

6 September 2024

Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee inquiry into the Education Services for Overseas Students Amendment (Quality and Integrity) Bill 2024 [Provisions].

Short Opening Statement from Alec Webb, Chief Executive Officer, Regional Universities Network.

[check against delivery]

Thank you Chair.

The Regional Universities Network remains deeply concerned about this legislation.

Its application to Australia's high-quality, low-risk public universities has never been properly or consistently justified.

It gives a Minister unprecedented and unnecessary powers to politicise a major export industry.

The caps for 2025 will be entirely theoretical while Ministerial Direction 107 remains in place.

Why? Because it currently takes 12-16 weeks to obtain a student visa.

Unless Ministerial Direction 107 is revoked today, it will continue to prevent international students from commencing at the start of the 2025 academic year.

In responding to Ministerial Direction 107, some regional universities changed their enrolment practices and reduced their international enrolments. As a result, they received punitive cap allocations that offer little-to-no growth, certainty, or sense.

In many cases, this runs counter to the intent of the policy.

Any symptomatic relief provided by 2025 caps is no cure for 2026 and beyond.

Regional universities need a pathway to recovery and sustainability. They require a visa processing regime and a cap methodology that provides certainty, transparency, and repeatability.

This Bill, and its associated cap methodology, fails to deliver this.

I've provided this committee a more detailed written statement for your consideration.