

# Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education  
Legislation Committee

## **Inquiry into the provisions of the Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Union Fees) Bill 2005**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Federal Government's Voluntary Student Union legislation introduced by The Federal Minister for Education Dr Brendan Nelson into the House and titled "**Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Student Union Fees) Bill 2005**" which prohibits Universities from charging student fees to provide a wide range of student services (including sport and fitness facilities and support for sporting clubs and student athletes) and imposes penalties on Universities for non-compliance, will have a catastrophic impact on the provision of services at regional universities. The impact will not only be on students but the wider community.

This Legislation is of concern to Sport UNE, The University of New England, our students and the regional New England Community as supported by a recent student survey undertaken by Sport UNE during May, 2005 and the response to a petition at the University Sports Centre from mid April to 7<sup>th</sup> June, 2005. In the survey posted to all UNE fulltime students (up to 3,500), Sport UNE obtained responses from 793 students (providing a very credible survey sample of 22.67% of internal students).

- Only 19 students (2.40%) indicated they support the Government's VSU legislation.
- 651 students (82.09%) indicated that they were concerned that services will be lost and those provided will be more expensive as a consequence of the VSU Legislation.
- 194 students (24.46%) indicated that they would be happy to pay a General Service or amenities fee to the University but would prefer membership of student organisations to be voluntary.

A petition handed to the Federal member of parliament for the seat of New England, Tony Windsor on 8<sup>th</sup> June was signed by 1070 individuals (up to 850 students and 220 members of the local community) and called on the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of representatives assembled in parliament to reject the Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Student Fees) Bill 2005.

Sport UNE appreciates the opportunity to provide an assessment of the likely effect of the legislation on the provision of Sporting, Fitness and Physical Recreation Services for students at the University of New England, and the related consequences of the legislation. This submission highlights the likely impact of the legislation based on the Western Australian experience of VSU where 6% to 30% of students voluntarily joined student organisations when VSU legislation was operational (between 1995 and 2002). The UNE General Service Fee of which Sport UNE received \$124.97 for internal students and \$41 for external students (in 2004) contributes up to 45% of Sport UNE's operational income. In 2004 Sport UNE received \$915,000 from the GSF (which is likely to be around \$860,000 in 2005 due to lower enrolments at UNE).

In 2004 Sport UNE invested the \$915,000 it received from the UNE General Service Fee in the following areas:

<b>Salaries</b>	<b>\$346,000</b>
<b>Maintenance</b>	<b>\$204,000</b>
<b>Student Facility Fees subsidy</b>	<b>\$110,000</b>
<b>I.V and College sport support</b>	<b>\$85,000</b>
<b>Club expenses and subsidies</b>	<b>\$80,000</b>
<b>Accident and Building Insurances</b>	<b>\$66,000</b>
<b>Membership of Australian Uni Sport</b>	<b>\$14,000</b>
<b>Sports Scholarships</b>	<b>\$10,000</b>

Sport UNE estimates that based on the Western Australian VSU experience that we could be faced with a loss of up to \$850,000 of operational income if the legislation in its current form is passed. This would mean that the following sports services and programs at UNE will be hardest hit :-

- No funds to maintain playing fields and indoor facilities (\$250,000pa)
- No ability to provide Accident Insurance Coverage for students (\$45,000pa)
- Investment in new equipment will be reduced substantially (\$100,000pa)
- Insurance of buildings and club programs will be compromised (\$25,000pa)
- Student employment opportunities will be reduced and up to 50% of our fulltime staff would be retrenched.
- Club sport subsidies will be withdrawn (\$80,000pa)
- User fees will increase substantially for all programs (loss of \$110,000 in student subsidies)
- Intersport and intercollegiate sport subsidies will be withdrawn (\$85,000pa)
- Sports scholarships will be reduced (\$10,000pa) and Sport UNE would have no capacity to support the Australian Sports Commission Elite Athlete Friendly University Network.
- The Indoor Recreation Centre hours will be significantly reduced (likely to close at 8pm weeknights and possibly not open on Sunday). The Centre currently trades from 5.30am to 10pm on weekdays and 8am to 7pm on weekends.

## **2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Sport UNE believes that the legislation in its current form could have, amongst others, the following consequences:-

- Up to 50% of Sport UNE's 13 full time staff and up to 30 casual staff may have to be redeployed by the University or retrenched on or before 31<sup>st</sup> December 2005. Our total payroll cost in 2004 was \$877,373 and Sport UNE is budgeting on a 'leave and redundancy payout' of up to \$200,000 if retrenchments occur.
- A cessation or dramatic reduction of capital investment in non-teaching campus infrastructure at UNE.
- A run down of existing sporting, fitness and physical recreation capital infrastructure as a result of the loss of core general service fee funding essential for facility maintenance and equipment upgrades.
- UNE will be forced to either:
  - Not replace or develop campus non-teaching capital infrastructure
  - Divert DEST funding from staffing, teaching or research program funds to replace or develop existing and planned infrastructure currently funded and maintained by Sport UNE or
  - Request additional funding from DEST to provide such infrastructure, capital replacement and maintenance.
- UNE's community sporting commitments and obligations will be severely compromised.
- The potential cessation of Sport UNE funded and subsidised club, health, fitness, volunteer and physical recreation programs will diminish leadership and life-skills opportunities for students and reduce the opportunity for students to participate in

cost effective sports, health and physical recreation programs which contribute to their health and wellbeing and provide a balance in their daily campus lives.

- On-campus student numbers may fall as students, prospective students (both domestic and international) and parents come to realise that expected campus services and facilities are not or no longer available at regional campuses.
- UNE may find it increasingly difficult to attract students as well as qualified academic and general staff and their families to Armidale if there is a rundown of existing campus services and no prospect of future developments. Staff and students, expect regional universities to provide a range of sporting, recreation health and leisure opportunities, as well as excellent teaching and research programs.
- The legislation will undermine Australia's sporting future by diminishing Sport UNE's opportunities to provide sports scholarships for talented student athletes and support regional athlete development programs such as the Northern Inland Academy of Sport.

### **3. Sport UNE**

The University of New England Sports Association trading as Sport UNE was established in 1938 and is responsible for the provision and management of sport and physical recreation activities at the University of New England. Sport UNE is one of four student organisations at UNE and acts in accordance with its Constitution approved by the University Council. Sport UNE seeks to:

***Be recognised by its Members, the University and the Community for its excellence in all aspects of the development and conduct of sport and physical recreation activities.***

The important role which Sport UNE plays in the life of the University has been established firmly for many years and is illustrated by the following facts:

- Due to Sport UNE's ability to subsidise sport and fitness activities and encourage active participation by students, Sport and physical recreation are overwhelmingly the major student extra curricular activities at UNE, and throughout the past three decades, Sport UNE's participation rates have been amongst the highest in all Australian Universities.
- Sport and physical recreation make an important contribution to the physical, social and emotional well-being of students and staff.
- Sport UNE provides an important bridge between students and staff.
- Sport UNE's extensive community recreation program is an important bridge between the University and the local residents of Armidale.
- Sport UNE's National Sports Camp program (conducted since 1981) has generated extensive favourable publicity for the University at regional, national and international levels.
- Sport UNE's commercial activities (such as Sports camps) have brought substantial business to the Colleges and the local community and have assisted Sport UNE in reducing the level of student membership fees to cover operational expenditure.
- Sport UNE's facilities help to attract students and staff to the University.

- Sport UNE is a major employer of students, providing casual employment opportunities for up to 30 students per year.
- Sport UNE provides extensive sporting and fitness facilities which would otherwise be unavailable in a small rural community of 22,000 residents.
- Sport UNE works closely with local Councils, Sports Associations and Schools to attract major State sporting events to Armidale utilising University sports facilities .

**Sport UNE is able to provide an extensive range of facilities and services as a result of the University Administration levying all students a General Service Fee.** Without a compulsory service fee paid by all University Students, Sport UNE would be unable to maintain its facilities and service programs which benefit both the University and local community.

**It is worth noting that the massive demands placed on Sport UNE by students, arises from a situation which is unique to regional Australian Universities.** The University of New England is located in a relatively small country town with 22,000 residents whose ratepayers cannot be expected to provide the sports and physical recreation facilities needed by a large number of transient students. On the other hand students at metropolitan universities have access to an extensive range of facilities provided off campus by outside bodies. Many students at metropolitan universities play with non university teams and use non-university facilities. At the same time, almost every sporting and physical recreation activity pursued by students at the University of New England has to be provided by Sport UNE.

#### **4. FACILITIES DEVELOPED BY SPORT UNE**

**Sport UNE believes that the application of the Legislation in its current form will undermine the quality of sporting facilities available to students, staff and the wider New England Community.**

In its 66 years of operation, Sport UNE has developed facilities valued at over \$12 million. Our facilities include:

- A two court multipurpose hall used for basketball, netball ,volleyball, badminton and futsal and physical education teaching programs conducted by the School of Education
- A 25 metre heated indoor pool
- A comprehensive weights gym featuring pin loaded weight machines, free weights and electronic cardio centre
- An indoor climbing wall
- A multi purpose group fitness room
- Comprehensive changerooms
- 7 squash courts
- 8 tennis courts (6 floodlit)
- A massage therapy room
- Sports Store
- A floodlit synthetic Hockey field
- 4 floodlit football fields and
- Overall 12 heactares of playing fields incorporating 5 soccer pitches, 3 Rugby fields an Australian Football/ Cricket Ground and 4 hockey pitches.
- 6 synthetic Cricket practice wickets

The above facilities have been fully funded by Sport UNE with a small amount of funding (\$122,000) from Federal Government grants for the development of playing fields and change room amenities during the period 1964 – 1970. Sport UNE has also received limited financial support for the development of its extensive facilities from the University (during the period 1948-1970) and no support has ever been received from State or Local Government sources.

Universal contributions by students for sporting and recreational services at UNE have, over many years, been the source of funds for the development of UNE's quality sporting facilities. This revenue services the debt on infrastructure projects relating to buildings and grounds of a sporting/recreational nature. Sport UNE is currently servicing a loan of \$150,000 for the upgrading of the Indoor Recreation Centre roof (which was damaged by a major hail storm). How will this debt be serviced in the future under the proposed legislation? Who will take on responsibility for these loans should Sport UNE cease to exist? How will future facility development be funded under the proposed current legislation? In Armidale and other rural areas, the negative impact on facility development will be significantly amplified.

In 2004, Sport UNE resourced a team of business leaders from the New England Community who have been working to raise \$2.5million to upgrade the University pool and develop a grandstand complex at Bellevue Rugby Field. Regrettably the VSU legislation has undermined the efforts of our fundraising team as the regional community is unwilling to contribute funds to the project given the uncertain future of Sport UNE in a VSU environment.

The significant cost-benefit of maintaining and extending University sporting and recreational infrastructure has already been recognised by Government. A Federal Government Committee Report in June 1998 – "*Rethinking the funding of community sporting and recreation facilities: A sporting chance*" - reviewed the provision of national sporting and recreational infrastructure, and recognised University sporting facilities for the opportunities that they provide for the local community. It acknowledged that University facilities were already being used extensively by the community and that further contributing to them provides for a very cost-effective means of providing improved facilities for community as well as student use. Community use of Sport UNE facilities is extensive with support provided to a wide range of sporting groups, schools and disabled and disadvantaged groups on a daily basis. This support would be severely affected under the current legislation as the levying of higher commercial user fees is likely to curtail future facility usage by these groups.

The proposed legislation will have a dramatic impact on facilities and programs which are currently provided to rural and regional university students (services which are currently provided and readily available in metropolitan areas). One example of a facility that is offered by our organisation is a synthetic hockey field which was developed by Sport UNE in 1993 at a cost of \$700,000. Had this facility not been developed and funded, students and local hockey players would have had to travel a return distance of some 240 km to use a field of similar standard in Tamworth.

If students did not contribute financially to University facilities and services via universal membership of their Sports Association, many facilities would simply not exist for students at UNE, at other regional campuses or the broader rural community. The proposed legislation will severely affect the ability of Sport UNE to maintain the

facilities we have developed over time as we will be starved of funds to maintain our buildings and grounds. This would represent yet another reduction in services to the residents of Armidale and the New England region with similar impacts on other regional university communities.

## **5. THE CONTRIBUTION SPORT PLAYS IN PROVIDING A “WELL ROUNDED EDUCATION” AT THE CAMPUS LEVEL**

**Sport UNE believes that the application of the Legislation in its current form will undermine the richness and cultural diversity of University life, and in particular the role Sport plays in facilitating this.**

Cultural diversity and feeling of “community” are developed on campus through non-academic activities. Sport and recreation at university enhances and broadens the experiences of students. Whether they be campus-based, regional, national or international sporting opportunities, these activities contribute to, and provide a foundation for, the rich cultural diversity that exists on many Australian campuses. In fact it serves to extend the university environment beyond a student’s studies and helps create a positive dimension to University life for ‘tens of thousands’ of students.

Students not only acquire physical skills through University sport, but professional attributes that extend well beyond the development of sporting prowess. There are many skills which a student acquires as a result of playing, administering and generally becoming involved in sport. Developing skills in decision making, in management, in committee roles and in officiating are all opportunities available to those who are active in the administration of University sport. At UNE, our students can register for the New England Award which recognises leadership development through participation in a wide range of extra-curricular activities such as Sports and Club administration. The opportunities for students to obtain leadership skills through sport and other student organisations will be significantly diminished as a consequence of the VSU legislation.

In addition, those with an understanding of how University sport works in this country would acknowledge the role it plays in a student’s social development. Lifelong friendships are born through sport in the general Australian community and University sport is no different in this regard. University sport is as important to campus life as sport is to community life.

Sport UNE is proud of the activities conducted under our Club Programs and the skills that students acquire through their involvement in Club Sport. Evidence from Western Australia suggests that Club Programs under the proposed Legislation would be greatly affected if they do not cease entirely. At UNE the loss of Club Programs would have the following impacts:

- Reduction in opportunities to undertake Sports Administration, Coaching, Refereeing Courses (skills which our students take into the wider community upon completion of their degrees).
- UNE Sports Clubs currently provide the only form of Competition within the Armidale District for the following sporting activities:

- Waterpolo
- Women's Rugby Union
- Women's Cricket
- Volleyball
- Australian Football
- Badminton
- Mountaineering
- Scuba Diving
- Underwater Hockey
- Canoe Polo
- Indoor Climbing.

The loss of funding for these programs would have a profound impact on the local and regional sporting communities who participate in University Club Sports programs.

- University and UNE College Teams contribute to vibrant local sporting competitions. If UNE Club teams were to withdraw from local competitions (due to higher costs under VSU) this would seriously affect the viability of the local Rugby Union Competition where UNE teams contribute 70% of the players/teams in the New England competition.

## **6. FACILITY MAINTENANCE AND SAFETY STANDARDS**

**Sport UNE believes the application of the Legislation in its current form will undermine the safety of students, staff, visitors and community users to our facilities through the curtailment of quality and properly resourced preventative maintenance programs.**

Sport UNE currently invests up to \$300,000 annually on the maintenance of its indoor facilities and playing fields (excluding staff costs). This funding is provided from universal contributions by students through the University General Service Fee. Sport UNE currently maintains up to 13 hectares of playing fields on campus. Under a Voluntary 'user pays' basis it would be impossible for Sport UNE to continue maintaining its playing fields. Local Government Authorities are only able to fund the maintenance of their parks and playing fields through the levying of Council Rates as these facilities simply cannot be provided by adopting a 'user pays' philosophy. Federal, State and Local Governments spend \$2 billion annually on sport and physical recreation (2003 ABS report). With University Sport essentially excluded from this funding, Sport UNE asks why is University Sport alone being asked to operate on a user-pays basis?

Under the proposed legislation, major maintenance would be unable to be undertaken by Sport UNE for costly repairs, facilities would become rundown and as a consequence this would reduce the commercial viability of these facilities. This was the case in Western Australia (particularly at Murdoch and Curtin with older sporting and recreation facilities), when similar VSU legislation was implemented. Indeed during the VSU years in Western Australia, there was no investment in capital infrastructure for Sport within Universities. Unlike UNE, all Western Australian Universities have playing field maintenance undertaken by their University administrations. Without Sport UNE maintaining playing fields, these facilities would have to be withdrawn as the University of New England is in no financial position to take over funding of playing fields and inject \$300,000 annually into the maintenance of sporting facilities if the legislation in its current form is implemented.

Sport UNE cites the example of our 25 metre heated indoor pool which was constructed in 1979 and opened in 1980. After 25 years of continuous operation, this facility is in need of major upgrading. With the provision of funding from the UNE



General Service fee, Sport UNE currently has the capacity to earmark funds for the upgrade of plant and machinery for the pool or to apply for a loan. Sport UNE is currently looking at our cash reserves being used to fund staff redundancies as a consequence of the VSU legislation. If the pool plant breaks down it is likely that an investment of up to \$250,000 will be required just to replace pipes which have worn thin after pumping chlorine through them over the last 25 years. UNE is not in a position to fund the upgrading of the pool and if Sport UNE has no cash reserves to undertake the costly upgrade (as a result of paying staff redundancies) it is likely that the pool would have to be closed down. This would strip a major asset from our regional community and lead to the loss of many aquatic based club programs such as waterpolo, canoepolo, underwater hockey and the Penguins Community Swim Club.

## **7. THE CONTRIBUTION UNIVERSITY SPORTS ORGANISATIONS PLAY IN ENCOURAGING STUDENTS, STAFF AND THE WIDER COMMUNITY TO BE PHYSICALLY ACTIVE.**

**Sport UNE contends that the VSU Legislation will undermine The Federal Government's investment of \$90 million to encourage school children to take up sport as over \$30million of expenditure on Sport at a University level will be withdrawn if the legislation is implemented.**

Sport UNE is proud that as part of a deliberate strategy of subsidising facility fees through General Service Fee contributions (up to \$110,000 per annum) we have been able to provide access to programs and our facilities at low cost for students. This policy has contributed to UNE achieving the highest participation rates in Sport and physical activity within all Australian Universities for our internal student population. Sport at UNE provides a healthy balance for our students. If Sport UNE is to increase facility usage fees for our students and withdraw club subsidies as a consequence of the VSU legislation it is likely that students will participate less frequently in physical activity. This is not a positive change when considering the increasing levels of obesity and overweight amongst our youth and adult populations. It makes no sense to invest dollars into school programs and then destroy University programs that encourage and achieve high participation rates by students. Sport UNE currently funds a healthy lifestyle co-ordinator who conducts a wide range of programs aimed at encouraging students and staff to improve their health by making physical activity an integral part of their daily routine. Sport UNE's Healthy Lifestyle Program is subsidised by Sport UNE and receives a grant from the Vice-Chancellor to assist in the promotion and conduct of programs for staff at UNE. This program would be a direct casualty of the VSU legislation unless funded by the University or State or Federal Government Sport or health initiatives.

## **8. EMPLOYMENT LEVELS**

**Sport UNE believes the application of the Legislation in its current form will dramatically affect employment levels within Armidale and in Rural and Regional University centres.**

Sport UNE employs thirteen full time staff and up to 30 casual staff to service its extensive facilities and programs and keep our Indoor Recreation Centre open for up to 16.5 hours per day, seven days a week. Sport UNE's salary budget is \$880,000 per

annum. Our staff is drawn from Armidale and its surrounding districts and from within University residential colleges.

The likely reduction in casual staffing opportunities as a consequence of the current VSU legislation would dramatically impact on student retention rates and willingness to study at a regional university. Sport UNE is one of the Armidale Communities major employers of students, providing a range of casual employment opportunities for up to 30 students each year. The lack of casual employment opportunities for students in a small regional community is already a concern to the University in attracting students to Armidale. The legislation in its current form would effectively eliminate most of the casual student employment opportunities in Armidale (up to 150 positions) which are provided by UNE's four Student Organisations.

Sport UNE is concerned that the legislation will also have a profound impact on our full time workforce with the potential loss of up to 3 ground-staff (the funding would not be available to maintain facilities to current standards) and up to 3 administrative positions providing programming assistance and club support.

The reduction in funding that is inevitable under the proposed current legislation will have an immediate and dramatic effect on employment levels in all sporting associations/departments Australia wide. It will undermine staff professionalism and the considerable breadth of experience that currently exists within the University sport industry workforce.

The impact on employment levels will not be confined to the employment of University sport-service industry staff. The scaling down of activity in the University sport sector will have significant implications for employment in the construction and service industries associated with the provision and maintenance of over \$600 million worth of campus-based sporting and recreation facilities Australia wide. Construction, maintenance services and related industry activity will be severely impacted especially in regional areas, with the flow-on effect to local businesses and the local regional economy being significant.

## **9. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

**Sport UNE believes the application of the Legislation in its current form will significantly diminish our ability to contribute to the local and regional sporting community.**

Community involvement is the cornerstone of Sport UNE's mission which includes the following actions:

*The promotion of the University within the local community, the region and nation through:*

- *assisting in the conduct and management of sport and physical recreation programs.*
- *the management of the use of facilities by members and non-members.*
- *appropriate joint arrangements for the development and operation of sport and physical recreation facilities, and*
- *developing skills in sport and physical recreation conduct and management.*

## a) Community usage of Sports Association Facilities

Sport UNE has as part of its strategy, various roles that assist the development of sport in the community. Sport UNE's facilities are made available for use by a number of community groups throughout the year.

- **Local Schools** utilise Sport UNE facilities for their weekly sports programs and regional carnivals with up to 700 school children each week accessing our facilities as part of their school sport and physical activity programs.
- **University Teams and Sports facilities** are a vital part of local sporting competitions. The University's Consett Davis playing fields are floodlit and provide Armidale's only venue for competition standard night play (with a lighting level of more than 200 lux). The VSU legislation will mean there will be no capacity for Sport UNE to replace blown light globes as the costs would be prohibitive (up to \$10,000 to hire cranes and replace all globes).
- **Sports Association Clubs** fill gaps in the local provision of sport by encouraging non University teams to play in University competitions where no other locally organised competitions are available. Australian Football, Badminton, Underwater Hockey, Volleyball, and Mountaineering are examples of this support. Sport UNE will be unable to subsidise equipment and facility access for these clubs making it more expensive for everyone to play sport. Without Sport UNE's assistance most of these activities would not be sustainable as they rely heavily on student participation.
- **The University Community Fitness Program** provides a wide range of fitness related activities and health lifestyle programs conducted under supervision of qualified instructors. Sport UNE is Armidale's only Fitness centre accredited with State and National Fitness bodies.

The current Legislation would reduce Sport UNE's ability to provide facilities and programs to community groups at cheaper/subsidised rates. This would greatly affect community, school and disabled and disadvantaged groups and our inability to subsidise programs would diminish our capacity to conduct coaching, refereeing, first aid and learn to play programs.

## b) National Sports Camps

Since 1980 Sport UNE has conducted the National Sports Camps in Armidale. During the past twenty five years in excess of 130,000 campers have attended the Camps from all states in Australia and from New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, South Africa, Great Britain, China, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Fiji. The Camps have featured Australia's leading coaches and players and have earned the University an International reputation for the quality of the sporting facilities and coaching programs.

The National Sports Camp program is conducted by Sport UNE in conjunction with State and National Sports Associations. This link enables the University to secure the services of Australia's leading coaching and players to conduct the sports camp programs.

The National Sports Camps provide participants the opportunity of developing their skills under the guidance of Australia's leading coaches and players. Coaching accreditation programs are also conducted for parents and coaches in all programs.

The current Legislation would effectively see the 'winding up' of the National Sports Camps as Sport UNE would no longer have the facilities, staff or financial resources to promote the program.

c) **Major Championship Events**

Sport UNE has a proud history of hosting major sporting championships. Sporting teams travel from around Australia to utilise UNE's extensive sporting facilities. Once again the influx of players and supporters provides a major economic benefit to the local economy.

Sport UNE had been planning to host the 2006 Northern University Games in Armidale an event that would have injected well over \$2million into the local economy through the participation of up to 2,200 student athletes across 15 sports. The VSU legislation has placed 'on hold' our plans for this event as we would no longer have the standard of facilities or staff resources to conduct the Regional University Games.

## **10. UNDERMINING THE FUTURE OF AUSTRALIAN SPORT**

**Sport UNE believes the application of the legislation in its current form will undermine Australia's sporting future. It will curtail student participation and significantly hinder the opportunity universities have to contribute to the nation's future sporting potential.**

With the implementation of the legislation in its current form, Sport UNE will be unable to subsidise the participation of our students who represent UNE and the wider community at Regional and National University events. University sporting contests in the future will become events for students who can afford to compete rather than for those who are deserving of representation. This will reduce the standard of Australian University sport and ultimately reduce opportunities for talented student athletes. It is likely that the National Universities Games which are the largest multi-sport event conducted in Australia today "will die" as a consequence of the current Legislation.

University sporting programs at UNE provide a basis for greater female participation than the community norm. With up to 53% of UNE's full time student population being women, the loss of a vibrant sport and recreation industry with the University sector will undermine further the opportunities for women in sport.

The legislation in its current form will also adversely impact on the following regional and representative sport programs:-

- **Northern Inland Academy of Sport.**

Sport UNE was the developer of the concepts behind the establishment of the Northern Inland Academy of Sport in 1992. Today, the Academy makes extensive use of Sport UNE facilities for the conduct of its programs in the

following sports: Rugby Union, Netball, Softball, Hockey and Soccer. Sport UNE currently supports the Boys and Girls Soccer program. This support will be lost under the VSU Legislation.

- **Armidale Dumaresq Sports Council.**

Sport UNE has been an active contributor on Armidale Dumaresq Council's - Sports Council and has worked closely with Council in hosting major sporting events. Armidale Dumaresq Council is currently developing a Strategic Plan for Sport. VSU will have a profound impact on the Council as Sport UNE would have no capacity to maintain fields our students would therefore seek to make greater use of Council facilities.

With the likely demise of our Club Sports program, students will look to community clubs to sustain their representative sporting interests. This transfer of responsibility will place considerable strain on Councils recreation budget and facilities from non rate-paying students who reside in UNE's Residential Colleges.

- **The Athlete Friendly University Network**

In October 2004 the Federal Government through its agency, the Australian Sports Commission, requested and received the commitment of Australia's universities to the "Elite Athlete Friendly University Network".

This program recognised that for too long Australia's talented sportspeople had to choose between achieving sporting excellence and seriously pursuing tertiary education. UNE is a member of the Elite Athlete Friendly University network and Sport UNE advocates on behalf of the University of New England's elite athletes. With the potential loss of staff as a consequence of the VSU legislation, Sport UNE would be no longer able to assist these athletes. It is envisaged that our Sports Scholarship program would also be diminished thereby providing reduced opportunities for our regional athletes. As an example, Sport UNE's Scholarship support has assisted Katherine Calder (Australia's number one ranked cross country skier) to successfully combine the rigours of her external studies with her representative sporting commitments in Europe as she aspires to represent Australia at the Winter Olympics. In Katherine's own words "Sport UNE's assistance has been awesome and has helped to keep me competitive," "Without Sport UNE's scholarship support and assistance it would have been a struggle for me to compete on the world stage, I certainly could not have continued my studies without Sport UNE's support".

There is a very real contradiction in that the proposed legislation will withdraw the capacity of Australian universities, through their respective sports bodies, to provide the substantial resources required to develop a system that, for the first time, would adequately equip athletes for life after sport.

## **11. MARKETING UNE TO POTENTIAL STUDENTS AND RECRUITMENT OF STAFF**

**Potentially the most dramatic impact the introduction of the Higher Education Legislation Amendment Bill would have upon the local community would be in the reduction of students wishing to study at UNE if student services are**

**diminished or curtailed. Regional Universities are already finding it difficult to attract students with the competition from large metropolitan universities.**

The facilities and services provided by Sport UNE are a major attraction for students to study at UNE. Without our services and facilities, students would be lost to major metropolitan universities where an extensive range of facilities and services are available to compliment their University education. UNE is likely to find it increasingly difficult to attract students as well as qualified academic and general staff and their families to Armidale if there is a rundown of existing campus services and no prospect of future developments. Staff, as well as students, expect a regional university to provide a range of sporting, recreation, health and leisure opportunities, as well as excellent teaching and research opportunities.

## **12. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, Sport UNE advocates the amendment of the current VSU legislation to enable the University to levy a compulsory Amenities fee for non academic services for all students. Sport UNE believes it is not unreasonable for all university students to be asked to make a contribution to the services available to them - especially those services of a sporting and recreational nature. Moreover, we believe it is paramount that student sporting and recreational services continue to be adequately resourced.

As a member of Australian University Sport (AUS), Sport UNE endorses the following amendments proposed by AUS to the Federal Government's Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-Front Student Union Fees) Bill 2005. The amendments recommend that Universities be allowed to collect a compulsory fee for amenities and recognises the current Bill's primary intention to:

- Promote the ideal of freedom of association
- Give students the choice as to which organization(s) they wish to join as members
- End the potential for compulsorily-levied fees to be directed to political actions that may not accord with a student's own political views
- End the situation where higher education providers are responsible for the collection of such fees without being held accountable for their application

Sport UNE believes the following amendments to the Bill address these issues at the same time as allowing for the continuation of vital campus services and facilities.

The amendments also ensure that the responsibility for all monies raised by a student service and amenities fee will pass from students to higher education provider appointees.

The proposed amendments are as follows:

**i). A student services and amenities fee chargeable by the higher education provider be applied to cultural, welfare and support, sporting (including health and fitness) and artistic purposes.**

**ii). The disposition of all funds is to be administered by an entity or entities established by the higher education provider, the board of which shall**

**comprise at least 51 per cent of members directly appointed by the higher education provider.**

**iii). No funds are to be spent on political activity. Clubs and societies which are involved in political activity are ineligible to receive grants from this fund.**

**iv). Universities be empowered to allow the entities to use funds for the following student services and amenities:**

- o health and dental services**
- o computing, photocopying and library services**
- o welfare services and child care facilities**
- o sporting facilities and clubs**
- o non-political student societies**
- o international student services**

**v). Membership of all clubs and societies which receive grants from the entities must be voluntary.**

**vi). The tertiary education provider be required to certify annually that the proceeds of the student services and amenities fee have been applied in compliance with the legislation.**

Sport UNE would welcome the opportunity to address these issues when the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Legislation Committee meets in Armidale on 5<sup>th</sup> July.

