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MILKING THE HOLY COW AND BUFFALO

Blatant Discrimination by the Australian Government

Submission

To

The Senate Inquiry

Into the

Welfare of International Students

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Society For the Prevention of Cruelty to Overseas Students

Submission to The Senate Inquiry Into the Welfare of Overseas Students

Current Situation

1. Each of the 113 Submissions to the Inquiry, address the multitude of problems currently faced by the overseas students, showing that the current system is so sick that it needs a major surgery. The Submissions point out systematic problems from beginning to the end,
 - from the intending student thinking for applying for a student visa to meeting visa eligibility requirements,
 - course selection,
 - selection of educational institution,
 - arranging funds to meet student visa requirements,
 - visa application,
 - reception at Australian airport and arrival in Australia,
 - accommodation and other problems on arrival,
 - attendance at English or other course,
 - finding work - to meet expenses, pay fees and repay pre-departure loan, attending lectures,
 - passing examinations,
 - obtaining qualifications,
 - finding employment, and
 - finally achieving his objective of obtaining Permanent Resident (PR) visa, final settlement in Australia.
2. Students face immense problems at each of the above 16 issues, mainly because the vested interests have been taking maximum advantage – the maximum allowed by the system, of the innocent, young but determined minds. They know that the students are fully committed and will make any sacrifice to achieve their objective, which in most cases is to obtain Permanent Residence visa – more about this later.
3. These mercenary vested interested have studied the system thoroughly, especially its strengths and weaknesses, and then obtain the maximum financial advantage the system allows.
4. Although the rorts are very well-known, let us look at three case studies. These are not isolated cases and further back-up information is available. Considering the acute shortage of aged carers, one aged care facility in Australia, negotiated with Government educational institutions in Australia to open a campus in

overseas country, after identifying a nurse training institution in overseas country, to train aged carers. After inspecting the proposed facilities, agreed to open the campus, but demanded same fees it is currently charging from the overseas students in Australia for the course plus all the travel and other expenses in monitoring the overseas campus plus a profit margin.

5. A so called air conditioning technician (in demand occupation in MODL) turns up at a church with his baggage, asking for a place to stay temporarily. He could barely speak English, was only a labourer, hailing from a village and had funds to live for a fortnight only.
6. Third is a restaurant. After obtaining necessary registration, it teaches commercial cookery in the restaurant kitchen, charging students about \$10,000 per year, using students as unpaid cooks and waiters. There is also a case of an entity teaching commercial cookery from his garage and did not have a kitchen to teach students.
7. Suffice to say that the vested interests are so deeply entrenched in the system, that they command respect and power to resist any changes. This applies to almost each of the 16 issues stated above. The so called 'Full Fee' in the context of Universities is unreasonable but is exploitative in the private sector with shady facilities made available by the service providers, with no audit of quality;

Lands of Holy Cows and Buffalos

8. Following Table extracted from the Submission of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship shows the following.
 - the main problem country is India – the land of holy cow, where the student numbers have increased nearly nine times in the last six years.
 - vested interests have now shifted their target to Nepal, the country well known for providing Gurkhas to the British army, whose historic selection criteria included strength to cut the neck of a buffalo with a Khukri – a short curved Gurkha dagger, in one stroke.
 - The number of student visas granted increased from 615 in 2002/03 to 14355 in 2008/09 – increase of nearly 24 times.
 - appears the vested interests are now concentrating on the lands of holy cow and the buffalos.

Student Visas Granted – Top Ten Nationalities 2002/03 - 2008/09

Passport Held	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
India	7 603	11 106	13 314	20 273	34 146	47 639	65 503
China	22 597	27 829	30 392	29 970	38 466	49 763	54 015
Korea, Republic of	11 270	14 375	14 775	16 917	18 557	19 350	17 594
Nepal	615	568	648	1 106	4 980	10 247	14 355
Thailand	9 418	8 519	8 151	8 835	9 479	11 576	13 612
Brazil	2 894	3 236	4 523	6 679	8 220	11 096	12 609
Malaysia	10 133	9 260	8 729	8 614	9 496	10 661	11 567
USA	11 294	11 461	11 050	10 382	9 973	9 969	9 598
Vietnam	1 851	2 107	2 101	2 843	3 845	6 878	9 389
Indonesia	10 136	8 613	7 509	7 572	7 534	8 246	8 756
GLOBAL TOTAL	162 575	171 616	174 786	190 674	228 592	278 184	320 368

The Cruelty

9. The main question is, do the students really come to Australia to study or simply use the Governments' permitted method to attain permanent residence. Nearly 95 % of the overseas students attending vocational courses, settle down in Australia permanently. Mainly those unwilling to withstand cruelty, return home. Immigration Department does not publish statistics on this issue.
10. Violence on Indian students is continuing, but is not reported. Being afraid, they are also now moving to safer regional cities, away from bigger cities of Sydney and Melbourne, even though the opportunities for employment and advancement are far less.
Violence usually is on a student alone at late night when few others are in sight, returning home after work or at work (taxi driving).
11. Instead of studying, he (including the female gender) is working his guts out, to pay hefty University fees, nearly three times the fees paid by a local student, protecting the financial position of the Australian Government, who then pays less to the educational institutions. The system accepts that a middle class person

from a developing country like Nepal, Thailand and Viet Nam, has the resources to pay the fees and living expenses in an expensive country like Australia.

12. Now imagine the profile of an average student. He is enterprising and determined to work hard to make his life. He is from a middle class family and hence the parents have used family's resources to support the young to achieve his objectives in life, on the basis and all have been so informed, that once in Australia, he will be able to support himself, including payment of University fees.
13. Of course he can support himself in Australia, but at what cost. Firstly, he works at menial jobs, the jobs which he will never do in his home country – cleaner, kitchen hand, taxi driving, waiter etc. Secondly, he is exploited by paying low wages and cash, to avoid paying tax and to hide more than the allowed 20 hours a week work. Thirdly, he has to reduce the study load, to reduce the fees to the affordable level, from his menial earnings, thus stretching the usually two or three years course to some six or more years. He then has to pay the hefty fees of the Migration Agent to obtain permanent residence. Above results in using the most productive years of his life, just to obtain permanent residence in Australia. No wonder people from other countries have been coming to Australia in leaky boats to achieve the same end.

Blatant Discrimination by Australian Governments

14. Charging three times higher fees is clear discrimination. Local and overseas students attending the same course, have access to the same facilities and overseas student gets no preferential treatment. Yet the overseas student pays three times higher fees. There can't be a better example of discrimination.
15. In August 2009, SBS TV aired a comprehensive program crystalising the issues. In that program, Professor Christopher Niland of International Business in Monash University Melbourne, clearly concluded that main problem is the policies of the Australian Government relating to the high fees and the system of allowing permanent residence after obtaining Australian qualifications in cheap courses – cookery, hairdressing etc, in the false guise of occupations in demand.

Are we exporting Education?

16. Three time higher fees of overseas students is often justified on the ground that Australia is exporting education. As suggested above, students come here with the intention of settling in Australia and hence are our future citizens. Thus their education remains here and is not exported. Even if the small percentage returns to the home country, is Australia entitled to determine the fees autocratically. For its iron ore and coal exports, mining company have to make repeated trips to China and Japan to negotiate the prices for our exports. For bauxite and alumina Australia gets world market prices. Australia cannot determine the prices of any of the exports in an autocratic manner.

Present Environment

17. The three certain things in life – death, taxes and change. I like to point out the three recent newspaper headlines. Australian drug companies have been providing free dinners, overseas visits, computers, all their stationery etc to the Medical doctors – usually millionaires, to obtain commercial benefits. Politicians’ perks are being questioned – as they are being misused. Well padded and antique chairs, bearing the title “For Whites Only” are now museum pieces only and soon will be thrown out from the museums as well. Thus community hopes even the well entrenched but incorrect milking of holy cows might have to show some justice. After all there is no such thing as a free lunch.
18. Present Government’s election promise was Education Revolution. Hopefully this revolution will extend to the overseas students also.
19. Overseas students pump about \$15 billion into the Australian economy each year. Entire Australian iron ore exports to China last year were worth \$15 billion. With 15 billion, last year Australian Government gave a gift of about \$ 900 to each Australian taxpayer citizen with annual income up to \$100,000, to stimulate Australian economy. The best way of protecting that source of income is to do justice to the overseas students.
20. At present most of the overseas countries have no restrictions or monitoring on the number of students coming to Australia. With this issue getting huge media attention overseas, a number of overseas are understood to be considering a restrictive regime in this matter. That will reduce our income and our control over this source.
21. Australia needs migrants. Every Australian is a migrant or the parents/foreparents were migrants. Australia has bringing migrants from the time it was discovered by Captain James Cook. But we should be select the type of migrants we need. The overseas students are probably the best migrants – hard working, determined and motivated to succeed.

Cure of Cancer

22. The cures suggested in the submissions clearly show the vested interest of its respective author. Increasing the bureaucratic monitoring at each of the 16 steps will be hugely expensive, not really practical and more importantly will not cure the underlying disease. We already have controls at each of these steps at present, but the controls have been a failure. Increasing more controls will only spread the cancer. Further we run the risk of overseas Governments taking over the control. The results of trying to cure the cancer are still indefinite.
23. The real cure is to stop the blatant discrimination of the overseas students that has been going on got the past over twenty years. The real cure is to charge them the

same fees as local Australians. We should treat them as our guests and future Australians, not use them as an income source. We will have to reduce the numbers and we have the infrastructure for reduced numbers, not for the currently large numbers. The infrastructure is currently bursting at its seams. Your in-depth analysis of this one brave measure will immediately drive all the unscrupulous vested interests out of the present lucrative businesses. The students will concentrate on the studies, instead of earning money to pay the next fees, and thus concentrate on contributing to Australian advancement.

CONCLUSION

24. The present system of using overseas students as income source cannot be justified any more. Australia's image overseas has already suffered considerably. The one single measure that will fix most of the problems is by treating overseas students equal to locals, as welcome migrants, charge the same fees and offer them same facilities HECS etc. The truant vested interests will automatically disappear, as their operations will not be viable any more.
25. The so called 'Full Fee' in the context of Universities is unreasonable but is exploitative in the private sector. If the students are coming here to benefit from Australia's excellent education system, then the present link between permanent residence visa and education must be broke.
26. Finally, Education Provision should be means of creating goodwill in the region, as was the case with the Colombo Plan rather than displaying blatant greed in the Asian region.

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