



SNOWY RIVER SHIRE COUNCIL

A.B.N. 21 862 479 274

"A Caring Community in a Unique Environment with a Prosperous Future"
1906 - 2006: A centenary of service to the community

Contact: Mr. J Vescio
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6 December 2010

Senator Gavin Marshall
Chair
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee
PO BOX 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator Marshall

Re: Submission to Senate Inquiry into Social Security Amendment (Income Support for Regional Students) Bill 2010

Snowy River Shire Council is concerned at the proposed changes to the arrangements for Income Support to Regional Students as Council is of the view that residents of this shire will be significantly affected by this new legislation.

Under the current guidelines a prospective student is required to complete an average of 30 hours of work per week for 18 months over a 2 year period. Even assuming a student commenced work as soon as Year 12 finishes (say mid November 2010), then 18 months hence would be April 2012. Not all courses are offered on a mid year intake with most allowing only a 12 month deferral, so therefore a student could lose their place at university and have to compete with newer incoming students for a position in early 2013 even though they were allocated a position some 2 years earlier.

This arrangements clearly discriminates against students from rural areas where employment opportunities are limited and access to TAFE courses to obtain necessary certificates to gain employment are not necessarily available within many rural communities such as ours. It also gives no consideration to communities where employment is largely seasonal for unskilled workers as it the case in Snowy River Shire. As a result of current conditions young rural and regional people are more likely than their metropolitan counterparts to leave home in search of work to become eligible for Youth Allowance in order to become a more skilled and productive person. That adds yet more cost to rural and regional working families who are less likely to afford those costs than metropolitan ones because of prevailing conditions.

The new guidelines introduced by the Labor government late last year and which came into effect as at 1 July 2010 fail to recognise the discriminatory aspects of the arrangements regarding regional students and their families. It burdens them with additional financial costs that city based students do not have to incur particularly as most live at home with their parents. Everyday costs of rent and bonds, electricity,

gas, water, food, internet connection etc not to mention relocation costs which could include purchase of essential household goods such as a fridge, washing machine and furniture, have to be met either from the scholarship monies above and/or parental assistance.

Ongoing financial support is inevitable as motor vehicle costs etc continue to put students under financial hardship. All of the above is on the assumption that students qualify for Youth Allowance

Studies show lower than average participation of rural and regional youth in tertiary (especially university) education and without changes this legislation will perpetuate this scenario. Indeed, the Federal Government is currently undertaking significant investment in schemes such as the Structural Adjustment Fund (SAF) aimed at increasing university participation by students from non-metropolitan areas. It is counterproductive to direct investment towards such schemes while simultaneously introducing legislation which will make tertiary education beyond the reach of many from these areas.

While in the longer term schemes such as SAF may result in an increased tertiary presence in regional areas there will always be young people who will need to move away in order to access appropriate educational opportunities. Regional students deserve an equal opportunity to undertake tertiary studies on the same basis as their city counterparts.

Given that the State and Federal Governments are running campaigns to convince families to move to rural centres (Evocities) how successful will that be when people realise the additional burden and discrimination that applies for rural and regional students. Increased participation in post secondary education by rural youth also increases resilience. It is that resilience which is important for rural communities struggling with the impacts of climate change.

The division of Shires such as ours into Outer and Inner Regions does not appear to have any basis as some parts of our Shire and our neighbouring Shire Cooma-Monaro have been classified as Inner Regional and yet have no school bus, no mobile phone service, no internet and no sealed roads. It does not matter what parts of our Shire (or other rural areas) are classified as Inner or Outer regions as the costs incurred by students from both categories will be the same as they all have to live away from home to attend tertiary studies.

Finally, there is an academic disparity between students who are required to spend a significant amount of time in paid employment, compared to students who, for example, still live at home, or who have no financial need to participate in the work force. The former category almost always contains regional students. The government must recognise how much harder it is for rural and regional students to obtain a tertiary education, and instead of making it even harder it should provide some assistance to these students.

Council suggests that the Committee seek a review of the classifications to ensure that they are appropriate to the regional area and not a map prepared by a city based bureaucrat without having cognisance to the real situation on the ground.

Council also suggests that the Committee look at innovative methods of making post secondary education available in rural communities through the use of technology. Examples of this currently exist in places such as Bega but use could be made of high school and TAFE facilities. These facilities offer the opportunity for tertiary

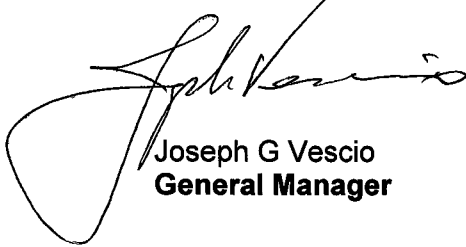
students from rural areas to begin courses locally and then transition into the city campus. This is not an alternative to the income support but an option to reduce pressure on rural students to relocate to universities in city locations straight from high school thereby reducing the burden on them and their families.

It is our view that these new guidelines are inconsistent with the view held by the Labor Government which seeks to increase post secondary education participation leading to a higher skill level which in turn increases productivity in the long term.

Council supports the submission to the Inquiry by the NSW State Council of the Isolated Children's Parents' Association and argues this legislation needs to be changed and Senator Nash's Bill needs to be carried if Regional Australia is to progress with rural and regional students having equitable access to education

Council would be more than happy to assist the Inquiry in whatever way it can to achieve an equitable outcome for rural and regional youth.

Yours Faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joseph G Vescio', written in a cursive style. The signature is positioned to the left of the printed name and title.

Joseph G Vescio
General Manager