

The new income support provisions for university students introduced by the Federal Labor Government in the recent budget discriminate against rural students.

Under the proposed changes rural families falling outside the parental income cut-out points will receive no financial support. While metropolitan families have a choice of their child living at home while attending tertiary studies, we don't have this luxury. I have given an outline of our situation below.

The eldest of our three children finished her schooling at the end of 2009 and will work as much as she can until she begins her degree in 2011. She has been accepted at Curtin University in Perth to do her degree of choice. She is currently living in Busselton, two hundred and fifty kilometres from Perth. She will have no option and will have to live away from home and relocate to Perth to embark on her degree.

It has been estimated that relocation and accommodation costs are around \$15,000 to \$20,000 per year, per student. Our income falls outside the Parental Income Cut-out Point and live inside the Inner Regional area (still 250 kilometres from Perth) which means our daughter will receive no financial assistance with her university aspirations. While she has been able to accumulate, through hard work, some savings this will be nowhere near enough to finance her relocation, accommodation and living costs over the period of her degree. If we lived closer to the tertiary institutions it would be very different, as she could live at home and commute to her place of study. This would pose no significant additional financial burden on our family budget.

All we ask is that rural families whose children wish to undertake tertiary studies are given a "fair go". The proposed changes apply a "blanket" rule which fails to take into consideration people's geographical situation. As opposed to families living in Perth, our necessity to live and work in the country will come at immense cost by effectively restricting our children's opportunities of tertiary education. Surely the Federal Government can see under the proposed changes rural families are significantly financially worse off than their city counterparts and some sort of recognition through financial assistance is fair and just.

Why is it that the Federal Government is so blatantly overlooking rural families living within the Inner Regional boundaries and failing to consider the added financial burden they experience should their children undertake tertiary studies in Perth? To expect rural families to absorb additional costs not experienced by their city counter-parts is unfair, inequitable, discriminatory and contrary to Federal Labor Government stated aims of removing barriers to higher education.

Helen and Andrew Spencer-Wright
(250 km from Perth)