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Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee  
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re: Inquiry into Higher Education Legislation Amendment (Student Services and Amenities, and Other Measures) Bill 2009

This submission is made on behalf of the Western Region of CAPA, the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations. The Western Region of CAPA comprises Curtin University of Technology, Edith Cowan University, Murdoch University, and the University of Western Australia. This submission is additional to a more thorough and in-depth response by CAPA's national office.

This submission is intended to highlight the importance of independent student representation and advocacy, and the threat posed to such when student organisations are dependent of universities' discretion for funding. An alarming exchange between the Murdoch administration and its Guild of Students motivates our concerns.

We commend the Government on its actions in this matter thus far, and are particularly pleased with the focus placed on independent advocacy and representation.

Student-run organisations are the traditional providers of independent advocacy and representation on university campuses, and we imagine that this will remain the case in the foreseeable future. We are concerned that where student organisations are forced to negotiate with universities for their funding, the independence of this voice may be compromised. A letter from Chancellor Terry Budge to the Murdoch University Guild of Students dated 14 November 2008 provided a frightening case study.

Chancellor Budge's letter began by expressing concern over the Guild's campaigning on several issues of direct relevance to students, including NTEU negotiations and the status of one of the university's smaller campuses. The letter asked that the Guild discontinue its campaigning on these issues, and concluded with the following paragraph:

"These considerations are particularly pertinent in an environment where, per recent Federal government announcements, the University may expect to begin collecting fees from students for directing towards Murdoch student services needs, and to begin planning the most appropriate ways for administering these funds..."<sup>1</sup>

This is a clear and unambiguous threat towards the Guild, using the proposed fee to restrict the activities of student representatives at Murdoch. We are concerned that the Murdoch incident will prove, in the coming months and years, not to be an isolated event.

A truly independent student voice can only exist where the university does not control funding for student activities. It is for this reason that **we strongly recommend that the following subsection be removed from the Bill:**

*19-67(3) However, the Student Services, Amenities, Representation and Advocacy Guidelines cannot require a provider to fund an organisation of students, or of students and other persons,*

and that the Services & Amenities Fee Guidelines be formulated with a specific requirement for the adequate funding of student bodies.

Yours sincerely,

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<sup>1</sup> The letter in full, along with related material and a Murdoch Guild press release, can be found at <http://www.guild.murdoch.edu.au/your-guild/guildgagorder/>