

**COUNTRY WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF NEW SOUTH WALES**



**SUBMISSION:  
Youth Allowance - Social Security Amendment (Income  
Support for Regional Students) Bill 2010**

**To:** Committee Secretary  
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace  
Relations Committee  
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The Social Issues Committee of the Country Women's Association of NSW thanks the Senate Education, Employment and Work Place Relations Legislation Committee for the opportunity to have input into this Inquiry into Social Security Amendment (Income Support for Regional Students) Bill 2010.

To the CWA of NSW this is a very important inquiry, one which highlights very clearly the difference in rights and entitlements between city and country folk, young people and the availability of education.

The CWA supports this Bill to extend the Inner Regional zone youth access to the same youth allowance criteria currently received in Outer Regional, Remote and Very Remote zones. However, it is known that there are many more anomalies to be adjusted regarding the education of country youth.

To determine the regionality of students for eligibility criteria for Independent Youth Allowance, the Australian Standard Geographical Classification – Remoteness Area (ASGC – RA) map was used, showing the five zones. However, this is a flawed system and works against the country youth. It is incredible that cities and towns such as Wagga, Tumut, Gundagai, Tumbarumba, Coolamon, Batlow and Adelong fall into the "inner regional" category. Would-be students from these areas and all Inner Regional zone are forced to re-locate, just as those from the Outer Regional, Remote and Very Remote zones.

So often the Government trots out its mantra on supporting those in the bush stating that we must encourage the country youth/students to enter tertiary education to become qualified in the fields of medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, occupational therapy, engineering etc. Then having acquired this knowledge, graduates are expected to return to country areas to relieve the dire shortages of professionals. However, the government does very little to help these would/be students; instead nearly impenetrable barriers are raised to prevent them accessing their right to education.

Access to the same criteria existing for the Outer Regional, Remote and Very Remote zones will, no doubt, be of great help to the Inner Regional students....BUT why should would/be doctors, physiotherapists etc. have to work so many hours a week for any number of months after leaving High School? Just to qualify to be called "independent"?

In the metropolitan areas there is no doubt that high school students (with a "Maccas", KFC etc. on every corner), earned money whilst at school. In the country, such gourmet delights are thin on the ground and casual work is most difficult to find. So, while the metropolitan high school graduate can stay at home and earn the amount of money stipulated to qualify for the independent classification, the great majority of high school graduates in all other zones (inner and outer regional and the remotes) have to leave home,

at great cost or be relocated, just to find work to qualify for the independent classification.

It is no wonder that the percentage of rural students attempting tertiary education is so much lower than that of the metropolitan students; also the dropout rate of rural students from these courses is so much higher than for the metropolitan students.

The reason for this is financial, the inadequacy of income support measures, the inability of family to give much financial support. Often there are younger siblings to raise and educate and sadly we sometimes hear of families having to make a choice – which son or daughter can we afford to send to University - and the other siblings have to miss out.

For the student, living and study costs for a fortnight range between \$700 and \$800. The income support payment of \$377 leaves quite a gap to be helped out by family support and casual work (if this work can be fitted in with heavy study and assignment loads). Students must feel very affronted when they realise that, apart from CPI increases, the Youth Allowance has not increased for over 20 years. This is in spite of the government's often repeated claims that they were working hard to ensure country students avail themselves of the benefits of tertiary education and then return to and improve the lot of country regions.

The Youth Allowance payment of \$377 compares badly with the job-seekers New Start Allowance of \$470. Apparently, students are a minority group, which does not have as much voice and clout as the unemployed.

It is so unfair that students from Inner and Outer Regional, Remote and Very Remote zones, having earned their allowance with great difficulty and sacrifice and have relocated (at great cost) in the Metropolitan zone, will be studying side by side with city students who have the same allowance, but live at home.

Those receiving a tertiary education through TAFE NSW also suffer through no fault of their own. A member of this committee approached head of department teachers at TAFE in Sydney and Canberra. She was astounded at their lack of knowledge about country students, the distances they have to travel and where they stay. They assumed that all students live at home and are within 30kms of a TAFE. So many times, the nearest TAFE, say 40kms away, does not teach the subjects required (such as plumbing) and the 18 year old apprentice plumber has to drive 300kms to ACT every Sunday, attend TAFE Monday 9.00am to 5.00pm, and then drive 300kms home to go to work on the Tuesday. Imagine how his family feels, worrying about this young driver travelling those long trips at night.

More government funding must be spent on this important area of tertiary education and TAFE. Our young must be afforded every chance of improving their work skills, for the sake of Australia's future.

We ask that consideration be given to the fact that many families in the bush find it extremely difficult at the moment to offer financial backing to their student offspring to progress to tertiary education with rising interest rates, the 10 year drought and the current variable crop-affecting weather patterns. We stress that it is not just the farmer (man on the land in trouble), but all the concerns feeding off agriculture are in trouble e.g. machinery operators, produce stores, shop keepers, business and professional enterprises etc.

**In conclusion,** the CWA of NSW supports this Social Security Amendment regarding Income Support for Regional Students and insists that there are absolutely no logical reasons for Inner Regional students to be treated any differently to, and should have the same classification as those students in the Outer Regional, Remote and Very Remote zones, as they all have to relocate or leave home for tertiary education.

We also ask that all grants, including Relocation Scholarships, Allowances and Rent Assistance etc. be increased to a reasonable, sustainable level. These young people should be encouraged, not ground down by government "penny-pinching". They are Australia's future.

Social Issues Committee  
Country Women's Association of NSW.