

# AUSTRALIAN GREENS DISSENTING REPORT

## Introduction

1.1 Despite changes to the original legislation, the Australian Greens remain opposed to the passage of the Higher Education and Research Reform Bill 2014. The amended legislation retains many aspects of the original legislation that would make Australia's higher education policy framework unfair and unsustainable.

1.2 Most of the measures contained within this bill would have destructive impact on higher education and research in Australia, particularly those that:

- Cut public funding to universities for students and research training;
- Remove the cap on fees universities can charge students; and
- Open government supported places to private providers.

1.3 If passed the Bill would push the cost burden for maintaining our public universities onto students and further weaken university staff work conditions.

1.4 The proposed cuts to public funding would threaten the viability of many public universities. The cuts, coupled with the requirement that universities compete with for-profit private providers under no obligation to offer a broad range of courses, undertake research, or meet community-service obligations, will undermine the quality of higher education in Australia.

1.5 Several submissions made by universities have cited a lack of guaranteed, high levels of funding as a justification for supporting fee deregulation. Numerous Vice Chancellors have stated that their support for fee deregulation was driven by the fact that successive federal governments had inadequately funded higher education.

1.6 The deregulation of student fees remains an ongoing concern for the Australian Greens. Rather than being driven by any genuine "competitive agenda," it is clear that the fee deregulation model being pushed by the Liberal/National government has been adopted to shift the cost burden of higher education onto students. Combined with the bill's proposed cuts, the government is essentially forcing all universities to raise their fees in order to retain their current levels of funding.

1.7 Finally, the Australian Greens remain strongly opposed to the extension of Commonwealth supported places to private providers. Given the growing concerns about the extent of defrauding FEE-HELP by a number of private providers, we support the calls made by the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) that the FEE HELP and VET FEE HELP programs be the subject of a separate investigation.

**Recommendation 1**

1.8 The Australian Greens recommend that Higher Education and Research Reform Bill 2014 be rejected outright.

**Senator Lee Rhiannon**

**Australian Greens**