

**Submission to: SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION,
EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS**

**On the 'SOCIAL SECURITY AMENDMENT (INCOME SUPPORT FOR
REGIONAL STUDENTS) BILL 2010**

My family live on an isolated grazing property 53 kms from Cooma and 160 km from Canberra. Currently we are supporting two older children at university in Canberra and two younger daughters at boarding school in Sydney. The changes to Youth Allowance, categorizing many Monaro students as 'inner regional', are creating great anxiety in our community for the following reasons.

This, in effect, means that many rural students will now be unable to commence tertiary education for two years after they leave school, meaning that:

- students competing for very competitive courses are unlikely to be able to defer their courses for two years.
- A greater number of post school students will now be competing for a very limited number of entry level jobs in aged care, retail and fast food in our rural community. This creates much anxiety for the adults who rely on these jobs longterm as their main source of income.
- In tourist areas, such as the Snowy Mountains, hospitality work is sporadic, seasonal, unpredictable and not conducive to obtaining 30 hours a week over an extended period
- The limited number of twelve month traineeships available locally will no longer allow students to qualify for the Youth Allowance
- Students from families without a tradition of accessing tertiary education may find the whole extended, complex process of qualifying for Youth Allowance to be too dispiriting and just give up

Rural and regional students have to physically relocate to gain postschool qualifications. This is a very costly process, well beyond the financial reach of many rural families. Students trying to juggle multiple casual jobs while studying to cover their costs are unlikely to succeed academically, and very likely to suffer chronic mental stress. Surely common sense dictates that students originally from the bush are much more likely to feel an emotional and cultural affinity with rural areas, and having gained qualifications, are much more likely to return to rural areas to make a professional contribution there.

The current situation is that many professionals are 'parachuted in' on a sporadic basis from city areas, such as dentists who like to ski for a few short winter months! 'The Australian' newspaper recently reported (20-21 November 2010) that currently the acute shortage of Australian doctors willing to service rural and remote communities means that 43% of the doctors servicing these communities are now

overseas-trained. This will continue as long as the ALP continues to describe efforts to extend equity and fairness to regional students as a 'political stunt'. Such comments dramatically emphasize the extraordinary extent to which the ALP and Greens are perceived as completely city-centric parties, with little comprehension or understanding of the world beyond their suburbs.

Maybe the ALP and Greens are content to see a continuation of a two tier system where it is a 'given' that city students have access to a wide array of post-school education options, while their rural counterparts face an anxious and testing time in trying to access any kind of professional training. However, parents in the bush are fed up with this inequity and insist that their children be given a reasonable chance at using their abilities and contributing to their communities in the future.

Mrs Ruth Fletcher

27 November 2010