

I am writing in response to the changes made to the eligibility criteria for independent youth allowance. I consider these changes to be totally unjust. They disadvantage a group of students who are already disadvantaged because of where they live.

The so called inner regional students are no different to outer regional students. In fact, they go to school together. The inequity in the system must be addressed or we will lose our keen, bright young men and women – our future. We need them to be educated and return to our country areas. We should be doing all we can to help country kids so the regional areas will not die.

My son has studied and worked very hard to achieve his goal of undertaking Engineering at the University of NSW. He understood this would mean relocating 400 kms to Sydney, leaving home, family and friends and finding accommodation, thus adding to his expenses. However, his dream may not be fulfilled. He has been accepted at the uni to study his first choice of course and he has been working long hours this year and saving his money to help fund the costs associated with moving. However, under the current arrangements, he will be ineligible for any youth allowance and the accompanying payments to help with relocation expenses. Therefore, he will probably only be able to complete the first year of his course.

My husband and I will help him as much as we can, but we have a low income and my husband is semi-retired, brought about by health issues. We are older parents and have saved hard to ensure our children receive a good education and to look after ourselves in our old age. We feel we have been penalized for being frugal and saving our money. We have a modest home and owe no money. In hindsight, we would have been better to have a large home, pool and mortgage and our son would then qualify for youth allowance as a dependant.

Please consider our children and our country areas as you ponder this matter. It is becoming harder to attract professionals to country areas and large amounts of money are being spent to entice them to move from the cities. Inequities like this will not encourage their movement. They will not want to see their own children's future prospects in doubt. It sends a very real message that the government does not really consider regional areas as important. Regional Australians are important and should all be treated fairly, regardless of where they live.

Yours Sincerely

Barbara McRae