the university?’ In fact, it is probably an indicator of how good a job that students have done over the years that those things are now in train and you do not notice them.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—Thank you for that. Mrs Pains, you have talked a lot about money for cultural activities and you have given us a pretty good idea of what is commercially viable and what is not. Let us take, for example, entertainment. In the submission we have read about bands that have been provided for university students. Surely those would have been commercial successes. Surely bands and other cultural things that you provide will be fine.

**Mrs Pains**—We will certainly get a number of students that will come to those and pay the fee. What we find though is that even now students have a limited amount of money to spend on a certain night. We run the only venue in town that will seat the number that we had, for instance, in March this year when we had Spiderbait. We had 1,600 students attend that particular concert. Realistically, that sort of band would not come to Armidale without the sort of facility that we can provide and the size of crowd and dynamic that we can create around that. Students paid a price, from memory, of about \$12.50 and nonstudents paid \$25. To go to those sorts of bands in the city you might pay \$40, \$50 or \$60. If we were to run them commercially and charge those sorts of rates, the reality is we would get a much smaller number of students, because that would be more than those students currently spend on the entire night. It would be much harder to make those sorts of bands commercially viable or to guarantee them income.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—Some people might wonder if entertainment generally is part of university experience. To me it seems that now it is like a conveyor belt—get your degree and get out—and that cultural life is not really encouraged.

**Mrs Pains**—I think it is an incredibly important part, not just of the university experience but of what allows the university to compete against metropolitan universities for students. If you live in a regional area, you know about the cultural divide between the city and the regional centres. Armidale has an incredibly rich cultural life. I have lived in a number of regional centres right around Australia and in New Zealand and I am constantly amazed at the cultural activity that occurs here. At the same time, a lot of that is directed at university lecturer level rather than student level. I believe that what I call the bragging rights for students, the ability of students to go home to Sydney, Orange or wherever and say, ‘We saw

Spiderbait and it only cost us \$12.50,' is an important component of the next generation at least being attracted to looking at Armidale as a potential university.

In addition, if we do not have a guaranteed income stream, the union will not be in a position to risk the sorts of funds that are needed to put up a band. It cost us around \$17,000 to stage the Spiderbait concert. Until the day before we had not sold a ticket, even though we had had tickets on sale for 10 days. I went from worrying one day that we were not going to sell any tickets to worrying the next day that we were going to sell too many. If we had not had that guaranteed income stream and a reasonably robust budget for entertainment throughout the whole year, we would not have been able to risk blowing our entire budget on one concert, in case it failed. At the beginning of last year we ran a concert and an outdoor cinema event as part of our non-alcohol program. Both of those events failed and cost the union significant amounts of money. In a VSU environment you cannot risk those sorts of amounts or take those sorts of chances with something.

**Senator FIFIELD**—Thank you for sharing the Spiderbait defence for compulsory fees with us.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—It is probably a pretty convincing one for students.

**Senator FIFIELD**—No-one is arguing that there is no value to campus life, to student life, but I think as long as you have highly spirited and intellectually curious students you will have a campus life. This legislation is not antipolitical. In terms of service delivery, clearly if this legislation were enacted there would be a much greater onus on the union to communicate to students the services that you provide and the value of those services. There is probably a bit of undue pessimism about your capacity to communicate to and convince students of, and also for students to appreciate, the value of what you do. Have you given any thinking to—and I have asked this of witnesses in other places—how you might market to students under the new legislation, if it is enacted, something along the lines of an NRMA roadside assist membership, where you pay a certain amount and you get this level of service or you pay a little bit more and you get twice as much service? There are models and ways of convincing people and enticing them to take out membership of an organisation. Have you done any work along those lines and what do you think would be your capacity to introduce certain membership along those lines?

**Mrs Paini**—I have done some modelling and I believe our best opportunity to sell a membership of some description is to sell it to freshers in their first year, more for the level of entertainment we provide, particularly during first semester, than for any other reason. We ran three bands in first semester. The differential between member and nonmember price should be able to justify a \$50 or \$60 up-front fee for students. However, that will not equate to the sort of income we generate at the moment, and our ability to attract that in second semester and subsequent years during the three or four years the students are there is much diminished.

The University of New England, or at least the union at the University of New England, is significantly disadvantaged by the critical mass of students that we serve through our food and beverage outlets, for instance. We offer a 10 per cent discount to members at the moment through all of our food and beverage outlets. It costs us around \$250,000 a year to subsidise that cost, and that comes out of our GSF.

Because 2,000 of the internal students live in colleges, that leaves us with around 2,000 students on campus. Most of those students attend perhaps one, two or maybe three days a week. If you go up to the campus during the middle of term on a Friday, there is no-one around. At the same time, we operate commercial activities only 30 weeks out of 50, but we have to fund them for the full 50. I do not believe students would be prepared to subsidise to that extent the running of a purely commercial service providing the range of services that we provide at the moment.

The other issue that I think does not get talked about much is that, while students might potentially see value in getting something that they are going to attract a return from over the course of the year, by and large young people—I am talking from experience with my own son—look at the immediate impact. If they have \$50 to spend and they can blow that in the next two weeks on entertainment or they can pay a membership fee to an organisation where they are going to attract a return over the next 12 months, I am sorry, but most students will choose to take the immediate gain. Their discretionary spending will not go our way.

**Senator FIFIELD**—So they can plan in the medium to long term by deciding, ‘I want to be a lawyer; I’m going to study law,’ but they do not have the capacity to think, ‘Gee, I might need advocacy services; I might take out a membership’?

**Mrs Paini**—Certainly the Western Australian experience is that they did not. They chose not to.

**Senator FIFIELD**—Mind you, the West Australian experience could be that those particular unions just did a really bad job at marketing their services. It is not necessarily the fault of students. There is an onus on the union to communicate.

**Mrs Paini**—I think the union at the moment has quite a robust marketing program. We have a weekly publication called *The Buzz*—I did not think to bring any down. We have a contract with the local *In Tune* magazine, which is the local TV magazine, which most people would keep for the week because of the TV viewing. We advertise our services very heavily in that, and Sports UNE, the other commercial provider, also advertise in that. We also have a very robust mailing list and email list for students. We signed up 600 fresher students at the beginning of this year for emails, and we actively market our services and what’s on guide to those students every week. We also run the cinema in town and we advertise in the cinema guide. So I think we do a very good job of marketing the services we currently provide to students.

The difficulty is going to be getting them to pay up front. I think it was the University of New South Wales that did a survey of their students about which students would voluntarily pay membership, which would not, whose parents paid the general service fee and whose parents would in a voluntary scenario. In fact, the difference was quite significant. I do not have the numbers, but there was a high proportion of students who said that their parents currently paid the general service fee because it was compulsory but that they did not believe their parents would pay a voluntary general service or student union fee.

Based on my past experience as an external student while working, my employer paid my general service fee, part of a compulsory enrolment fee, as part of my reimbursement for studying. But if that had been a voluntary fee they would not have reimbursed that. There are

other mechanisms or alternatives for funding the general service fee that will be lost to students and that will not be available under a voluntary regime.

**Senator LUNDY**—I apologise for my late arrival; it was dictated by the flights. Have you had an opportunity to have a look at the student association's submission?

**Mrs Paini**—Yes.

**Senator LUNDY**—Do you have any comment on some of the assertions made in that submission?

**Mrs Paini**—I think it is a very generalist document. It is very light on facts. It makes a lot of claims but does not support them with any evidence or any examples of how these things have happened. It is very easy to make statements when you do not have to support them.

**Senator LUNDY**—I note with interest that the student association, which I think we will get the opportunity to question after morning tea, supports the VSU legislation. Are you able to make any comment about the role that this student association has played in its advocacy of this issue—for example, did it have any political associations when it was set up?

**Mrs Paini**—Most of the executive on the student association were, until recently, board members at the UNE Union. I do not think anyone is unaware that they are very strong members of the Liberal students club. In fact, through our clubs and societies, the general service fee was used to fund that club last year, when they made a submission to our cultural activities committee—in the same way that we funded the Greens and other organisations that made applications for funding.

**Senator LUNDY**—Was the presentation of the VSU legislation in the parliament part of the motivation, in your view, for the establishment of the student association?

**Mrs Paini**—The student association has existed on campus for a long time. Every 12 months they have a new executive—a new council—that is elected. This year it just happens to be that the Liberal students stood for and were elected to that council.

**Senator LUNDY**—Thanks for that.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much for your appearance here today.

**Proceedings suspended from 10.32 am to 10.58 am**

**HOUSTON, Miss Amy Elizabeth, Councillor, University of New England Students Association**

**ROSOLEN, Mr Dayne Micheal, Treasurer, University of New England Students Association**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. We have received your submission, which the committee have numbered 117. Before we ask questions, you have an opportunity to make a brief statement for the record if you wish, just for two or three minutes, or to state your interest in this inquiry. You can also indicate if you wish any of your evidence to be made confidentially to the committee. I now invite you to make a brief opening statement.

**Mr Rosolen**—The UNE Students Association supports this bill in its entirety as it believes in the individual and the freedom of association. Basically, it believes that people should be able to choose what organisations they join and how their money is spent.

**CHAIR**—You have indicated that you strongly support the bill. Most of your student association executive budget would come from amenities fees. Is that so?

**Mr Rosolen**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—How would you propose to survive should the bill be passed?

**Mr Rosolen**—Certainly the organisation will have to look at providing more relevant services to students that provide value for money in order to make the organisation attractive for students to join in a voluntary environment.

**CHAIR**—Have you thought about what some of those services might be?

**Mr Rosolen**—Yes. We are currently planning on restructuring our organisation to function next year.

**CHAIR**—At the risk of divulging commercial-in-confidence information, would you like to outline that? Obviously, with student associations looking to how they will survive, that sort of information is crucial to the inquiry.

**Mr Rosolen**—Could you say that again, please? I did not quite hear it.

**CHAIR**—Would you tell us how you propose to do that. With student organisations looking to see how they will survive if the legislation is passed, that sort of information is crucial to the inquiry.

**Mr Rosolen**—We are currently looking at a number of things, such as streamlining expenses to make the organisation run more effectively and efficiently and to make it more relevant to mainstream students.

**CHAIR**—Has it not run efficiently in the past, in your view?

**Mr Rosolen**—I do not believe it has.

**CHAIR**—In what way?

**Mr Rosolen**—As with anything that runs under a system of compulsion, the previous councils that have run the organisation have been complacent in how they spent their money

because they have been guaranteed an income stream. The fact that it may or may not be relevant to students has fallen by the wayside in pursuit of their own interests.

**CHAIR**—Can you give us some concrete examples of that?

**Mr Rosolen**—Funding for any number of fringe causes that the majority of students at UNE are simply uninterested in.

**CHAIR**—Have you taken polls or asked your fellow students their opinion on this to gauge their interest or lack of it?

**Mr Rosolen**—To elaborate on the lack of interest, I have had conversations with several students who have been attending this university for over five years and they have had to ask me: ‘What is the UNE Students Association and what does it do?’ They are completely unaware of how it functions and what it does.

**CHAIR**—So, even though they have paid their fee, they have not been approached?

**Mr Rosolen**—These students have no idea. They think their money goes to the university for something. They are not even aware that it is spent on amenities.

**CHAIR**—Are there any services provided at the moment that would not survive under voluntary student unionism?

**Mr Rosolen**—It is hard to say. I cannot predict the future. Obviously certain functions that the UNE Students Association currently runs would have to be looked at, restructured, reorganised and run differently to survive in a voluntary environment. I anticipate that that restructure would make the services more relevant to and more cost effective for students.

**CHAIR**—What sort of restructure are you talking about?

**Mr Rosolen**—Streamlining of services and focusing on what students really want, rather than on what a group of people think they want.

**CHAIR**—What do you think students really want?

**Mr Rosolen**—Students want to come to uni and study. That is certainly what I want from this university. I want a qualification at the end of it.

**CHAIR**—What sorts of services would you be thinking about offering students to make it more attractive and more relevant? I would like you to give me a couple of examples.

**Mr Rosolen**—Certainly one service that I think is relevant is the second-hand bookshop. That currently runs at a break-even position at no cost to students. I think even that service could be restructured to make a slight gain to continue its operation in a voluntary environment.

**CHAIR**—Do you have anything to add to that, Miss Houston?

**Miss Houston**—I think streamlining everything and making the structures viable for the future in a voluntary environment is the most important thing at the moment.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—Miss Houston, perhaps I will start with that last point about making the structures viable for the future and streamlining. Do you want to elaborate on that for the committee so that we can get a specific idea of what you mean by streamlining and viability?

**Miss Houston**—I think that is very similar to the question that Dayne just answered.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—Yes, I was going to ask the same question. It did not elicit an answer that explained it to me specifically. You said that you want to provide what students want, not what a group of people want, and Senator Troeth asked you what you think students want. I would like to know how you will find out what students want. When you say ‘streamlining’, is there anything in particular—dentistry, catering, entertainment?

**Miss Houston**—UNESA is not responsible for catering or entertainment.

**Mr Rosolen**—We do not cover catering or entertainment.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—Under a new model of VSU, who knows what people will be responsible for. That is the point, in terms of the legislation.

**Miss Houston**—At the moment, there is a lot of overlapping of administration. Everything needs to be more relevant to students. Previously, funding has been misused on irrelevant things. Students at UNE did not even realise that their money was being spent on things like that. As Dayne said, they do not know that their GSF is being spent on things like that because they are uninterested. They pay their money so they can come and get their degree.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—Going back to the question, it was a good point that you raised about catering not being your responsibility. Under the legislation, would you envisage that the student association would survive?

**Mr Rosolen**—It would survive, but it would operate radically differently than how it does currently.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—Can you elaborate on that?

**Mr Rosolen**—That is simply because it is not relevant to students. We have been working hard to change that this year. This organisation needs to be turned around so that, if you spoke to a first-term first-year student, they would be able to specify exactly what the student association has done. Currently under this system students pay money with no idea where it goes. I have trouble explaining to sixth-year students what the different organisations at this university do for them.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—So the students association might survive. Would the union survive?

**Mr Rosolen**—I envisage that the union would survive because it runs commercial operations.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—I see. So you envisage that the commercially viable operations, by definition, would survive under the future viability model.

**Mr Rosolen**—Yes.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—Tell me about child care, for example.

**Mr Rosolen**—As I understand it, no money collected from the amenities fee at this university is spent on child care. I do not believe that student amenities fees, which every student is forced to pay, should subsidise child care. At this university, child care is mainly used by the staff of the university. I do not have children, but I am forced to pay a fee to the

university. This one does not subsidise child care, but I understand that that is the case at other universities. Why should those people have to subsidise services that they will not even use? For example, this is the third time I have set foot in this complex since my time here at university and none of those times has been because of sporting pursuits. I am forced to pay my amenities fee to this university to subsidise sport for people, but I do not use the services. It is entirely possible for a student of this university to get a degree without even stepping foot in New South Wales, let alone Armidale, and yet students are forced to pay a fee which subsidises services and facilities in Armidale—a place that they will never even lay eyes on.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—Do the amenities fees go towards advocacy at this institution?

**Mr Rosolen**—Yes.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—How would that be maintained? Would that be relevant?

**Mr Rosolen**—Advocacy would continue. They can join their political clubs.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—No, advocacy.

**Mr Rosolen**—Advocacy in terms of—

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—Advocacy in the usual sense we use the term when talking about student life or university life: advocacy against the university if someone has an exam result that needs to be challenged, for example. I am not talking about political advocacy in terms of political organisations. I am not going to get caught on that generalist and often irrelevant, minor point in the context of this debate. I want to talk about services that students use that we can all perhaps agree on—advocacy, for example.

**Mr Rosolen**—That is an important service. But I imagine that can continue in a voluntary environment as well.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—Have you done some modelling on the costs of that? That is something we have heard a bit of evidence about, as you would imagine, from vice-chancellors and others. As you point out in your submission at point 41, student unions at UNE are required to pick up the slack. You talk about whether UNE student associations have picked up the slack, to use your terminology, from the university. You might think that the university would pick up the cost of something like advocacy. But, as we heard from the vice-chancellors, they are probably not going to pay for advocacy against themselves. In fact, they are pretty much ruling it out. The costs seem to be prohibitive. I am wondering how we get that to a commercially viable basis. Students will bring in lawyers, I suppose. That might be the most logical way to go. I am not sure.

**Mr Rosolen**—Again, I do not have all the answers, but this university has quite a high population of internal students who live in a residential college at the bottom of the hill. Within each college there are support networks and structures for the students who live in those colleges, and they use the support mechanisms there to talk to academic staff and the university about concerns that the residents have. I imagine a similar service could run in a voluntary environment but funded by voluntary payments to the organisations and any commercial enterprises they run.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—I will put some questions on notice to the university, because I did not think to ask the vice-chancellor about that. I imagine a number of things could run. I want to know what modelling and what specific costings or information you have for us that are not generalist.

**Mr Rosolen**—I do not have any figures with me. Currently, the council of the organisation is looking at what restructures and measures we need to put in place to ready us for next year.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—That is fair enough. Have you employed anyone to do that examination or is that something that the council is doing?

**Mr Rosolen**—In view of the costs, we have decided to undertake a lot of that examination ourselves. But, in the event that something comes up that we cannot handle, I am sure we will seek advice elsewhere.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—That is on a voluntary basis. It is very good of people to donate their time. As we know, most student reps do. I take it that no-one gets paid an honorarium?

**Mr Rosolen**—Four people get paid a small honorarium from the association.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—Does that include the treasurer?

**Mr Rosolen**—Yes.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—What do you get paid? I know it is never that much, but I have asked all student reps this question.

**Mr Rosolen**—I have not collected it. I think it is \$3,000.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—You are donating a lot of your time and effort.

**Mr Rosolen**—Possibly too much.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—Indeed. I was wondering whether there was a philosophical objection to that money based on so-called compulsion. At point 31 of your submission, you state:

Not all students wish to be part of an ‘academic community’.

You have also said that in your comments today. When you surveyed students, what percentage actually said that?

**Mr Rosolen**—We have not conducted any surveys but, as I pointed out before, it is entirely possible to get a degree from this university without even stepping foot in New South Wales.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—I do not dispute that point. I am now only interested in specifics. We have your submission. I am just wondering when you said, ‘Not all students wish to be part of an academic community,’ whether—

**Mr Rosolen**—I do not think I need to conduct a survey for that because, personally, I do not want to be part of an academic community.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—That is fair enough, and we do take anecdotal evidence as well. Have you passed any motions by the student union to back up this submission? It sounds as though it is strongly supported by the council.

**Mr Rosolen**—Yes, it has been authorised by the executive.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—This will be my last question. Let us face it: at the moment this legislation has the numbers to pass in the Senate. We are looking at a very radically different environment, if the legislation is passed. Many organisations will have to undertake the kinds of surveys and consultation that you are talking about. Can you tell us your times lines for working out what services will be needed and the work that the council is doing?

**Mr Rosolen**—Currently, we have entered discussions with the university about possible restructures and we are continuing down that track. Certainly, organisations will have to be incorporated and things like that.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—Could the committee have the survey information, the analysis or your modelling if it is available in the next couple of weeks before the report is written? I ask you to take that on notice.

**Mr Rosolen**—Yes. I am not sure we will have anything in writing in the next couple of weeks. We are still working on quite a few areas.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—Thank you; that is evident.

**Senator FIFIELD**—The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Moses, said this morning that she thought students had choice about the institution at which they studied—and which degree and which subject—but that, when students arrived on campus, they were part of a community and that the concept of choice was not relevant to the GSF. I was wondering what your views were on that.

**Mr Rosolen**—As I said, students who not even set foot in the state do not become part of the community at Armidale. I am opposed to the objective of compulsion. It is like moving into a street and the people who live in that street saying, ‘You must go to this church,’ and then, when the collection comes around, saying, ‘You must give this much.’ Students generally, you could say, are slightly more intelligent, by their nature. Surely these people are intelligent enough to decide where their often very limited funds are spent—that is, on things they want.

**Senator FIFIELD**—A vice-chancellor from another university told the committee yesterday that he did not want to sound condescending to students but he did not think students focused on the long term; they only focused on the short term. Do you think that sort of comment is condescending towards students?

**Mr Rosolen**—I think it is. I think that by the time you come to university you should have a fair idea. If you cannot manage your money, how can you expect to successfully undertake studies at any level? It is an expensive business. This compulsory up-front union fee is the only up-front financial impediment to starting an undergraduate course at any Australian university. I think it would be wonderful to say that Australia has a university education system where anyone can attend without paying a single dollar up front, where anyone can have access to a degree and then pay it back when they are working. I think that would be an excellent thing to say, but we cannot say that at the moment because of these up-front fees. If you do not pay them, you are asked to leave—and quite often this university does not even tell people. After they have spent six months and done their exams, they go to get their results

and find out: ‘No, sorry, you failed to pay your compulsory up-front union fee’—either because they could not afford it or because they forgot, but most probably because they could not afford it—‘so you have just wasted six months and possibly incurred a HECS liability. We are not going to offer that course again until next year.’

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—That is an important point for the committee. I just thought that some people were prevented from getting exam results; I did not realise that people were failed.

**Mr Rosolen**—I know a fellow who last year did not pay his amenities fee and then continued along as normal. He got the usual calls from debt collectors and whatever else. I am not sure if he paid it in the end but, in any event, six months were wasted. He had to wait because various units are compulsory for a course and prerequisites for further studies. He was held up another year.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—We will chase that up with the university, because that is interesting if that is the case. That is quite a story.

**Senator FIFIELD**—That is outrageous, if that is indeed the case.

**Mr Rosolen**—Yes.

**Senator FIFIELD**—With HECS, you do not have to pay it up front and it is not a barrier to entry for students. Is the GSF the only compulsory up-front fee that students are required to pay?

**Mr Rosolen**—To my knowledge, yes. I am pretty sure that is the case. Quite often I talk to students who say, ‘We’re eating skinny this week because the GSF is due next week.’

**Senator FIFIELD**—As you mentioned, UNE has a large number of students who are off campus and who never set foot on campus. I think the vice-chancellor said that they pay \$80, rather than \$185.

**Mr Rosolen**—I think it is something like that. I have never paid it, because I am an internal student. It is \$85 or something like that.

**Senator FIFIELD**—Do you think that is value for money for the students?

**Mr Rosolen**—I do not think it is. When I was the vice-president of the union I sat on the committee that had responsibility for providing external member benefits. I can tell you now that I found it incredibly tough to provide them with even minimal value. The only ones we seemed to be able to give value to were the people who actually came for a residential school, which is a school over the break to undertake practical work or whatever else. All we managed to do was give them a sausage sizzle and a couple of drinks afterwards one afternoon. I certainly would be quite upset if I were forced to pay \$85 for nothing. You would get more benefit burning it and warming your hands on it.

**Senator FIFIELD**—The vice-chancellor this morning also asserted that UNE as a regional university would be particularly affected by this legislation. I asked the vice-chancellor for evidence of that and how it would compare to, say, Monash’s Clayton campus, which is a pretty isolated campus. It is not actually near anything. She did not give any specific instances

where UNE would be affected more than any other campus. Do you think UNE would be affected to a greater or lesser degree than any other campus?

**Mr Rosolen**—I think the only organisations or universities going to be affected by this legislation are those that simply waste students' money and do not provide value for money. I have read the university submission and I find it odd that they could not even research some basics for a Senate committee. The buses run more frequently than hourly. They mention that quite a lot. The CBD is six kilometres from the campus but they fail to let the committee know that within a couple of kilometres of campus there is a fully fledged newsagency, post office, takeaway and convenience store—all within walking distance.

**Senator FIFIELD**—You are say that services will be affected on campus as a result of students' support of those services rather than the fact that this is a regional campus.

**Mr Rosolen**—Yes.

**Senator FIFIELD**—Your association runs a dental clinic?

**Mr Rosolen**—Yes.

**Senator FIFIELD**—In your submission you say that that dental clinic should be able to continue.

**Mr Rosolen**—I think it should. I have been here for 3½ years now and I have never used it. Again, why should I have to pay? If I needed dental work done I am sure I would be able to find a dentist in town. Previously that dental clinic was not running because of the difficulty of finding a dentist to operate it.

**Senator FIFIELD**—The medical service is provided by neither you nor the union; it is university funded.

**Mr Rosolen**—I think they round up the general service fee and use a slice of that money to put towards the medical centre. No student organisation on campus runs the medical centre. In the university submission they say that there are doctors not taking patients in town. I find that hard to believe. Whenever I have needed to see a doctor I have not gone to the university medical centre, because I have wanted to be seen that day. It took me a little bit of ringing around but I was able to find a doctor that would take me as a new patient.

**CHAIR**—How many doctors are there in town?

**Mr Rosolen**—I could not tell you.

**CHAIR**—That is a town of 22,000 people.

**Mr Rosolen**—Again, I could not tell you.

**Miss Houston**—There are quite a few—not a small number.

**CHAIR**—I realise it is a regional centre.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—Does the student association receive funding from the GSF?

**Mr Rosolen**—Yes.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—How much is that worth to your organisation?

**Mr Rosolen**—I do not have the figure on hand—it is over \$500,000.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—Aren't you the treasurer?

**Mr Rosolen**—Yes, but I do not have the figures to hand. I can hazard a guess. It is the majority of the income for the organisation. It may be \$750,000. I cannot give you a hard figure.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—What is that \$750,000 spent on?

**Mr Rosolen**—It is spent on the services the organisation provides to students.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—Which are?

**Mr Rosolen**—It runs the dental clinic.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—How much does it spend on the dental clinic?

**Mr Rosolen**—I do not have the figures with me so I could not tell you.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—Is it half the \$750,000?

**Mr Rosolen**—I do not think so.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—Can you please take that on notice and provide us with those figures—how much funding you get and how much is spent on the dental clinic?

**Mr Rosolen**—Yes.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—Perhaps you could also take on notice how much of your funding is spent on the different services that your association provides. You have made a lot of general accusations but you have not been able to give specific details. In point 4, for example, you claim that student unions are notorious for their waste, yet you have not been able to cite specific instances where that has occurred and what the circumstances are. In point 5 you say that your association:

... has worked hard this year to reposition itself to make itself relevant to the study body at the University of New England. The slashing of wasteful spending; reprioritisation of spending to areas of greater need and relevance to the student body; and delivery of services and representation that appeal to the majority of students and not sectional interests.

Would you like to explain to us in detail what you have done over the past year? How have you changed your services? What services have you abolished? What new ones have you put in place?

**Mr Rosolen**—Currently, we have not abolished any services but we have cut separate budget areas to make those services use their money more effectively.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—Can you give us a bit more detail of what you have done?

**Mr Rosolen**—I think the council cut a few thousand dollars off the student newspaper to drive it to make better use of that money in producing that publication and seeking advertising and other sources of income.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—How successful has that been?

**Mr Rosolen**—Advertising has increased in the magazine but, again, I cannot tell you for sure. I think it has had a positive impact but I cannot give you any hard figures.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—It is a bit difficult—

**Mr Rosolen**—I will take it on notice, if you want.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—If you could take that on notice and give us the hard figures, because it does make it a bit difficult to assess the credibility of your claims if we cannot get the detail. Mr Rosolen, are you a member of any of the clubs that exist at the university?

**Mr Rosolen**—Yes, I am.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—Are you a member of the political clubs?

**Mr Rosolen**—Yes.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—Are you a member of the Liberal club?

**Mr Rosolen**—Yes.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—Were you consulted by the Australian Liberal Students' Federation in the presentation of their submission?

**Mr Rosolen**—I have not read their submission as yet, but I can guess the lines it has gone along with.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—It is very similar to your submission, I can assure you. But you were not directly consulted by them?

**Miss Houston**—I spoke to people who were involved in putting it together.

**Mr Rosolen**—I personally did not have any consultations in producing the ALSF submission.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—So, Miss Houston, you were involved in the preparation of this submission?

**Miss Houston**—Not of the ALSF one or the UNESA one. I read both of them and talked to people who were involved in writing them, but I was not directly involved.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—Does the Liberal club at the University of New England receive funding out of the GSF?

**Mr Rosolen**—The Liberal club, like any club or society, has the ability to apply to the organisations for funding for various events or conferences.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—And you have received funding out of the GSF?

**Miss Houston**—This year, no.

**Mr Rosolen**—I am not sure whether the Liberal club has received anything this year.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—You are not aware whether it has received any funding this year?

**Miss Houston**—We did not apply for any, so we have not received any.

**Mr Rosolen**—To my knowledge, the club has not applied for any.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—Can you take that on notice and let us know for certain?

**Mr Rosolen**—Yes.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—Mr Rosolen, you say that the UNE Student Association claims the bill will not have a negative impact on services in rural and regional areas. That is considerably out of step with the whole range—

**Mr Rosolen**—Sorry, where were you reading that from?

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—It is at point 19. What grounds do you base that on?

**Mr Rosolen**—I think it will make the organisations run more efficiently and effectively. By having the volunteer mechanism as the funding of these organisations they will run more efficiently, more effectively and more in line with the needs of students at this campus.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—But you say it ‘will not have a negative impact on services in rural and regional areas’. How do you make that judgment? All the evidence we have had so far in Victoria and here this morning has been to the opposite; it has been saying that it will have a negative impact on services in regional and rural areas. All of the political comment, particularly from National Party MPs, is also making that claim. Your claim is completely out of step with what is generally being heard. I am asking you: on what grounds do you base that?

**Mr Rosolen**—I personally think that if you change the structure of these organisations to allow them to operate in a voluntary environment, they will not need to close.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—So it is a personal view?

**Mr Rosolen**—Yes, I agree with it.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—It is your own personal view.

**Mr Rosolen**—My personal view is that if organisations are restructured in a correct and well thought out manner, they will be able to continue under a voluntary environment.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—But how does that associate with whether or not it will have a negative impact in the area? They may well continue, but they could continue at a lesser level than they are now.

**Mr Rosolen**—Services have to be supported. Services have to be wanted. So if certain services do not continue next year because they do not have the support from the students, they are not wanted by the students or they are impossible to run at a regional area, then that will be the case.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—Are you saying that there are services provided now at the university that are not wanted by the students?

**Mr Rosolen**—I cannot tell you any one exactly but, again, a service would need to have enough support to run. I would like nothing more than a tenpin bowling alley between the university campus and the colleges but somehow I do not think it would have the community’s support to be a viable operation.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—Have you gone out and attempted to start a tenpin bowling club at the university?

**Mr Rosolen**—No, I have not. But a reasonable assumption is that there would not be a casino—there would not be enough people to support it to make it a viable operation.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—That is a judgment that you make in your own mind without testing it with your community, isn't it? If you have not tested with the student community as to the level of demand that is out there, how can you make the claim that it would not have its support? It may not have its support—I am not suggesting that it does.

**Mr Rosolen**—I do not think it would.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—But you at least ought to test the claim. In point 31 you say:

Not all students wish to be part of an 'academic community'.

Isn't it true that once you join the university, once you enrol, you are part of the academic community at the university?

**Mr Rosolen**—A lot of people simply enrol at this university to obtain a tertiary qualification for employment.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—But once they do that don't they become part of that academic community?

**Mr Rosolen**—If you want to draw that argument I suppose you can. But not necessarily. Again, how can you be part of an academic community if you do not step foot on the campus?

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—How can you not be part of it if you are participating in activities of the university such as by undertaking lectures, whether or not remotely or locally at the university; by engaging with lecturers; or by undertaking exams? How are you not part of that community?

**Miss Houston**—What does that have to do with the GSF and the student organisations?

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—I am asking the question because you put it in your submission. I am trying to understand what it has to do with the GSF.

**Mr Rosolen**—I think the spirit of what was being said was: an academic community where you get involved around campus in pursuits of academia, and where you get around and wear your gowns and—

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—But this is all part of university life, isn't it? If you go to any university in the country it is all part of university life.

**Mr Rosolen**—Yes. But for students—

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—Universities do not consist of simply classrooms, lecturers and students.

**Mr Rosolen**—Why not? For some students that is all they want.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—Show me anywhere in the world where they do.

**Mr Rosolen**—For a lot of students at this campus they enrol to get a degree for employment and all the contact they have with the university is a phone call and putting things in the mail. How is that a community? That is no different than paying your phone bill.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—There is no way in which I can test that. I think the vice-chancellor this morning disputed that it is the case that students never set foot on the campus, saying they did attend semesters even if they were remote students.

**Mr Rosolen**—That used to be the case when this university had compulsory residential schools but the university has changed its stance on that. Not all residential schools are compulsory now so you do not have to come here and graduate—they will send you your testamur and transcript in the mail.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—As I said, there is no way in which I can test that claim of yours. What you are saying seems to be contrary to what the vice-chancellor has said this morning.

**Senator LUNDY**—First of all, in point 36 in your submission you say:

Claims from the UNE that the UNE Second-Hand Bookshop, security bus and other welfare services ... would have to close under VSU are incorrect.

What ‘other welfare services’ are you referring to? Why do you consider a second-hand bookshop and a security bus to be welfare services? Aren’t they just student services?

**Mr Rosolen**—They are services that, frankly, should be provided by the university. I do not think students should have to foot the bill. The point there is the security bus. The security bus that transports students from the library to the residences is something that the university should bear the cost of. The duty of care rests with the university. The students should not have to foot the bill.

**Senator LUNDY**—So you do not think it is a welfare service?

**Mr Rosolen**—There is a need for that service because of what misadventure you could have walking between the library and home or travelling. But, again, it rests with the university to make sure the campus is a safe place. Students should not have to be subsidising a security bus for the vast majority of students at this campus who never step foot in Armidale. They are not going to get on that bus.

**Senator LUNDY**—You state that the second-hand bookshop will need some reform to operations to ensure long-term viability were VSU to pass the parliament. Can you be specific about the reform that you are alluding to?

**Mr Rosolen**—Currently, that bookshop operates on a commission basis. I would envisage that the commission may have to be increased somewhat. So students will not get as much money back from their books, but that increase in revenue would fund staff. I think we are also currently investigating a new computer system that will streamline how that bookshop operates its stocktake and sales so that it need only be run by one staff member—again, a saving in wages.

**Senator LUNDY**—Have you ever used that bookshop?

**Mr Rosolen**—I have some books sitting in there at the moment but they have not sold.

**Senator LUNDY**—At point 39 of your submission you comment on the provision of dental services. What efforts did the student association make to find a dentist to work in the facility?

**Mr Rosolen**—There is a dentist there now but in previous years they have not been able to find a dentist. They are quite hard to come by.

**Senator LUNDY**—So there is a dentist there?

**Mr Rosolen**—There is a dentist operating there but I understand that in previous years that was not the case.

**Senator LUNDY**—You make the statement that it would become unviable under its present business model if membership were to reduce under VSU. Can you tell the committee what a viable business model would look like?

**Mr Rosolen**—We are still investigating that, so I cannot tell you at this stage. I envisage that my inquiries will go down the line of when it is open and then possibly making more time available for cosmetic or other services that require a charge. I understand that, currently, the dental basics are provided there free of charge. But, if you need cosmetic work or a crown or something like that, provided the dentist can do it for you, you can pay him. So there is the possibility of increasing the amount of that sort of work he is available for to generate some revenue back into that unit.

**Senator LUNDY**—Have you discussed this with the dentist who is currently there?

**Mr Rosolen**—I have not discussed that with the dentist yet. Again, we are examining quite a few things at this stage.

**Senator LUNDY**—Who are you consulting with to develop a new business model for the campus dentist?

**Mr Rosolen**—We have not consulted with anybody yet. There is still some discussion under way as to what model of VSU will be introduced. We are currently talking about the university with current structures. But, again, everything is up in the air until the legislation is passed. We support this bill but there are quite a number of people, as you can probably tell from this morning, who are a little bit either way on it or against it and they are holding up proceedings because of talk of amendments and whatever else. It is important that we get the underlying structure of the organisations—and that will possibly mean a merger of a couple here at the university—so that we can build an organisation that services students in a very highly effective and efficient manner and provide value to students for their fee and encourage them to join.

**Senator LUNDY**—So your idea to create a new model for the dentist built on cosmetic dentistry is your idea?

**Mr Rosolen**—That is one idea that has come to mind. I am yet to sit down and discuss that with other people. It is an avenue I will be investigating. I am sure there will be others as well.

**Senator LUNDY**—You have taken the time to express your personal view on a number of the services. You mentioned that you have not used the dental service and you have not used

the child care as you did not have any children. What are the other services that you have no use of? Does that equate with your view that they are not relevant to university life?

**Mr Rosolen**—They are services; but, if I choose to join the students association so that I can get the free dental, that should be a choice that I have. I have not used sport, because I am not a sporting person. Under VSU, these organisations will still exist but they will need to be effective and subsidised by the people who use them. I find it silly that thousands of external students who never set foot in Armidale have to pay \$85 a semester to subsidise the weights and the indoor pool here that they will never even lay eyes on, let alone use. If they have that choice and think those services are important when they come for residential schools and, of course, if those services operate efficiently and effectively and provide true value for money then they will join.

**Senator LUNDY**—You use a lot of very general terms as far as what constitutes a healthy market and the operating efficiency of a business. Can you tell me whether you have read the Sport UNE submission?

**Mr Rosolen**—I have not read the Sport UNE submission.

**Senator LUNDY**—One of the important points made by Sport UNE is the integration between the sporting facilities at this campus and the community and the extent to which the facilities are utilised by the local community. Can I use that as an example to ask: what is your view of the role of this university in creating that link with the community and the role of universities in creating social capital in a town like Armidale?

**Mr Rosolen**—The people from the Armidale township do come out and use the sporting facilities here, but the Armidale township need to support these facilities if they want to use them. Again, students are being slugged to foot the bill, and students, by their very nature, do not have a huge amount of disposable money lying around. In fact, if you wanted to be really idealistic, the township should subsidise the services for students.

**Senator LUNDY**—I think you will find that they do make a contribution. It is not black and white.

**Mr Rosolen**—They do make a contribution, but they will need to support it more along the lines of the cinema. The students are subsidising facilities for the town that the town wants, but the town needs to be willing to utilise the services, contribute to the services and support the services for them to operate.

**Senator LUNDY**—Can you tell me whether or not it is your view that, with VSU, the sporting clubs and the sporting bodies in the university would continue to be viable?

**Mr Rosolen**—I am not sure of all of them. I do not have enough detailed knowledge of all the different sporting clubs here, but I am sure that the ones that are supported by their members and that have the interest of their members would continue to operate. I am a member of a small golf club in my home town. It does not have a compulsory influx of membership that it can guarantee its operations on. It has to provide a golf club with a course and facilities that members would see as reasonable to join.

**Senator LUNDY**—Having not read the Sport UNE submission, you are still prepared to state that they would continue to be viable?

**Mr Rosolen**—One thing is that people are prepared to pay for their sport. I have noticed it with soccer clubs: people get in with the working bees and mow the fields and set up the competitions. People are willing to support sport and they are willing to pay for sport. I believe it is one relevant service for a majority of students at this university that they want, and they will support it. Sport conducted a survey where they said that over 90 per cent wanted the sporting facilities here and opposed VSU. So I do not think the sports complex here has anything to fear next year, because people will join. They must be running their services efficiently and effectively to attract members.

**Senator LUNDY**—I am not sure whether this is relevant to the facility here but it is certainly relevant to other facilities that have been able to access capital for their construction on the guarantee of further incoming fees—that is, they are guaranteed without the VSU. The whole debt financing of facilities like this would perhaps not be funded elsewhere without the compulsory fee system. Do you concede that that would be a bad outcome, because facilities like this just would not get built?

**Mr Rosolen**—If it is planned and thought through well enough, they would be able to obtain the finance. My local golf club struggled. It was bought by a Japanese investment company that went belly up. The club borrowed the money to buy the course back. In a couple of years they will have it paid back. They have had to change how they were doing things considerably to make sure they attract members and provide value to members so they can grow their member base and continue with other ventures. I am sure once they have it paid for they will be seeking money to make course improvements. I do not see how that would be any different here at sport.

**Senator LUNDY**—In terms of your criticism of Sport UNE, you have not read the submission. Miss Houston, have you? If that is the case, on what do you base point 26, where you accuse Sport UNE of building up personal empires and not focusing, by imputation, on facilities that students actually want? Can you explain that accusation?

**Mr Rosolen**—I think Sport UNE had an idea to establish a beach volleyball court at one stage because they thought it was a good idea.

**Senator LUNDY**—And you do not think they should have established a beach volleyball court?

**Mr Rosolen**—It did not go ahead because enough concern was raised by people saying: ‘No. We don’t really want this. We’d rather something for the rugby field.’ Again, under VSU, if you had the option to pay and you knew this sporting group was neglecting your sport, then you would not join.

**Senator LUNDY**—You say:

If the entrenched management of Sport UNE stopped trying to build up personal sporting empires and focused on managing the sporting facilities students actually wanted then they would have the necessary cash to maintain sporting fields.

Is that because you have a view that expenditure on maintaining sporting fields is more important than building up new sporting infrastructure?

**Mr Rosolen**—I think you need to have an organisation that is able to maintain and resource the facilities it already has before it starts embarking on new projects.

**Senator LUNDY**—What do you mean by ‘build up personal sporting empires’? Is a beach volleyball court a sporting empire? What do mean by that? It is a pretty big statement to make in a Senate submission. You are accusing someone of doing something and I want you to explain it.

**Mr Rosolen**—Personally I think there is a view from this organisation that they are more important than the rest and that they have their own little empire down here. That is certainly the impression I get—and, unless you are in a clique, you do not seem to get very far down here.

**Senator LUNDY**—I still do not understand. You are not involved in the management of it so therefore it is a clique?

**Mr Rosolen**—Sorry?

**Senator LUNDY**—You are not involved in the management of it—

**Mr Rosolen**—I am not involved in the management of it.

**Senator LUNDY**—So is that why it is a clique?

**Mr Rosolen**—No. That is the impression I get.

**Senator LUNDY**—Based on what, if you have not been a member of the organisation?

**Mr Rosolen**—My observations and conversations I have had with people.

**Senator LUNDY**—So conversations with people have led you to make this allegation in this Senate submission. That is about the level of it, isn’t it?

**Mr Rosolen**—Yes.

**Senator LUNDY**—You also make quite an amazing statement about the operation of the cinema. You say:

In fact it smacks of monopolistic behaviour.

How can you explain that statement, given the UNE union has operated that cinema now for quite some time and seems to do a reasonable job in doing it, from what I can ascertain from the submissions I have received?

**Mr Rosolen**—I did not quite hear.

**Senator LUNDY**—In point 24 you accuse the UNE union by saying ‘it smacks of monopolistic behaviour’ with respect to the operation of the cinema. Can you explain that statement?

**Mr Rosolen**—I think the cinema could be run a hell of a lot more effectively.

**Senator LUNDY**—But that would also be a monopoly, would it not? If you were running it or it could be run better, are you saying that that is still a monopoly?

**Mr Rosolen**—This cinema is part of an organisation that has a guaranteed income stream. I am sure a struggling up and starter, if the UNE union put its mind to it, could make life hard for—

**Senator LUNDY**—Can I ask you quite specifically if you support the opening of another cinema in Armidale?

**Mr Rosolen**—Yes, I would.

**Senator LUNDY**—Finally, I would like to ask you a general question about the operation of the student association. In your submission you have made general references to more relevant services and greater attraction to join. You are looking at a large number of initiatives, including streamlining expenses, merging a couple of organisations and getting rid of any number of fringe causes. What studies, reports or investigations have the association formally done of the assessment of the efficient running of all of the facilities and services under your control?

**Mr Rosolen**—It is quite a small organisation and it is based on the belief of the current council. We are throwing ideas around as to how we can improve things for next year. As I said before, we have engaged in discussions with the university. We are waiting for a fixed model so that we know what we have to work with. Certainly there are ideas that have been bounced around the student council as to how things should operate next year or how they could operate. A lot of it depends on how this organisation will be structured. Will it still exist in its independent structure? Will it go into a conglomerate with the university? Will there be an amendment for rural and regional campuses, which then of course would mean—

**Senator LUNDY**—Would you support the removal of the general facilities or general service fee part of the compulsory union fees?

**Mr Rosolen**—I am sorry; what was that?

**Senator LUNDY**—Would you support the separation of the bill to allow the general services facilities and fees component to persist in a compulsory form?

**Mr Rosolen**—And the politics not?

**Senator LUNDY**—Yes.

**Mr Rosolen**—No, I would not because of all the people who study at this university who may never come here or who come here for a week.

**Senator LUNDY**—Would you support the separation of the paying of fees for the external students and the students who actually use the campus and on that basis oppose the bill?

**Mr Rosolen**—Would I support the externals not having to pay?

**Senator LUNDY**—Being non-compulsory.

**Mr Rosolen**—I would like the internal students to be non-compulsory as well because, again, I do not use this facility. I have never used the dentist.

**Senator LUNDY**—But that would mean you would not have to pay—

**CHAIR**—Senator Lundy—

**Senator LUNDY**—I am trying to get him to answer my question.

**Mr Rosolen**—Would I support the separation of external students? No. I support this bill and it needs to be done to be in its entirety. I think benefits will come from it.

**Senator LUNDY**—Even though both of those amendments would essentially solve the core of the position you seem to be trying to put in your submission.

**Mr Rosolen**—But that does not change the position of other people like me at other campuses who do not have—

**Senator LUNDY**—Do you have an ideological view on this as well as a practical one?

**CHAIR**—We have to wind this up.

**Mr Rosolen**—I think that I should have the right to choose what organisation I join and how my money is spent.

**CHAIR**—I think that is fairly definitive. Thank you very much. We would like to see a financial statement from your organisation and also a list of the clubs that have received funding during the last financial year.

**Mr Rosolen**—The last financial year?

**CHAIR**—Yes.

**Mr Rosolen**—Okay. I think my comments were for this calendar year. I am not sure that the club that was referenced got—

**CHAIR**—If we could see whatever your current list is.

**Mr Rosolen**—Certainly.

**Senator Lundy**—The funding from last year's calendar year might be a better indication.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—As opposed to halfway through this year's.

**CHAIR**—It will have to be a financial year. Is last financial year easier?

**Mr Rosolen**—Yes, probably.

**CHAIR**—Okay, last financial year.

**Senator LUNDY**—Can I ask for last year's calendar year expenditure as well.

**CHAIR**—We would like that as soon as possible. The committee has to report by 9 August.

**Mr Rosolen**—I think our manager is away this week. We will get onto it first thing next week.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much.

[11.55 am]

**STAPLETON, Mr Kevin John, General Manager, University of Southern Queensland Student Guild**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. We have received submission No. 47 from you. Before we ask questions, you have an opportunity to make a brief statement for the record if you wish, just for two or three minutes, or to state your interest in this inquiry. You can also indicate if you wish any of your evidence to be made confidentially to the committee. I now invite you to make a brief opening statement.

**Mr Stapleton**—I do not wish my submission to be confidential. I am based in Toowoomba, Queensland. The University of Southern Queensland has a small campus at Hervey Bay, near Maryborough, and is planning on opening a campus at Springfield, west of Brisbane, in 2006. I have been employed by the student guild since 1989. Prior to that I worked as a deputy college librarian at Sydney College of Advanced Education, now part of Sydney university, and I have held various positions in libraries and educational technology at institutions now known as the Australian Catholic University and the University of New England. I hold degrees and diplomas from UNE, Charles Sturt University and the University of New South Wales. I have only ever been a distance education student—I am very proud to have been a distance education student of UNE and Charles Sturt University—or a part-time student at UNSW. I have not had the opportunity to study full time on campus.

I am a board member of the Toowoomba Chamber of Commerce and an immediate past president of the Toowoomba Chamber of Commerce. Since leaving the Royal Australian Air Force after serving as a radio technician, I have been involved in higher education both as a student and as an employee for more than 30 years. I have been a board member of UNE Union, UNE Student Representative Council—now called the student association—and Rivcoll Union at Charles Sturt University in Wagga. I have been employed in the sector since 1989. In fact, I was a member of the SRC, now the students association, at UNE when the dental scheme was introduced. I supported it.

In my time as an elected officer and as an employee of campus student organisations, no money has ever been given to any political party in my experience. Also, at USQ, political and religious groups or clubs are not affiliated through the student guild and do not they receive financial grants from the guild. This is due to a constitutional clause. The USQ Student Guild is a member of ACUMA and Australian University Sport. It is not a member of the National Union of Students, the NUS, and the NUS is not the only peak body that speaks for this industry.

If the bill is introduced in its current form, the consequences at USQ are outlined in our submission. These will include virtually shutting down the operations of the guild and retrenching all permanent and casual staff—around 150 people in total. In 2004, the guild's payroll was approximately \$2.2 million for payroll and on costs. We also believe that the implementation of this bill will lead to a decline in on-campus student numbers, particularly international students. International students represent a \$6 billion export industry to Australia, and we suggest that the impact of the bill on this export trade has not been

addressed or considered in the discussions by either the department of education or the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

I suggest this bill is not about voluntary student unionism. It is about what Tony Smith is quoted in today's *Australian* as stating: 'no greater article of faith for the Liberal Party'. Let us be honest about it—the bill addresses this 'article of faith' but also goes further and impinges on the corporate governance role of universities by restricting the areas they can make decisions on. If, in acting on their fiduciary duties, a university council believe it is fiscally responsible to impose a fee on students to pay for services which the submission by DEST states clearly are specifically excluded from inclusion in the tuition fee, that university council will be unable to do so. In fact, there is a penalty for doing so under the provisions of the bill—that is, the bill imposes a penalty on good corporate governance of universities.

In submission No. 67 the Victorian Liberal Students Association state:

... student unions are bastions of socialism, squandering hundreds of thousands of dollars annually on irrelevant campaigns, violent protests in pursuit of obscure, fringe and radical viewpoints.

I do not know where Mr Jones et al get their research from. USQ is neither a bastion of socialism nor squandering hundreds of thousands of dollars on irrelevant campaigns or violent protests. In the 15 years that I have been employed at USQ, there have been no protests, let alone violent ones. The USQ Student Guild is, however, spending hundreds of thousands of dollars building and maintaining multipurpose sporting and recreational infrastructure on the Toowoomba campus. The main facility, the Clive Berghofer Recreation Centre, built in 1996 at a cost of \$8.6 million, is used extensively by students, the university and the regional community. It recovers most of its operating costs by charging user fees. However, like the multimillion dollar funding of social, cultural, recreational and sporting infrastructure by both federal and state governments, user fees pay part of the operating costs and certainly not the capital costs. In our case those are funded by fees and in the general community they are funded by the taxpayer.

The Victorian Liberal Students Association's submission also states:

Melbourne University's failed student union is a clear example of why students should not be forced to fund student unions, and watch their money squandered.

I suggest it is nothing of the sort. It is, however, a clear example of why good corporate governance rules should apply to all student organisations. When those rules are breached, those responsible should be subject to the normal civil and criminal penalties, whether they are at Melbourne University or the University of New England. When one insurance company, HIH, failed, the government did not use that example to shut down insurance companies.

A reading of the House of Representatives debate on 12 May reveals some interesting ideas about the student organisation industry. There are regular references to the 1970s and the various groups apparently funded by student organisations. Dr Southcott, for example, referred to support for the PLO and the Shining Path guerrilla movement in South America. A Liberal senator interviewed on Radio National this morning at nine o'clock also referred to the PLO. Mr Barresi spoke about money going to support terrorist organisations overseas. If this happened, it happened 30 years ago. One wonders whom the supporters of such motions,

now in their fifties, voted for at the last election. The supporters of this bill also speak about their time at university and, from a reading of *Hansard*, refer to only four of the 38 public universities in Australia. There is no discussion of the other 34.

With one or two exceptions, campus student organisations are responsible, responsive and reliable organisations providing quality services and capital infrastructure on Australian university campuses. The USQ Student Guild has invested over \$6 million on the Toowoomba campus. If there are problems with some organisations, why not make them act responsibly and not put at risk an industry employing over 5,000 Australians? In summary, I ask: how will this legislation result in Australian universities, especially USQ, being better places?

**CHAIR**—Thank you for that, Mr Stapleton. We will move to questions. You may have missed my opening statement when, as chair, I said that the reason for this legislation being brought forward is that it has always been the government's view that compulsory payment of fees for non-academic services cannot be justified. It is non-academic services rather than the particular view of political organisations, which you seem to have taken. Our view is much wider than just that. I would ask you to accept that.

**Mr Stapleton**—I accept that. My reading of *Hansard* and statements in opinion pieces in the *Australian* usually refer to the political funding of organisations rather than the complete picture.

**CHAIR**—I have just given you the government's view, which is the reason for the committee inquiry.

**Mr Stapleton**—Thank you.

**CHAIR**—As a general view, and taking up the words that you used in your last sentence, about making USQ 'a better place', would you take it that students should be able to be free to join or support the services which they want rather than pay a fee for a whole range of services, some of which they do not want?

**Mr Stapleton**—I suggest that there are two parts to that question: one is to join and one is to pay for services. I suggest that the argument about whether students should be compelled to join a student organisation such as a student guild or a university union is not particularly relevant. It is not going to be an argument that we will win. It makes no real difference to students. It is administratively convenient to say that they become members of the guild when they enrol at USQ. The second part of the question is about whether students should be asked or required to pay for services that are provided by the university or at the university that they choose to enrol at, whether they use those services or not. I believe they should. Services which are specifically excluded from inclusion in the tuition fee, according to DEST, are an essential part of a university. It is what makes a university different from being just a building.

In society we all pay for services that we may or may not choose to use. Taxes and rates—although we are not a form of government—are a classic example. For example, I do not have children and therefore I do not use the parks particularly much in Toowoomba. I do not use the public library provided out of my rates, because I use the university library. So we all pay for services—some we use and some we do not. Not having children means that I do not benefit from child welfare payments, but I pay my taxes.

**CHAIR**—I just make the point, as has been pointed out many times in this inquiry, that students have a very limited range of disposable income and to make a compulsory up-front payment for services that they may sometimes use but may never use, such as in the case of external students, to us seems to be an injustice. At USQ, is the services or amenities fee a separate payment? Does that then entitle the student to be a member of the union or is that separate?

**Mr Stapleton**—No. The payment at the University of Southern Queensland, as is relatively typical in Queensland, is called a student guild fee. For example, the University of New England has a separate sports union, a university union and a student association. In Queensland we have one organisation, a student guild, which covers those three organisations. That is a typical model in Queensland.

**CHAIR**—How much is that fee for full-time students?

**Mr Stapleton**—It depends. It is based on the number of units that a student studies. If you live within the 4350 postcode, which is the Toowoomba postcode, it is about \$40 per unit per semester. If you live outside the 4350 postcode, it is about \$22 per unit per semester.

**CHAIR**—Do you have many external students—that is, students who may never visit the campus?

**Mr Stapleton**—If we look at onshore students, because distance education students living offshore do not pay, University of Southern Queensland has about 5,000 students on campus and about—depending on which group of figures you use—12,000 to 15,000 distance education students, some of whom do not, as you say, step foot on campus.

**CHAIR**—And do they pay the amenities fee?

**Mr Stapleton**—If they live within Australia and outside the 4350 postcode, they pay the \$20 per unit per semester.

**CHAIR**—They pay the fee.

**Mr Stapleton**—That does not mean that they do not get services, of course, because they do not set foot on campus.

**CHAIR**—Have you done any survey or polling to show how many students would still support the organisations that presently get maintenance if this legislation is passed?

**Mr Stapleton**—No, we have not, but we have relied on figures from Western Australia which show that about 10 to 20 per cent of on-campus students would join. Working with this, we assume that no external students or distance education students, if any, would join.

**CHAIR**—I see. But you have not done any polling at your own university?

**Mr Stapleton**—No.

**CHAIR**—Okay.

**Mr Stapleton**—The reason for that is that I find that those sorts of surveys are unreliable. When I was a librarian, when we asked people what library hours they would like, there was a different answer to that than to the question of what library hours they would use. For example, students would like libraries open till midnight and all day Saturday and Sunday, but

in practice they do not use it at those times. They would like to have it open when they may wish to come and use it. So doing a survey about how many would join is unreliable data.

**CHAIR**—Well, in that case, wouldn't you consider the Western Australian information unreliable data?

**Mr Stapleton**—No, because that is based on fact. We know how many students over a period of time actually joined.

**CHAIR**—But, if you did not then think it was worthwhile doing a survey at your own university, wouldn't that make the Western Australian one seem incomparable in that way?

**Mr Stapleton**—No. What I am saying is: in one case we have practice—that is, what actually happened in Western Australia—and in the other case you are suggesting that I would ask students whether they may or may not join the organisation next year.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—I understand the distinction you are making between the hypothetical versus the practical. First of all, thank you for appearing. It is a relief, regardless of whether or not we agree with your views, to have someone who is well researched, is specific in their submission and has looked at other submissions. Would it surprise you to know that in law—that is, in court cases that have tested the issue of a compulsory fee—it has been found that an amenities fee or a student union membership, whatever you want to call it, is analogous to local government and the payment of rates?

**Mr Stapleton**—No, I am not surprised at that. In fact, I am also aware that a court case relating to whether it is freedom of association has also been dismissed by a court.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—Indeed. I might just follow on from Senator Troeth's question about surveying members, not so much to find out what members would use the services—I am just curious if USQ, for example, has an idea of student views on the legislation or on the so-called voluntary student unionism concept.

**Mr Stapleton**—We have done some vox pop. We have done sort of a quick and dirty research on our web site where people can tick a box in answer to a question. It gives an indication. I do not think it is particularly reliable, because if you wanted to log on and refresh the screen 20 times you could tick the box 20 times, but it gives a bit of a feeling. The general feeling is that, when it is explained to students the implications of the bill, students do not support the legislation. We have emailed information to students and have had one response from a student saying that they support the legislation. Again, I do not think that that is particularly reliable. It gives us a bit of a feeling, but I do not believe that that would also translate into students voluntarily paying the fee.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—Speaking of ticking boxes, does your organisation allow for people to opt out if they do not want to be compulsorily joined to a union as such?

**Mr Stapleton**—Yes. It is made very clear to students when they enrol that a condition of enrolment is payment of this fee. If they have a conscientious objection, they can write to the university. They still have to pay the fee—and I know that has been criticised—but they have to pay the fee to the university; it does not come to the guild. The university gets about five to 10 of those applications a year. In fact, because the number is so low, if you write in, you will

be excluded from being a member of the guild but you still have to pay the fee to the university.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—Indeed. If a student does not pay the fee for whatever reason—for example, they cannot afford it—are there options to assist students, such as interest-free loans, a loan scheme or some kind of welfare assistance?

**Mr Stapleton**—The university has a scheme like that. It should be borne in mind that, when students come to university, there are a lot of expenses; there is not just the student guild fee. That is one of the reasons we have split the fee into a semester fee rather than a yearly fee. We also make a lot of effort to explain to students that, in choosing to come to university, you have to buy textbooks; you have to buy pens and paper; you have to pay a deposit on your flat or a six-month advance deposit on your residential college; you have to pay deposits on gas, electricity, utilities; you have to pay bus fares; and you have to pay the student guild fee. That is the package. In coming to university, they are the costs. It is the same as if you were to move town or leave home and move into a flat. There are costs involved in that. The guild fee as a percentage of the total expenditure that students pay is relatively small. It is the price of a couple of textbooks, isn't it?

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—Indeed, even when you factor in the abolition of the educational textbook subsidy scheme. With regard to the expulsion of students who choose not to pay the fee, is that something that happens regularly or has happened at your institution?

**Mr Stapleton**—The university has just changed the procedure for this at the insistence of DEST. Yes, in the past, some students who have not paid the fee have been de-enrolled, if you like, but the university has also seen this as part of an audit. There are a lot of external students in particular who apply to enrol in November/December, go through the process, get their first mail-out in March, see that there is an assignment due, and, because something has changed in their life, they then decide they are not going to do it anymore and just stop. It may appear to be onerous or horrendous to cancel that enrolment because they do not pay the student fee. In fact, these are students who have effectively dropped out but have not advised the university. By cancelling their enrolment, they actually save the impost of a HECS bill.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—That is right. When you say, 'At the urging of DEST,' have I missed a circular or a government policy change?

**Mr Stapleton**—I think it is a reinterpretation of a policy change about allowing students who are cancelled to re-enrol after the census date.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—So it relates to the census. Did you receive a letter or has the institution been formally notified by DEST to that effect?

**Mr Stapleton**—I understand that the vice-chancellor did. I personally cannot understand this involvement from the department because it means that we re-enrol the student. They still have a HECS bill if they cancelled after the census. Why not let them re-enrol? The department is insistent that government policy is such that they cannot be re-enrolled after cancelling. If you let them re-enrol, you keep them and you might keep them for three years while they do a degree but, if you do not let them re-enrol, they still get the HECS bill—they do not pay the student guild fees—and they may not come back next semester.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—And the government still gets the fees. Thank you.

**Senator FIFIELD**—Mr Stapleton, I compliment you on your monitoring of the *Hansard* and the *Australian* newspaper.

**Mr Stapleton**—Thank you. It does provide light relief at times.

**Senator FIFIELD**—In relation to the *Australian* newspaper and Mr Smith, who you quoted as saying that the issue was an article of faith, that really comes back to what Senator Troeth was saying about the motivation for this. The article of faith is in fact freedom of association, which is the prime driver of this legislation.

**Mr Stapleton**—I do not have a problem with that being an article of faith. What this bill does, though, is to implement the article of faith, which is the voluntary student membership side, and to put in another part which says that universities cannot impose an amenities fee that is specifically excluded from tuition fees to pay for services. One is an article of faith—

**CHAIR**—And one is academic services.

**Mr Stapleton**—There are two different parts to this bill.

**Senator FIFIELD**—I guess it comes to the issue raised before. You can elect not to join the student guild but to pay the money to the university instead, but you are still being forced to associate in a way that you might not choose to do, so I think it applies regardless. In your oral evidence and also in your written submission, in item 1 in your summary, you say that you would see ‘all 45 full-time or part-time and 100 casual staff of the USQ Student Guild being retrenched on or before 31 December 2005’ if this legislation were enacted. You are saying that all staff would be retrenched.

**Mr Stapleton**—That is correct.

**Senator FIFIELD**—But that would be assuming that not a single person would voluntarily join your guild.

**Mr Stapleton**—No, it does not assume that at all.

**Senator FIFIELD**—What does it assume?

**Mr Stapleton**—It assumes that, as an incorporated association, the board have a fiducial responsibility to not trade if they believe that they may become insolvent. In order to protect staff entitlements of approximately \$800,000, the board have a responsibility to ensure that if they are unsure of the income that may come in next year they cannot, in accordance with their corporate responsibilities, continue to trade. Therefore it is my advice to them that they should take this action, and the board have accepted that advice in order to protect staff entitlements. By the way, we still have several hundred thousand dollars worth of debt as well.

**Senator FIFIELD**—Your advice is on the basis you have just described. Using the West Australian example, though, are you not capable of projecting what your revenue might be, assuming there was a 20 or 30 per cent take-up and tailoring your services accordingly, conducting surveys of students or looking at new sorts of membership packages. I have cited this earlier to other witnesses. Like the NRMA or RACQ, you could say, ‘Pay this much, you

get this level of service; pay a bit more, you might get double.’ Have you looked at those alternatives to shutting up shop?

**Mr Stapleton**—Yes. We currently get \$1.7 million in fees. I notice the minister has stated we get \$2.2 million or \$2.3 million. That is incorrect. We get about \$1.7 million in fees, as I say my submission. Although fees have gone up, the total fee income has not increased significantly—or, in fact, at all—since 2001. We would estimate an income of approximately \$200,000. We will have debts of close to \$600,000 for repayments next year. Hence, we would be insolvent and must comply with the relevant legislation. If we did not have the debt and we sold the property, we would get income of about \$200,000.

It is my estimate that we would have enough money to employ perhaps one or maybe two staff—certainly not at my level but at an entry point level. They would carry out some duties. I described this person to the board and said they would have to be—excuse the term—a bit of a dogsbody and do everything. I would wonder who would then arrange their payroll for them and do some of the other things on the accounting side of it. I also foresee that in three or four years time you would have a young person doing a job, perhaps with an assistant, providing some services. In taking up what the speaker before me said, they would have to be responsive to what students want. Taking up what the speaker before me said, there is not a lot of time to be responsive to members’ needs when you are one person doing everything. In three or four years time when that person wants to move on, I would see a lot of difficulty—I will not be there, of course—for that person in being able to arrange their successor.

**Senator FIFIELD**—What is the level of debt that you are carrying at the moment?

**Mr Stapleton**—We currently have two debts that we are paying. One is \$350,000 a year to the university. That is an interest-free loan. The other is \$175,000 a year plus interest to the Commonwealth Bank on the fit-out of the recreation centre and some land next the university that we purchased.

**Senator FIFIELD**—Are those debts larger than those of your typical student guild or university union?

**Mr Stapleton**—I think that 10 years ago, when we started paying the debt, we had nearly \$6 million worth of debt. Yes, that was large, but we were committed to paying it off in 10 years. We have almost done that. We will pay that off in 10 years. We are paying it off very quickly. The university building that we built is a sports facility, a three-court international standard facility. It cost a lot of money to build, but it is an asset to the university. There is a lot of pressure—in fact, students ask us: ‘When are we getting an aquatic centre? The UNE has one that was built in 1981.’ If I had a dollar for every time I have been asked by a student, a parent or a staff member, ‘When are we getting a swimming pool?’ or ‘Where is the swimming pool?’ I would have built the swimming pool. To build a 50-metre heated indoor pool—and we need a heated indoor pool in Toowoomba because of the climate—would cost \$8 million to \$10 million. Based on 10 per cent of our students joining, that gives us about 500 people. I just do not see the numbers adding up. Without something like an aquatic centre at the university, the USQ will not be a better place. It will continue to attract students, but students come expecting these sorts of facilities. They have them at their private and public high schools, and they expect to find them at universities.

**Senator FIFIELD**—I am just intrigued that no other guild or student union has said that, if this legislation were passed, they would need to shut up shop, lock the door and walk out.

**Mr Stapleton**—Yes, and some of those who may be appearing later today have heard me say it. I believe that in some cases student organisations are being naive in not doing that, particularly those that are incorporated, as they are in Queensland. I suggest that they will be in breach of insolvency rules if they do not.

**Senator FIFIELD**—Your recommendation 1 is:

That University Councils be left to decide if students should pay an amenities and facilities fee.

Is it fair to summarise that as meaning that university councils know better than students what services are of value?

**Mr Stapleton**—The short answer is probably yes, because they have the long-term view of the university at heart and they have experience in what services they believe are best going to suit their university. When students come to choose a particular university, they know what package of services that the university will provide. Students come to university for a very short term—three or four years tops usually—and do not necessarily have the world experience and the experience in higher education about what the total package should be and what they will gain from that package.

I was involved in campaigns here when we were talking about what sorts of subjects should be taught at universities and what should be included in the history program. I learned shortly after that that in fact the professors were right: they knew what was best to be included in the Australian history course I was studying, not I.

I believe that if we let university councils make this decision, this will engender some genuine competition between universities. Our university, for example, may decide that it does wish to impose an amenities fee because it wants to offer a package of services to students. The UNE or the Central Queensland University may decide otherwise. We would then have some competition between universities, because one would be offering a range and package of services that others may not. Students would then be able to more freely choose between universities and there would in fact be competition. My suggestion would engender competition amongst universities.

**Senator FIFIELD**—So we can trust students to choose between universities and to vote in student elections but we cannot trust them to decide whether or not to pay a fee?

**Mr Stapleton**—It is not about trust. It is about the package of services that should be offered when students come to university. Do you trust me, for example, to choose what taxes I want to pay? Do you trust me to say that I want to pay taxes for libraries and sports facilities and not for something else?

**Senator FIFIELD**—I have never accepted the analogy that student guilds or unions are the equivalent of national, state or local governments. I will let other senators ask their questions.

**Mr Stapleton**—I know that you do not accept that analogy, but it is really the only useful one that applies. It is not saying that governments—

**CHAIR**—We will move on to Senator Campbell's questions.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—Let him finish his sentence.

**Mr Stapleton**—What I am saying is that we have to use some analogies. Using the analogy is not saying that student organisations are in fact a form of local government. It is an analogy.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—I think that it is a very effective analogy. I have a couple of quick questions. You have partly answered my first question in relation to point 1 in your statement and summary. It seems to me that all you have done has been to apply good corporate governance to your situation at the university at Toowoomba. Are you saying that all organisations similar to yours at universities throughout Queensland are incorporated?

**Mr Stapleton**—Yes, except for the University of Queensland and a slight variation at Griffith University. At James Cook University, the University of Southern Queensland, Central Queensland University, Queensland University of Technology and Griffith University on the Gold Coast the student organisations are established under the act that establishes those organisations and they are incorporated under that act.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—So it may well be that a number of student organisations similar to yours could find themselves in some difficulty if they have not given thought to the likely implications of this bill and the consequences on their organisations.

**Mr Stapleton**—I believe that to be the case. Some of my colleagues do not, but from my observations and from looking at their annual reports and their reserves I think that, in some cases, some organisations are being either eternally optimistic or naive.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—The point I am making is that there could be unintended consequences as a result of this legislation for individuals who may be on the boards that are managing these funds.

**Mr Stapleton**—I believe that to be the case, particularly in smaller regional universities. To take an example, if 10 per cent of students join, we will have about 500 students join. At the University of Queensland, if 10 per cent join, there will be 3,000. That is a huge difference.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—In point 5 of your summary you say that USQ will be forced to do one of three things that you list as parts (a), (b) and (c). Part (b) starts with ‘Divert DEST funding from staffing, teaching or research program funds’. Is it your reading of the legislation that you would be able to do that in order to provide those services?

**Mr Stapleton**—I am unsure about that. I have had various opinions given to me. I have heard it said by supporters of the bill that if universities want these services then they should pay for them. If it is the case that universities want the services and pay for them, where else will the money come from if it does not come from income from international students or a DEST grant? It must come from somewhere. If it comes from a DEST grant, that is taxpayers’ money. My point is that if we divert money from teaching and research, which are the core activities of universities, we will end up with taxpayers paying for the services, not the students who use them.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—I suppose that could be argued as a case of broadening the tax base by making all of us pay, not just students.

**Mr Stapleton**—Members of your party were arguing the other day to broaden the tax base and I guess that is a valid point.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—Point 7 of your summary says:

This would be contrary to policies of the Australian and State Government Departments of Health and Sport.

Can you enlighten us as to what you are referring to there?

**Mr Stapleton**—One example would be that the Australian government have allocated, through the Australian Institute of Sport, \$90 million to fund a program which we think is largely based on or similar to a program that we run to assist and establish after-school and vacation care programs run by sporting organisations. They have allocated funding to appoint two staff in Toowoomba to look after the southern Queensland region. Their job is to go round to, say, a football or sporting club and say, ‘Do you want to run an after-school program which would bring in kids to be fit?’ This has been allocated \$90 million of taxpayers’ funds. This money is for the primary and secondary sector, but the tertiary sector, which is our responsibility, is being depleted at the same time.

**Senator GEORGE CAMPBELL**—Thank you. It is an excellent submission.

**Senator LUNDY**—To follow up on that point, you are quite right: the federal government has recently put in place a raft of policies aimed at keeping people more active. Do you have any insight into the sort of drop-off rates in physical activity for postsecondary students and therefore into what role these sorts of facilities play in maintaining levels of physical activity?

**Mr Stapleton**—I cannot quote you figures. I can quote you anecdotal evidence and I know there was some research done in Melbourne a few years ago. We also know that there is a huge drop-off rate in community sport above the under-16s age group in all sorts of sports. Some of that is because of work but some of it is the dropout rate. We run a number of sports programs, including lunchtime sport, formal sporting competitions and night-time sporting competitions. As well as that we run a series of programs to try to introduce new sports to students—say, a four- to six-week program to learn to play basketball or a sport that they may not have learned when they were growing up.

**Senator LUNDY**—Unrelated to that, what is the role of the Clive Berghofer Recreation Centre in the local community, particularly in attracting local and community events not related or linked to the university? What is its importance to the local economy?

**Mr Stapleton**—We have had a lot of events there. We have had concerts there; the community have held functions there. We run a lot of sport at night where the community are encouraged to come to raise revenue from the community and to help keep our fees low but also to give students an opportunity. For example, we do not have a netball club on campus but we have 36 netball teams playing in our centre on a Monday night so that provides opportunity for students to participate.

The facility is used by the community. It is an international standard facility—that is why it cost so much. It is of great advantage to the community and the region and it also attracts students to Toowoomba and gets them out of the capital cities. I believe that the best place for a student is to get them out of the capital cities away from the Clayton campuses at Monash

University and into some of the regions to spend some of their money. It is cheaper; accommodation and transport are cheaper and it is cheaper to run. This is what attracts international students to our university.

**Senator LUNDY**—To what degree will your ability to compete for those students, both domestically and internationally, be changed if the VSU legislation passes, your worst fears are realised and the sporting groups are closed down?

**Mr Stapleton**—It is my view that the facility will run down, as I say in my submission. The sports floor in the stadium cost \$500,000 when it was installed in 1996. It will need replacing in about 20 years time. It is going to cost over \$1 million—who is going to do that? It will not be user-pays and it certainly will not be the 500 or so voluntary members of the student organisation. If the university pays for it, because it will have to be done, will it be taxpayers' money that is used to do that? If they do not do it, I believe the facilities will run down. We put a lot of money into maintaining our facility in a pristine condition. It will start to run down because there are limited funds available to universities and they will have to be spread wider. I think that will have an effect over three to five years on students—not in 2006 but by 2010 it will affect student numbers.

**Senator LUNDY**—I have one final question. You make the very important point in your submission that it should be remembered that students are only on campus for approximately 24 of 52 weeks and that on small and regional campuses these commercial activities are not the goldmine that some may think they are. We heard previous witnesses today, the students association here at UNE, arguing that commercial alternatives were a viable option for university students. What is your view on that?

**Mr Stapleton**—We do have cheap sausage rolls at our campus, but I believe that people who say that are naive and have not run a food and beverage service. The submission from DEST states that our income in 2003 from our annual report was over \$5.2 million or something. What is not made clear—and thank you for the opportunity to expand on that—is that, in running a food and beverage service like that, if you are making 10 per cent net profit, you are doing very well. That leaves us with about \$500,000. When we had a travel agency, the cost of goods in the travel agency was about 93 per cent. So a million dollars worth of sales cost us \$930,000. So just giving gross figures is a bit distorting.

I can tell you about running food and beverage services on a campus like ours. In a good week in the refectory, we take about \$5,000 a day. This week, because students are on holiday, we will be lucky to take \$500 a day. We have expenses over 52 weeks. We work very hard to run those operations at a profit—and we do, but not every year. Everybody in small business struggles, and we are in a small business. It is not the goldmine that people think it is. There are high sales but they are over 24 to 26 weeks a year, and we have to provide a service on campus to the staff. It is a tough business and not necessarily viable.

**CHAIR**—Thank you, Mr Stapleton.

**Proceedings suspended from 12.42 pm to 1.53 pm**

**STEPHEN, Mr Gerard, Chair, Armidale Community International Sports Precinct Fundraising Committee**

**HARRIS, Mr Gregory Mark, Chair, Australian Working Party on Voluntary Student Unionism, Australian University Sport; and Executive Director, Sydney University Sport**

**MARSDEN, Mr Daniel, Chief Executive Officer, Australian University Sport**

**IAKIN, Mr Adrian, Executive Officer, Newcastle University Sport**

**GRIFFITH, Mr Stephen John, Executive Director, Sport UNE, University of New England**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. We have submissions Nos 173, 69 and 66 before us. Before we ask questions, you have an opportunity to make a brief statement for two or three minutes for the record, if you wish, or to state your interest in this inquiry. You can also indicate if you wish any of your evidence to be made confidentially to the committee. Mr Marsden, I now invite you to make a brief opening statement.

**Mr Marsden**—Mr Harris will be speaking on behalf of AUS.

**Mr Harris**—Thank you for the invitation to appear. I would like to point out that I am chair of the VSU working group for Australian University Sport, which is a collective of university sports organisations. As well as that, I am the Executive Director of Sydney University Sport. In stating that, I would like to put forward today the fact that Australian University Sport is very disappointed in the government's proposed legislation in that no real impact statement has been undertaken by the government on the impact this legislation will have on sport not only at the tertiary education level but Australia wide. I have here today an impact statement that we have put together. It highlights the massive impact that the legislation will have on sport at universities across Australia, including the loss of over \$32 million in investment in sport, health and fitness. We not only provide opportunities for the students at the universities but also have a massive involvement with local communities.

The document we have tabled also highlights a lot of the inconsistencies with government policies on sport, health and fitness, one of which is the user-pays myth that sport, health and fitness can be funded on a user-pays basis. This is totally inconsistent with government expenditure at federal, state and local levels where \$2.2 billion annually is invested in sport, health and fitness. What we are looking at there is a situation which the government itself funds, but is now denying our organisations the same opportunities. In fact, when we talk about a user-pays system, in the majority of cases in Australian universities there is a base service fee which is charged for sport, health and fitness. On top of that, if people decide to utilise other services, such as facilities or club sport programs, they in fact have to pay for access to further facilities. Just as within the community, base levels of infrastructure and opportunities are funded from a tax or levy.

Also, we would like to think there is a major inconsistency in the government's investment of \$90 million into sport, health and fitness opportunities for children at primary school or high school. We look at that and ask, 'Where do we find a corresponding opportunity for our

organisations to be able to raise the essential funds to be able to provide the infrastructure that is so important for these activities?’

In looking at the Australian Sports Commission’s Strategic Plan 1998-2001 it was noted that 10 per cent more people were involved in the activities which we provide. An estimated \$500 million would be saved from the health budget each year. Half a million students and community members utilise our programs and facilities. As I said before, not only the members of our university community but a very large number of local communities get the opportunity to be able to utilise the infrastructure which the universities have developed. The universities will no longer be able to sustain or develop any more facilities if the legislation proceeds. This is especially the case in the regional universities and the role which they have played in these communities. That is why today we have representatives from UNE and Newcastle university: to be able to discuss the massive impact that it will have on these communities.

The other situation which we would like to put forward in the document which I have tabled today is the amendments to the legislation. We think these amendments would address some of the major issues the government has with respect to compulsory membership and political use of funds. It would also offer that, whilst some reform is probably required in this sector, the universities should be accountable for what we call campus services.

I do not think anybody who joins any of our sporting organisations thinks that they are joining a union in the context which the government has applied. We are about sport, health and fitness, and we are about being able to provide those opportunities to many people. The amendments which we have put forward provide the government with the opportunity to be able to satisfy some of its desires but, at the same time, allow us to proceed and provide opportunities in sport, health and fitness for hundreds of thousands of Australians.

**Mr Iakin**—I have tabled a copy of our handbook. You often ask about what kinds of services we provide, and that will give you an outline of the services that NUSport provides to students and community members. If you actually spoke to members of the community across the Hunter—local schools, parents, sporting organisations, elite athletes and local government—you would find that the facilities and services that have been provided by NUSport in the Newcastle region are universally welcomed and strongly supported. In fact, a former Lord Mayor of Newcastle thanked us when our Forum Sports and Aquatic Centre was opened in February 1998 for providing the region with a range of sporting facilities that the Hunter needed, but which governments at all levels, including his own council, had failed to provide.

What I want to focus on is how important the facilities are to regional universities. The need for the services and facilities provided by NUSport is clearly demonstrated by both the number of users we have and the diversity of users. Last year there were over one million visits to our facilities on campus, including use by 62 local schools and elite teams such as the Newcastle Knights, our NRL team, the Hunter Jaegers and many others. Most importantly, however, we are talking about facilities for students. Our university student campus questionnaire showed that use by students was over 88 per cent last year, with an 80 per cent rate of satisfaction. Given that kind of utilisation, we stress that this very high usage rate would drop dramatically if fees for students were significantly increased. The fees are kept

low for students. We charge students about 50 per cent of the fees we charge the community users who come in when the facilities are not otherwise required.

What I would like to bring to your attention is that the excellent sporting facilities we have at the University of Newcastle have been developed largely through student service fees but that the ongoing costs are actually financed by user fees, so we are applying the user-pays principle. The loss of university service fee funding would stop further growth and upgrades and, eventually, the replacement of ageing facilities. While customers, including students, are prepared to pay for fairly priced facilities and services that they receive here and now, they are not prepared to pay for future development and expansion. As my colleague said this morning, students who are here short term do not look ahead; other people need to do that for them.

It took over 12 years of constant planning and careful husbanding of funds before work on our Forum Sports and Aquatic Centre was started in August 1996. The centre cost \$15¼ million. Our predecessor had to borrow \$5 million for the building. NUSport has paid \$1.8 million off the principal and another \$1.6 million in interest since 1998 but still owes \$3.2 million. The VSU legislation will place NUSport under severe hardship to repay this outstanding loan. We want to stress that when the loan was taken out in 1997 it was taken out in good faith under the principles that applied at the time and with the expectation that there would be continuing income from the student service fee into the future to pay off that loan.

NUSport has important activities in supporting the university's education programs. We assist with physical education and physiotherapy. We have over a thousand students doing coursework using the facilities that NUSport provides. We have partnered in teaching credit courses in fitness, recreation and sport and we also provide opportunities for students to acquire credentials in sports related courses—such as first aid, fitness and sports administration—through a scheme we named in honour of Neal Dickinson, one of our previous treasurers. We also provide extensive mentoring to club officials to help them acquire the skills needed to operate sporting clubs. In fact, I have given your secretary a copy of the handbook which we give to our clubs. It has taken a huge amount of time to develop. It took over six months to write. It has 50,000 words. We do a lot of work in this area and those people then go out into the community. A lot of our graduates have run important sporting organisations in the Newcastle community, including the Wildfires, as a result of the skills they have acquired.

The final point that I would like to make is that NUSport is a voluntary organisation. All of our membership is voluntary. People join if they wish to; no-one is forced to be a member. We provide services from general service fees that are extensively used—evident from the very high participation rates. The fees are kept low for students. We are a not-for-profit organisation, so everything is invested back for the benefit of our students and for the community, which also uses—in fact, it demands to use—our service because the facilities are so good. Thank you for your time.

**Mr Griffith**—I am very proud to have the opportunity to appear before you. I am also proud that you have been able to spend the day in a student run and managed facility. It is a pity we had tight timelines and so we did not get the opportunity to actually take you around and give you a little bit more of a tour.

I am also proud of the commitment, passion and hard work of the generations of students, staff and office-bearers of Sport UNE over the last 66 years who have helped us to develop the facilities that we occupy today, which are recognised as being amongst the finest in all Australian universities. But they are facilities that have been able to be developed because of our capacity to take on loans and to have general service fee income coming through from the university to sustain the infrastructure. For over 66 years we have had facilities that cost a lot of money to maintain. You have seen the 15 hectares of playing fields. It costs us a quarter of a million dollars to employ three ground staff and buy the plant and machinery to provide those facilities and services.

It is also with a very heavy heart that I appear before you, as I fear that the current VSU legislation will decimate those facilities and services. That fear is based on what happened in Western Australia, where six to 30 per cent of students joined their organisations. The legislation in its current form could strip up to \$890,000 out of our operational income. For our students, that will mean we will have no capacity to maintain the playing fields which they expect—where they can break out—and which give them balance in their campus lives. We will have no capacity to insure our students for accidents that may take place while they are participating in sport or physical recreation. We will have no capacity to insure the buildings and our staff for professional indemnity. We will have no capacity to subsidise the user fees that encourage our students to get a healthy balance in their campus lives by playing sport and engaging in regular physical activity at an affordable price. We will have no capacity to support or subsidise our clubs. Also, we will see a reduction of up to 50 per cent of staff in full-time employment and up to 80 per cent of our casual staff positions could be lost.

In our regional community, Sport UNE has been the major investor in sporting infrastructure over the past 30 years. The university have not funded the facilities. They have not contributed a cent, and nor have the state, local or federal governments provided any funds to the infrastructure and assets that provide a significant attraction to students studying at the university. Having developed the facilities, an example of community use occurred last weekend when the town playing fields were declared unplayable by the council when we had a fair bit of rain. We facilitated the conduct of Australian football and premier league soccer competitions that were relocated to the university. If we have no capacity to maintain our playing fields—to even cut the grass—that will not occur in the future.

Coming down the hill, you may have seen the new construction of our hockey facility at the back. That is something we have facilitated. It has taken over a decade to come to fruition. We constructed the first synthetic hockey field in this area to save our students and participants having to travel to Tamworth—a return trip of over three hours—to play on a facility of that standard. Having developed the facilities and provided the land for Hockey New England to develop the second field, we were also able to develop, in partnership with the community—with no funds from students or Sport UNE—an international standard facility in this region.

I think it is worth noting that the massive demand placed on Sport UNE by students arises from a situation that is unique but that probably can also be transferred to most regional universities. I think we are unique because we are in a community of only 22,000 students where probably 95 per cent to 98 per cent of our students have uprooted their ties from their

local sports clubs. So anything that is provided in the way of sport, physical recreation or fitness tends to be provided by Sport UNE. There is not the wide range of services available in the wider community. If we are not here to provide those services in the future, because we do not have the funding source, they simply will not exist. I think that is a very different scenario from the Monash Clayton campus, where people in a metropolitan area are probably continuing to play their club sports. In a regional university context, if we are not providing it, it will not be around.

If the federal government, as a consequence of its VSU legislation, takes away our capacity to fund facilities and programs, no-one else will step up to the plate to fund them. You have heard from the Vice-Chancellor this morning. There is no capacity. One of the first things that we did in modelling the legislation in its current form was to ask: could you take over half a million dollars worth of funding to ensure that we can employ ground staff and maintain the building infrastructure that we have developed for the university over time?

**Mr Stephen**—I am a farm manager. I am also appearing here on behalf of a community leadership team working in partnership with Sport UNE to raise funds to upgrade the sporting facilities at the University of New England, not only for the benefit of the students but also for the benefit of our local and regional communities. On your right you can see a board about the project that we are currently undertaking. Our fundraising initiatives have been stalled because of concerns about the VSU legislation, with potential benefactors being unwilling to commit funds to the university if Sport UNE will be unable to manage and maintain the facilities as an outcome of the proposed legislation.

Speaking as a parent who has a son attending UNE, parents' decisions are based on infrastructure. We look at the facilities that are available and UNE is certainly quite unique in its campus structure and the number of colleges. Because the students are so closely associated with their colleges there is a lot of sport—intercollege, intercommunity and intertown sport—and sport is a very big component of the students' life at UNE.

We currently have over 2,000 people from the local community attending our facilities—whether they be Glen Innes rugby players coming to play rugby or ladies coming to play netball, hockey or whatever—and coming to use our gym facilities, including schools that come and visit and use the aquatic centre and the gymnasium. So we are not only looking at the university; we are looking at the wider community.

Another point that is well made is that the students who come to regional New South Wales sometimes look for part-time jobs to help their parents defray the costs of university. We feel that the legislation in its current form reduces the opportunity of the student association to employ students on a part-time basis. We currently have 175 casual staff employed and, of those, 160 casual jobs are specifically earmarked for students, so that is quite a nest egg for the students who are trying to help their parents pay their way.

My committee therefore urges that the Senate legislation committee consider an amendment to the VSU legislation to recognise the value to students and their community and essential nature of the provision of services through the universal collection of the general service fee, and include a funding model that will allow as many of these services as possible

to be maintained—not only for the benefit of the university but also for the wider New England community.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—Mr Harris, in your capacity as the chair of the VSU working group can I ask you a couple of questions. First of all, I note that you have suggested amendments which have been endorsed by your colleagues. Is it your preference that the legislation does not get passed?

**Mr Harris**—Without doubt our preference would be for amended legislation, as per that document, to be passed. In making the universities accountable by giving them a controlling share of the boards then we do not have the situation where it is a student organisation, or a student union as such, that is responsible for the application of funds and for the activities which we conduct; it is a joint venture arrangement between the members of the community and the university appointees. That would give the accountability which I think is appropriate here. To the best of my knowledge I do not think any of my colleagues involved in sport have been responsible for any political activity or funding of political activity. I would find that a very, very strange situation.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—I just wanted to know, for the record, whether you want VSU in some form—that is, the amended form that you are proposing—or if you would be happy if this legislation just disappeared?

**Mr Harris**—I think we, as a group, have conducted our affairs in a very prudential manner and applied our funds to the best interests of our constituencies. I do not think for a moment that we are really the target of the legislation as such, so naturally we would be happy to get on with our business as we currently do. However, realising that the government has a mandate and has its ideological pursuits, a change to it would be an acceptable situation for us but not a preferred one.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—In your comments you refer to the issue of compliance. When you talk about a tertiary education provider being required to certify annually et cetera to ensure they comply with the legislation, do you have penalty provisions in mind? You would be aware that currently there is a suggestion for quite severe penalties. When I asked the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee about these penalties they said they were quite insulting. Do you believe there should be penalties?

**Mr Harris**—I think that each university—and I think this is a very important point—as a service and education provider should be accountable. But I draw the analogy with a high school. Newington College is down the road from my university. It has 1,000 students. It is allowed to incorporate into its fees charges for sport, health and fitness. So we are allowing that to occur at a secondary level. They are in control of their own affairs yet down the road, where I have 47,000 students and a similar raft of facilities, we are now being denied the opportunity because sport, health and fitness are not considered a part of the curriculum at a tertiary education level. I find that a terribly inconsistent situation throughout the education network and one which I am staggered trying to understand.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—Do you support the current penalty provisions that are in the legislation?

**Mr Harris**—I would not support the current penalty provisions in the legislation at all. I think the universities need to be accountable and if universities want to charge a service fee for infrastructure and for services which are provided then that should be a matter of choice. After all, the party which is introducing the legislation is the party of freedom of choice. If a university sees it as appropriate—just the same as Harvard, Oxford, Cambridge or any of the other major international universities in the world do—they should charge a service fee for essential infrastructure. The leaders of our universities are mature enough I would think to determine what is appropriate and what is inappropriate.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—What's a few hundred years experience? You define non-political student societies as an appropriate delegation, I suppose, for that money, among others. How do you define 'political'? And leading on from that: is sport okay, but cultural, social or indeed political development or expression somehow a bad thing, in our universities? I want to find out where you guys are coming from; the reason I am asking you, Mr Harris, is simply because you are the chair of the working group. How do you define 'non-political'? Does it mean 'non-party political'? Does it mean the philosophical debating club? Does it mean the small 'l' liberal students? I do not have a problem with those people having a voice on campus—I just want to know: is it the case that sport is okay but the others are not?

**Mr Harris**—No. In fact, if you look at the amendments which we have provided we have included the artistic, cultural and other essential services. We are looking at a very diverse group of entities within the service providers, as we call them. I also put forward the proposition that there are people who have much greater experience in defining what 'political' or 'non-political' activities are than me. I do not think that I am probably the best judge to say what is 'political' and what is 'non-political'; however, in the amendments we have included a raft of services and activities. There are other people better qualified than me to actually address what is 'political' and what is 'non-political'. And we are talking about the political activities still being allowed to be conducted by groups on campus, but not funded—I think that is a very important point.

**Mr Marsden**—From an Australian University Sport perspective we are obviously majorly concerned about the effects on sport. We acknowledge the fact that there will be major effects on the other areas, services and amenities that are provided by the university, but our sole concern obviously is the maintenance and protection of sport in university communities and the broader community.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—Chair, if my colleagues do not ask the question, I wish to ask one on notice to Mr Griffith. I would like us to give him the opportunity to respond to comments that have been made that I think are an adverse reflection on the UNE sporting community. If you want to elaborate on notice about your empire-building activities, we would be more than interested to hear what on earth that is about. I point out, for the record, that any allegations or comments made were not substantiated in any way by those people who made them.

**Senator FIFIELD**—Mr Harris, I would like to reassure you that we do not necessarily see 'union' as a pejorative term. We recognise that sports unions are not industrial or political in

nature and that it is just another term for an association or a group, so please be assured of that.

**Mr Harris**—So we are playing on the same team now, are we, Senator?

**Senator FIFIELD**—On your point about—was it Newtown high?

**Mr Harris**—No, it was Newington College.

**Senator FIFIELD**—Is that a government school?

**Mr Harris**—No, it is a private school.

**Senator FIFIELD**—Okay.

**Mr Harris**—But it is also, as a private school, eligible for federal government funding—which we are not.

**Senator FIFIELD**—I just thought you were saying there was a state government school that was refusing to enrol people.

**Mr Harris**—There is the Newtown High School of Performing Arts, which is also down the road. I am happy to take you for a trip around to show you.

**Senator FIFIELD**—Thanks. I was going to be very disturbed if there was a state government high school that was refusing enrolments on the basis of trying to charge a fee, so thank you for clarifying that. Mr Harris, do you think that university students have the capacity to make judgments as to what particular services are of value to them?

**Mr Harris**—That is a fairly leading question. To answer the question, I think university students do have judgment. There is no doubt about that. They are highly intelligent young people. They would not be at the institution otherwise. However—and this is where you are leading to—I would also state that, as has been previously remarked upon today, they are at the university for a period of, say, three to six years. As such, quite often the individuals do not necessarily have a long-term viewpoint as to the requirements of that institution. People with greater experience and a longer term view have greater capacity to make those decisions. This is what our biggest point is here: at my university there have been \$60 million of infrastructure replacement costs over the last few years. We have been here for 100 years but a lot of that stuff has gone.

As my colleague has mentioned, the gestation period for their forum sports centre was something of the order of 10 years. It is very difficult to ask somebody to make a contribution to something which will occur in 10 years time, because they will say, 'I'm only going to be here for three or five years.' However, at the same time, people want the brand. If you want to go to the University of Sydney and come away with a degree, then you take the whole degree. That includes the world debating champions we have had, it includes the Rhodes scholars we have had, it includes the rugby champions and the Olympians we have had—it includes the holistic approach to the university. That is the brand you buy when you come to our university. You cannot come and pick and choose what parts you want. If you want to go somewhere, you have to take the whole of it. It is just the same as this situation: I live in Newtown and I pay my rates. I am quite content that, while I am not one of the users of the library or the child-care centre or any of those things, I live in that community—or I get my

education in that community—and I am prepared to acknowledge that I have to make payment for it.

**Senator FIFIELD**—So a bit of choice is a dangerous thing when given to students.

**Mr Marsden**—I think it is general society. We all know what is good for us, but do we practice every day making those decisions that are good for us? Do we all go to the doctor for a check-up every three months or six months?

**Senator FIFIELD**—Sports unions are sounding a little more like regular unions all of a sudden, saying that they know what is best for students and that students do not have the capacity to make the judgment, so those who know better will—

**Mr Harris**—Senator Fifield, I think what we have opted for in the amendments is a 51 per cent controlling share for the university in the management or the governance of those bodies. At the end of the day, students have wonderful opportunities to decide whether they want to be in the drama club, whether they want to be in the music production or whether they want to be a member of a football club or a netball club. They have lots of choice. But if you take away our funding then they do not have a choice. Likewise, a student has a choice as to which university they want to go to.

**Senator FIFIELD**—It would not be us; it would be students deciding whether they wanted to pay a fee and for what particular services. In the interests of time I will hand over to my colleagues.

**Senator LUNDY**—The first question I have is to Mr Marsden or Mr Harris. To what degree, if at all, were you, as an organisation involved in Australian university sport, consulted about this legislation prior to it being tabled in parliament?

**Mr Marsden**—Not at all. Over the years we have made a number of submissions to the federal government and members of parliament. Obviously we have had response to that correspondence but to my knowledge we have never had an audience in regard to the effect of this type of legislation on sport.

**Senator LUNDY**—We have seen this type of legislation before and it has been rejected by the Senate. Have you previously made submissions along the lines of the submission to this inquiry? Would it be fair to say that the government was aware of these problems prior to drafting this latest legislation?

**Mr Harris**—I think that is one of the things that we are most disturbed with. While we were aware that it was Liberal Party policy, we do not have crystal balls to be able to say, ‘Hey, now they have a majority in the Senate; therefore it is going to be introduced.’ However, if I were the agent of change then I would like to think that I would also be responsible for examining the impacts of that change. I think that is what you are getting at. At the end of the day we have undertaken, because it is our industry, to look at what the impacts have been. The documents have been tabled today. I do not know of any other study undertaken by government, be it by the Australian Sports Commission or within the education minister’s department, into what the impacts of the change would be. Therefore we took it upon ourselves to be able to put that forward as quickly as we could. We do not have similar resources to government departments.

**Senator LUNDY**—But you are not aware of any government departments making any investigations along these lines.

**Mr Harris**—Nobody has crossed my doorstep. I do not know about my colleagues.

**Senator LUNDY**—Going to the study into the situation and the impact of VSU in WA, could you talk about the motivation of Australian universities investing in that study to try and tell the story.

**Mr Harris**—One of the reasons we engaged an independent consultant to evaluate the West Australian model was that there had been a lot of allegations about various activities in Western Australian universities flourishing under the VSU system which was implemented in Western Australia. In order to set the record straight we felt that it was important that somebody conduct an appropriate and extensive study into what the real impacts were. It is very easy to make a throwaway comment; the range of services might have flourished, but what about the quality and quantity? You might have had five activities and expanded them to 10, but the depth of those activities might be much shallower. For example, we still have netball. We had 10 teams but we now have only one, because that is all we can afford to supply facilities for and things like that. So it required more extensive research. We put in the submission as part of our overall submission. It was important for us to set the record straight about the real impact of VSU on sport, health and fitness in Western Australian universities.

**Senator LUNDY**—So when you refer to figures in your summary—and I notice some of the other universities have used the financial analysis of the impact of VSU in WA and translated that—you are actually basing those numbers on that in-depth study of the WA situation?

**Mr Harris**—That is correct.

**Senator LUNDY**—I notice also that you have been quite successful in garnering some support from high-profile sportspeople—from leaders in the committee. Can you outline what your organisation's activity has been in garnering that third party support?

**Mr Harris**—Just as we have, nationally, a large role in the community, there are many different sectors that we influence and have relationships with. My own university has a relationship with the New South Wales Institute of Sport. We provide athlete management services, tutoring, counselling et cetera, and similar arrangements exist with the University of Queensland, University of Melbourne, et cetera.

The fact is that we have within our programs a broad reach, or tentacles, out to these people who we have relationships with and we make a very valuable contribution to their programs. It is my understanding that these groups have written to the Prime Minister: national sports organisations such as Basketball Australia, Rowing Australia, the Commonwealth Games Association and the Olympic commission. You have also got Swimming Australia, Water Polo Australia—there is any number of national sports organisations and leading sporting identities who see this will have a major impact on sport nationally and not just at the university level.

**Senator LUNDY**—How intimately linked is university sport at the elite level with established elite sport institutions like the state academies of sport and the Australian Institute of Sport?

**Mr Harris**—It would be fair to say that the more established universities have a greater capacity to do that. I know the University of Queensland, the University of Western Australia, Melbourne, Monash, Sydney have very strong ties and involvement with state academies. But you can also transgress that to the regional universities, and I know full well that UNE plays a vital role in its regional academy—there would not be a regional academy, so I think Steve would be better versed to discuss that.

**Mr Griffith**—Sport UNE was the driving force behind the establishment of the Northern Inland Academy of Sport. We helped to secure corporate sponsorship and support to sustain that organisation in its first 10 years of operation.

**Senator LUNDY**—So it would not have happened had Sport UNE not taken that initiative?

**Mr Griffith**—It may have, but it may have taken a lot longer. We went out into the community and got sporting leaders and worked with established regional academies and came up with a model that was going to be reasonably successful in our area, where regional athletes potentially have to travel a lot further than even people at the Newcastle Academy of Sport.

**Senator LUNDY**—I am sorry to interrupt, but it is well established that elite development being so centralised prevented a huge number of athletes from reaching their potential. So to have regional elite development is consistent with both state and federal elite development policy.

**Mr Griffith**—Just to add to that: it is not only our metropolitan colleagues; we are a designated training centre for elite regional athletes as well. We support and sustain them. We currently support a Winter Olympics hopeful, Australia's No. 1 ranked cross-country skier, Katie Calder, who is in Switzerland at the moment. It is through our support, via a sports scholarship, and backup support with assistance in her studies that she is able to get a balance in her life. She can go out and represent Australia, but she can also obtain a degree so that when her competitive days are over, she can then put back into the community because she has professional qualifications. If we were not, via our organisation, providing that, Katie herself has mentioned that she just would not have had the opportunity to attend university.

**Senator LUNDY**—Thank you for that. Mr Stephen, you mentioned that you have a son at this university. Can you comment on the sport facilities and the sporting culture in this region helping keep young people in the region? I do not know if you want to look at it from your personal experience, but I would be interested in your views and why you, as a busy person, have made the advocacy of these issues something that you have been willing to spend time on.

**Mr Stephen**—The reason I got involved is because I have participated against university clubs for the last 30 years and, being a member of the wider community, I enjoyed my sport and I thought here was a chance to put something back in. My committee is totally voluntary. I have around me a wealth of experienced people who freely give their time because we all believe passionately in the development of this university and the sporting facilities.

I failed to mention earlier that we have over 2,000 children coming to sports games throughout the year, where the university provides the facilities and runs camps for soccer,

rugby league, tennis and a number of different sports. This is another way that our facilities are being used by the wider community. When we attract children out of the capital city areas they are totally blown away by the facilities that we provide here. They thought those facilities were available only in the capital city areas. Another thing I did not mention is that over 60 per cent of our graduates will most probably end up working and living in regional Australia. That is another fairly important point to remember. By providing the level of sport that we do, our graduates, if they have come from an urban environment, will see that there are facilities throughout regional Australia and that they can live there and raise their families.

**Mr Griffith**—I could add a point in relation to the value adding by having our graduates go into the wider community. While they are here we actively encourage them to obtain refereeing, sports medicine, umpiring and coaching qualifications. More than 60 per cent of our graduates are going into the wider community. They are not going there just as professional people; they are value adding in those communities because of the leadership skills and the life skills they have obtained as a UNE student. That occurs in most of our other universities as well. A significant point to add to what Gerard has just said is that they go out and value add in the wider community.

**Mr Stephen**—This year my son rang up and said, ‘Dad, I’m going to coach the St. Mary’s under 10s,’ which was years 3 and 4. I asked, ‘Luke, when did you do your coaching course?’ and he replied, ‘I’ve done it through the rugby club.’ They had a 10-a-side competition in town and not only did he participate but every college provided a couple of students for each public school within our city. We had 10 schools for a schoolboy rugby competition that was able to be run because of the students going out and putting something back in.

**Mr Harris**—One of the very important attributes of our investment in our club sport programs is the multiplier effect. What we mean by the multiplier effect is that we put in some seed funding and then those clubs have to raise the other moneys. In this instance, we would provide them with the facilities or some seed funding. Then the club has to charge membership fees, get sponsorship or alumni donations et cetera. One of the things that we are looking at is the \$32 million which will be lost in direct funding through the student fees which currently exist. What we also forget to apply is the multiplier.

Gerard is chairing a committee to develop the facilities at this campus. The people who he has approached to put the money forward for that are now saying, ‘Hold on, with this current legislation, who’s going to look after those facilities?’ So you lose not only the seed funding situation but the investment. Let us look at the voluntary labour forces which, as a collective, Australian university sport has. There are people who come back, coach for nothing, run around and organise things—presidents, secretaries and treasurers. There is a fantastic voluntary labour force out there and if we take away the seed funding then those people do not get involved elsewhere. We lose those people from contributing to our society. That is what is going to happen and that is why we are so emotionally upset as well as commercially upset about it. These people are not going to be there to provide opportunities for our young Australians.

**Senator LUNDY**—Thank you, Mr Harris. You make some powerful points. Chair, I am conscious that we are effectively out of time. I have four questions which I ask to place on notice and perhaps get some responses from one or more of the witnesses. The first one is for

further detail on the debt financing impact. Earlier today we heard some very effective evidence in relation to that, but some more practical examples of the possibility of raising capital or servicing debts as a result of these changes would be useful for the committee. Regarding local government involvement, I am certainly aware of local governments working in very close partnership with universities, so it would be useful if you could provide some information to the committee about the extent of those relationships. I would also like some information about insurance. I know many of the organisations do provide that cover for participants, but, with the public liability insurance issues being particularly challenging for community based sporting clubs, perhaps you could outline what you expect to be the impact on that sporting related insurance. Finally, I would like details of the impact on women's sport and disabled sport. I notice that you made mention of that in your submission. If you have any additional information or perhaps source material to elaborate on your submission, that would also be appreciated. I am sorry I have not had more time for questions, but the committee has worked very hard to get through the program today.

**CHAIR**—I would like to thank you very much for your appearance before the committee, particularly you, Steve. Thank you very much for looking after us so well while we have been at your facility. We have appreciated it very much, as well as the opportunity to see around your campus.

**Senator STOTT DESPOJA**—Thank you for holding the baby—we will not forget that in a hurry!

**Mr Griffith**—Absolutely. It is one of the value added services we provide! It has really been a pleasure and an honour to host the committee today. Good luck with your travels around the country.

**CHAIR**—I declare the hearing adjourned.

**Committee adjourned at 2.41 pm**