

July 31st



To whom it may concern,

I write in relation to the Senate Inquiry into Rural & Regional Access to secondary and Tertiary Education opportunities.

It is our hope, upon review of this letter, that your inquiry consider advising the Government to amend the proposed legislation to protect existing and future students from the unjust and discriminatory barriers that our rural and regional students face.

I have two children, live in a rural area of Cippstead and qualify for Family Tax Benefit A. We have a tertiary education fund for both children that pay benefits of approx \$2,000 per year. My first child is studying in a metropolitan university and completed a gap year in 2007 to assist with financial relocation costs. He successfully met the current eligibility for youth allowance. My second child is completing yr 12 studies this year and will not be undertaking a gap year as there is no prospect of her obtaining significant work hrs. to total 30hrs per week over two years due to the poor economic climate. Also, she will incur the forfeiture of benefits for deferring university enrolment past one year.

My concerns relate to the terms of reference section

- (a) the financial impact on rural & regional students who are attending metropolitan secondary schools, universities or TAFE;
- (c) the implications of current and proposed government measures on prospective students living in rural and regional areas;
- (e) the adequacy of government measures to provide for students

who are required to leave home for secondary or post-secondary; and (g) the impact of government measures and proposed on rural and regional communities.

The cost burden for families and students to relocate for metropolitan tertiary studies is enormous (approx \$17,000 for on-campus accommodation) so the proposed increase in allowable extra income is welcome for those who are currently eligible for youth allowance which will assist my son. However, those who are not eligible and those who, in future, fail to meet the unreasonable criteria with the proposed changes will incur too heavy a burden that will only further disadvantage regional students and lead to many not able to pursue their chosen course. The proposed relocation payments for a second child in university amount to approx \$2,500 per year, a help but far from supportive.

My first concerns with the proposed legislation are in regards to the retrospective section for I find it unjust and unreasonable to those students currently completing a 'gap' year. These students knowingly entered this eligibility period of 18 months to achieve and meet the criteria as set out by the government. To change the terms of reference midway is morally wrong and disadvantages the rural and regional student the most.

I request the Senate Inquiry to advise government to amend the proposed legislation that it not be made retrospective and exempt these students who are in a current 'gap' year.

The second concern is the full two-year 'gap' eligibility period for youth allowance which, again, prejudices the students as two-year deferrals cannot be obtained by many due to barriers outside the government's control but, non the less,

should be considered. Many minor fee scholarships, benefit fund payments and tertiary courses would have to be forfeited for any longer than a one year deferral further burdening the rural and regional students.

Thirdly, basing monies earned on the criteria of 30hrs work per week rather than the total amount earned in a nominated period for independent youth allowance also discriminates the rural and regional students and shows the government ignorance to work options for regional areas due to on/off peak times and winter/summer options of available employment work.

If this proposed legislation is successfully passed, then equal and indiscriminate access to metropolitan university for rural and regional students will be greatly undermined by an increasing amount of financial burdens that metropolitan students are not faced with.

Our regional communities need increased support to assist our youth, not barriers to prevent them from undertaking tertiary studies. To improve a community, we first have to improve their opportunities, and for this to happen we need to give our youth the resources to expand their knowledge and training, bringing back to the community new essential skills and services.

In closing, I find the proposed legislation to be more obstructive rather than supportive and will not serve our regional areas fairly for the governments proposed legislation changes only serves to create more barriers for our youth rather than create opportunities.

Yours sincerely

Tracy Fisher, Grace Arton