

Submission to the Senate Committee examining Rural and Regional Education

Our Situation:

- Bairnsdale is a 3 – 4 hour drive from Melbourne
- We have 4 children, whose ages are 20, 19, 16 and 14 years.
- The oldest is in his second year at university in Melbourne
- The second is in her 'gap' year here in Bairnsdale, she has deferred a university course also in Melbourne.
- We have a mortgage, an active life in the community and two children in their secondary schooling.
- Below are our responses to each of the criteria you as a committee are looking at, we have attempted to reveal to you how each item will affect us and our children's higher education and the aspirations of the two younger children.



The impact of the Government's Youth Allowance measures in relation to:

The financial impact on rural and regional students who are attending metropolitan secondary schools, universities or TAFE.

- It costs rural families between \$15 000 - \$20 000 per year to support one child in Melbourne to attend university
- City dwelling families do not have to brunt the cost of this relocation of their children who wish to attend university.
- Our oldest two children will end up going to different universities, so will need to live in separate locations, thus doubling the cost of this financial burden (\$30 000 - \$40 000) each year.
- This amount of financial support is just not possible for our family. The quality of life we would have and the opportunities we could offer the two younger children would be greatly reduced.
- The proposed changes have thrown all our plans and the aspirations of our children into chaos. *The only thing we are sure of right now is: if the proposed changes become legislation, we will not be able to support our three children, currently at home, in their chosen higher education.*
- **This government has a moral obligation to enable rural children the same educational opportunities as those from similar socioeconomic circumstances living in the city.**

The education alternatives for rural and regional students wanting to study in regional areas.

- The courses offered at our closest university campus (Monash Gippsland) are limited and so far have been unattractive to our children.
- Our children have chosen to attend university rather than TAFE.
- To limit the choice of university to the geographical zone immediately closest to the family home would not be an acceptable model. I imagine the city folk would also resent this imposition on their children.

- Without the financial support of Youth Allowance, fewer rural children will be pursuing higher education at institutions of their choice.
- The nation's pool of intellect would increasingly come from students who have grown up in a large city; **this would constitute a catastrophe of national proportions.**

The implications of existing and proposed Government measures on prospective students living in rural and regional areas.

- Currently in order for our children to move to Melbourne and study they have to a) defer their course, b) work during their 'gap' year to earn the required amount of money to be deemed independent, c) completely relocate to a city centre which is over three hours drive from home and all the support home gives them.
- We believe the above is already more than enough sacrifice for these young adults.
- Analysis of the MIPS data shows that a significant proportion of children taking the 'gap' year are from rural and regional areas, **THIS IS CLEAR EVIDENCE OF THE NEED FOR SIGNIFICANT SUPPORT FOR RURAL STUDENTS WHO WISH TO ATTEND UNIVERSITY.**
- The proposal where Year 12 graduates would have to be employed a minimum of 30 hours per week for 18 months, neither makes sense nor is it fair.
- The 18 month period does not fit into the current deferment system. This would mean these students would need to take 2 years off and so **greatly decrease their chances** of then actually shifting and beginning a university course.
- Two years is an enormous time in the life of a teenager, many social connections and roots are laid in this period of one's life. This is to say nothing of the motivation these young people would have to maintain over this period of time. A mammoth effort in itself.
- Bairnsdale has a population of 12000 approximately; there are limited jobs available for school graduates. It would NOT be possible for all the students who have to take a gap year to gain 30 hours per week of employment in this rural setting.

The short and long term impact of current and proposed Government policies on regional university and TAFE college enrolments.

- We believe our children who could not do their chosen course at the closest university, would have opted not to go to university at all, rather than begin a course not of their liking.

The adequacy of Government measures to provide for students who are required to leave home for secondary or post-secondary study.

- Currently our son is able to live a **very frugal**, shared existence. He has next to no spare money, in fact he delayed turning the heater on in his unit (which he shares with another university student), until June. He works all summer in a part-time job, to give him some buffer money to ease the burden during the very busy university year.

- Once he attends uni; studies; cooks; cleans and plays one sport he does not have time to get or hold a part-time job whilst in Melbourne. His uni course has 24 hours face to face time. He cannot afford to travel home more than once each Semester and he had to delay the setting-up of an internet provider at his unit until he had enough money.
- So, being on the Independent Youth Allowance and receiving the extra Rent Assistance is barely adequate.
- With the proposed changes, our daughter may receive an unknown amount of money next year. It will not be the equivalent of the current Independent allowance, but we don't know what it will be as information to date is vague and not available. She will have to have saved at least \$10 000 in order to be able to meet some of the costs of living, away from home in Melbourne. The proposed 'Relocation' one off payment of approximately \$6000 will of course help, **but my fear is what about her second, third and fourth years. How can she earn the \$15 000 needed over the summer holidays?**

The education needs of rural and regional students.

- Rural and regional students *need to be able to pursue higher education* if they choose. Their educational needs are really *no different* to those of their city cousins.
- However the educational *opportunities* of rural and regional students are and have always been *vastly different* to those of their city cousins.
- At every level of the socioeconomic hierarchy, the cost of higher educational opportunities for the children, is increased the further the family live from the large city centres.
- It is NOT FAIR to penalise those who choose to live in the rural areas, and have children with the desire to seek higher education which cannot be had in their rural area!
- City dwellers, NOT MATTER WHAT THEIR INCOME, are NOT REQUIRED to set up and support another dwelling simply because their child wants to attend university. Why should we as rural dwellers be penalised because we need help to do just that?
- Many great high achievers across the board have been children from rural or regional areas. By disadvantaging this current generation of students who knows who may be prevented from reaching the heights of achievement their potentially capable of.

The impact of Government measures and proposals on rural and regional communities.

- Do the families with secondary age students have to re-locate to the city so their children can go to university? Think of the impact this would have on the already crowded, sprawling, under resourced city! Then what would be the

result in the rural areas which provide the cities with vital food, materials and more?

- Every family in every regional area have many issues to deal with, all of which are directly related to their rural location. Why should parents of university age children be faced with yet another hardship simply because they are living in their regional community?
- It is NOT FAIR to penalise those who choose to live in the rural areas, and have children with the desire to seek higher education which cannot be had in their rural area!
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OUR SUGGESTIONS:

- Tighten up the criteria for Youth Allowance by *differentiating between city and rural/regional students and families.*
- *Acknowledge the financial burden rural/regional families face to be able to send their children to university in the larger city centres.*
- *Stop discriminating against rural/regional students who wish to attend higher education.*
- *Actively promote rural/regional centres by not treating the families who live in these areas as second rate citizens.*
- *Remember all rural/regional families have paid their taxes and will continue to do so, and in return they need to be able to access what city people take for granted.*
- These people should be able to do just that without being significantly financially challenged.

Yours Sincerely

Peter and Kay Buckland

04/08/09

