

Submission to the Australian Senate Education, Employment and  
Workplace Relations Committee

AUZZIE FAMILIES Homestay Care Pty Ltd trading as AUZZIE FAMILIES Homestay Care (“Auzzie”) welcomes the opportunity to present these condensed submissions to the Australian Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee.

Auzzie commenced its operations in 1997 as a provider of homestay accommodation for international students, and is affiliated with New South Wales’ leading tertiary education institutions. Auzzie’s placements would account for approximately thirty percent of the market share in greater Sydney, and this has been achieved without the need for any ‘network’ with other homestay providers.

Auzzie is independently operated by 10 staff sourced from the private and public sectors who hold more than twenty five combined years of industry experience. It is this size that allows for Auzzie’s experienced staff to provide its uniquely personalised accommodation service, which is subject to constant feedback and prides itself on accessibility and transparency. Therefore Auzzie can draw from this practical experience to make the following observations with respect to the industry generally, and the Senate’s Inquiry.

Auzzie is concerned that businesses within the industry, purporting to be large such as the Australian Homestay Network, are adopting a highly aggressive approach to expanding their market share, and industry influence, through the use of network

affiliations. This will in turn create lobby groups intent on the progression of their own business agendas, rather than ensuring the industry's focus continues to be the welfare of the students. Auzzie is also concerned that such businesses are proposing themselves as potential regulatory bodies when they lack the requisite 'hands on' experience, and approach the industry in an exploitative manner. Hence Auzzie believes there should be no regulation of the industry nor controlled private enterprise.

Auzzie is committed to the measured introduction of appropriate regulations to the industry that hold the safety and welfare of students as their paramount concern. However, it believes there needs to be a fine balance between introducing proper standards and overregulating an industry that is dependant on a degree of flexibility to proper function in a fluctuating environment. Furthermore, over regulation could damage the industry by allowing more flexible markets to encroach. Auzzie also echoes the calls of other participants in the Inquiry to request that any measures that are subsequently proposed by the Committee be subject to rigorous examination of independent evidence, and not influenced by those that only view the industry as a lucrative business opportunity.

Auzzie is also concerned that these growing organisations will seek to establish industry standards without proper consultation with or the knowledge of those best versed in the issues of the industry, being those that have 'day to day' contact with the students and host families.

There is a concern that the aggressive push by such organisations has led to information and personal details of hosts being passed between participating businesses without consultation or permission. Furthermore, there is a concern that the industry will be governed by automated online computer programs seeking to 'match' students to family hosts, in an attempt to become more cost effective. The removal of the human element from this process will create issues for students and host families whose compatibility has not been properly vetted or background experiences considered. Online matching of hosts and students should be discouraged where possible.

Auzzie refutes the claim made by others that all businesses within the industry operate without minimum standards being in place. Auzzie's high standards surpass the requirements of all of its affiliated tertiary institutions, and the New South Wales Department of Education and Training. Auzzie believes there is a need for standardisation and regulation that incorporate the values upheld in these agreements, which can be provided to the Committee upon request. However, it would be best if a properly resourced and carefully considered legislative scheme was introduced.

Auzzie believes its combination of practical experience and the continual review of its processes have created a "best working practice" that could be followed by the industry. However, Auzzie acknowledges its business models are subject to the constant need for improvement and development to meet the changing needs of international students. It would be best if such a process was adopted by the industry, with proper consideration given to the views of those at the forefront of this vital industry.