

# Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education  
Legislation Committee

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

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**Submission no:** 147

**Received:** 17/06/2005

**Submitter:** Mr Peter Crockett  
Captain

**Organisation:** Melbourne University Windsports Club

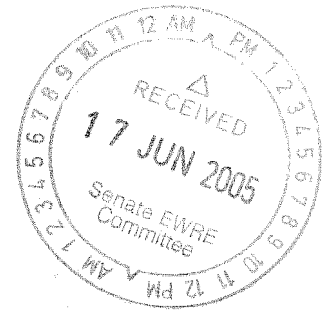
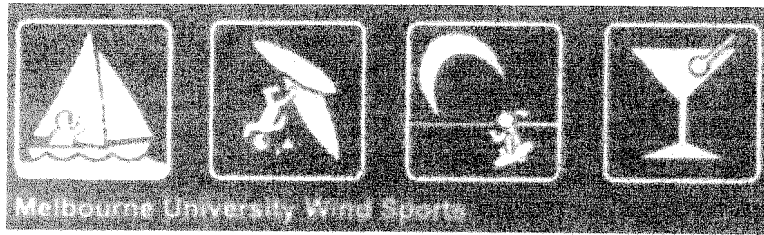
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The Secretary,  
Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Legislation Committee,  
Department of the Senate,  
Canberra

Dear Mr Carter,

**RE: Voluntary Student Unionism's impact on Melbourne University Wind Sports Club**

We write in objection to the proposed changes to student union membership rules in Australian Universities. As a group of undergraduate students involved in providing essential recreational, competitive and educational opportunities at Melbourne University, our club is disgusted with the ill-conceived and ignorant policies that the federal government intends to implement.

Melbourne University Wind Sports Club (under several names) has existed for at least 3 decades during which it has made a lasting contribution to the university experience. This year may be the last in which it receives funding derived from the amenities and services fees paid by students. The club allows students to learn, practice and compete in the sports of sailing and windsurfing, the club has ambitions of introducing kite-boarding to its list of activities.

85 students are members of the club this year, most of them have never previously had the chance to be involved in the activities the club offers. Under VSU we expect that our membership will be at least half that due to the prohibitive fees that will be charged. We are just one of the 45 clubs which are members of Melbourne University Sports Association (MUSA), who have similar (or greater) memberships to our own.

Under VSU, there is a very high likelihood that the club will be forced to severely reduce its already limited number of activities, possibly to the point where the club is no longer viable. The club's activities are totally reliant on funding from MUSA as the maintenance costs of our assets are high, membership fees are not enough alone. VSU threatens MUWSC's very existence. MUWSC will never again compete against other universities under VSU as Australian University Sport will cease to be viable, even if it did, students would not be able to gain financial assistance to travel to events which are usually interstate.

At present, membership is a nominal \$20, activities usually require a small fee from students such as \$15 (many students spend twice this on a night out). This year more than half the club's funding (\$2000) came from MUSA, and was barely enough. MUSA also provides the club with free on-campus storage facilities. Under VSU membership costs and activity costs would double to cover rent and maintenance expenses in the absence of MUSA funding.

Those who have been involved in the committees of the club have learnt organizational and management skills valuable both to themselves and future employers the best way known, through practice.

Melbourne University Wind Sports Club plays a vital role in Melbourne university life which is shown by the many skills that have been learnt by its members and committees, the members who have forged lasting friendships, and those same members' achievements, both great and small.

Every year, university students of all sorts are taught to sail and windsurf by the club, for most of those taught, the club offers their only means of participation in these life-enriching activities. In the world of sailing, expense is often a great discouragement, MUWSC offers an affordable way for students to participate in the water sports it offers.

For undergraduate students the club is a place to meet other students with similar interests and ambitions, a difficult task in many early-year lecture theatres, which seat 600 or so students.

Members of Melbourne University Wind Sports club often compete in local and national competition, often only having learnt their chosen sport after having joined the club. In 2003, MUWSC won the AUC for sailing in Canberra. For almost half the team, sailing was a sport they had learnt in the club. Most recently members of the club traveled to Sydney to compete in the National Windsurfing Championships.

In 2004, an all student team from Melbourne University competed in the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary Sydney to Hobart Yacht race. This team had its roots in MUWSC and would not have existed if its founding members had not met through the club.

MUWSC believes that its ability to provide extra-curricular activities to students will be severely limited under VSU, it may even cease to be financially viable without the support from the amenities and services fee. In light of the contribution the Wind Sports Club makes to Melbourne University, and of its fellow sporting clubs' contributions, we ask that our contribution to university life will be considered before any legislation is allowed on the implementation of VSU.

While MUWSC cannot comment on the experience of Western Australian and Victorian Universities who have experimented with forms of VSU, it believes that a comparison of Melbourne University with generally smaller universities is unhelpful. Melbourne University Student Union has a long history. A huge number of student associations and

clubs reside under its umbrella. At an institution which has such a long history of use of the amenities and services fees to provide essential opportunities for students, the abolishment of the Union's funding source would be devastating to student life.

Sincerely,



Peter Crockett,  
Cptn. Windsurfing,

**On behalf of the committee,  
Melbourne University Windsports Club  
C/- Melbourne University Sport, Melbourne, 3010**