

5th December 2010

We have four children and live on a farm 18 kilometres from Orange in the inner regional zone of Central Western NSW. Our two eldest children were able to access Youth Allowance prior to changes introduced in 2009. The course our son elected to do was Arts/ Law at ANU in Canberra. My eldest daughter also choose an Arts/ Law at UNSW. In both cases no courses where available locally and both Universities are over 300 kilometres from our home. Both children used University College accommodation. In both cases the cost of this accommodation was as over \$400 per week. My daughter has advised last week that her residential charges at Kensington Colleges will rise to approximately \$480 per week in 2010. Added of this cost there are normal costs in accessing a degree such as textbooks etc. In both Sydney and Canberra rental markets are expensive and rental housing if you can get it make living away from home a costly proposition.

On top of this they are both accruing debts associated with their courses. To survive both have had to work to augment their Youth Allowance. The estimated costs of a year at university living away from home is \$25000 annually. Additional costs are incurred in getting home to see the family and distance is a barrier in terms of time and cost. Public transport options are non-existent between Canberra and home. The youth allowance under the old legislation has however, allowed my two eldest children to overcome these barriers and become independent citizens who are working hard to achieve higher education.

Subsequently in 2009 the youth allowance changes were legislated. We tried to support attempts to prevent legislation that would severely restrict access of students to higher education. Unfortunately the legislation was passed and after some debate in the senate an amendment was made that divided students into inner and outer regional students. I applauded the decision to consider the plight of regional students in the amendment .Regional disadvantage is clearly apparent in educational opportunity. Unfortunately this change was qualified by the decision to discriminate between inner and outer regional students.

We now fall into the inner regional areas despite being 300 kilometres from universities that our children can access. Some students who are now classed as outer regional students are in fact closer to universities such as ANU than we are.

This means our next two children, one who finished school this year and our youngest daughter in Year 10 will not be able to access youth allowance and not be eligible for any government support relocation benefits that were available under previous legislation. Both our two younger students want to attend university and complete degrees that they cannot access here. This will mean that we as parents will have to support our two youngest children if they are to complete courses of their choice. We will not be qualify for Youth allowance as our family would not meet the income test of a combined family income of under \$150,000 before tax. When both our son and daughter are attending University we as parents will have to find \$50,000 from our annual income to cover the costs in them living away from home. This cost impost is simply not feasible or fair. At the same time all our children are incurring a HECS debt that as they move through University. It is a far cry from providing greater access to education that the Government claim as being the reason for the initial change in the legislation.

As parents we want to give our children access to higher education. This has got to be good for them and for our country. The costs of funding this option will now be financially difficult and may mean our younger children will have to reconsider the choosing a university education.

As it stands the inner and outer regional classification is not workable and is full of anomalies associated with the nature of rural Australia and the concentration of educational opportunities in our large cities. Regional centres have limited opportunities and forcing our sons and daughters to choose locally is discriminatory.

I table this submission as a father and an educator in inner regional NSW. Clearly we are now being asked to totally fund our son and daughters tertiary education. Our son and daughter will now be fully dependent on us till they complete their degrees. The current legislated proposal is unfair and discriminatory. Once again regional people who have no choice as their children have to live away from home to attend university are being abandoned. Please consider this submission as a failure to revisit this legislation will greatly reduce access to tertiary education for rural communities.

*Our family now seeks your support in amending this proposed legislation. **Can you please confirm receipt of this submission.** If you need further clarification of matters raised in the submission or would like me to speak to this submission don't hesitate to contact me*