

## **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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This submission will outline the negative impact of the government's proposed 'Abolition of Compulsory Up-Front Fees' legislation upon students and staff of Southern Cross University and the regional communities of which SCU is a significant part. We will briefly outline the demographics of SCU, the nature of the two students organisations that are currently an integral part of the university, and the impacts of the legislation upon the university and our communities.

We would firstly like to briefly comment on some of the misperceptions and misrepresentations surrounding debate about this issue, as these relate to our situation. At SCU, like many universities, membership of the student organisations is **not** compulsory, as there is provision to opt out of membership, and fees are not necessarily up-front, as many students take advantage of SCU's loans system that can cover the student amenities charge. SCU student organizations are, like many others, very happy to recognize the differential access to services that students have, by setting in agreement with the university widely differing fees for students depending on campus and mode of study (see Appendix). Both student organizations are also happy to consider any reasonable request for waiver of these fees from students.

## **Southern Cross University**

Like most regional universities, SCU has a student population that has particular need for subsidised services and activities, and is part of communities that often rely on the services and activities provided by student organizations.

- SCU has more than 12,000 students, with campuses at Lismore, Coffs Harbour and Tweed.
- 60% of students come from rural and isolated areas.
- 27% of students are from a low socio-economic background (national average 14.8%).
- Over 80% of students at SCU are mature age.

## **SCU student organisations**

Currently at SCU there are two student organizations based at the Lismore campus, the University Union (trading as Campus Central), and the Student Representative Council (SRC). The Coffs Harbour Student Association is undergoing a review, and students at Tweed are offered services and representation by the Lismore-based organizations. Both organisations are undertaking collaborative discussions with the university about the best form of student organisation for a relatively small, regional and multi-campus university.

### **Campus Central**

- In 2004 Campus Central collected \$930,000 in student fees.
- It employed 150 people from within the Lismore community.
- Over \$1 million in wages were injected back into the economy.
- More than \$500,000 was spent on commercial trade in our economy.

### **Student Representative Council**

- In 2004 the SRC collected \$499,000 in student fees.
- It employed 43 people from within the Lismore community.
- Over \$345,000 in wages was injected back into the economy.
- More than \$330,000 was spent on commercial trade in our economy, supported over 100 local businesses.

## **The predicted impact of VSU**

Based on the impact of state legislated VSU in Western Australia, the two student organisations predict the impact of the current proposed legislation can be summarized as follows:

- Campus Central will cease trading.
- The Student Representative Council will cut services by 90 %.
- \$2.2 million will be withdrawn from the Lismore community.
- Up to 170 Jobs will be lost.
- 23 sporting teams and clubs will cease to compete.
- The quality of Southern Cross University will be diminished.
- Students will give preference to city universities.
- The total number of students coming to Lismore will decrease.
- Coupled with inadequate funding cuts to Universities SCU may face closure.

## **How this will affect particular people in the university community and the broader community**

An examination in more detail of the very broad range of services currently provided by student organisations at SCU, and the very widespread use of these services by the

university community and the broader community, shows the dramatic impact this legislation will have on significant numbers of people.

## **Sports**

Campus Central:

- Supports 23 (mainly sports) clubs and societies with 530 participants.
- Maintains a Health and Fitness Centre with 1200 members, including 250 people from the general public. This is currently the **only** fully equipped gym in Lismore that caters to both men and women (there being a single other, women's only, gym).
- Helps 300-400 students annually participate in intervarsity sports.
- Provides considerable support to community sporting events.

## **Cultural events and activities**

As well as being an important part of the life of any university, cultural activities provided by student organizations at SCU play an important academic role for students studying Visual Arts, Media Studies and Contemporary Music as there are limited other opportunities for experience in these areas.

Campus Central:

- Organises band nights and movie nights that attract up to 400 students and 40 guests weekly.
- Organises large gigs that can attract up to 300 students and a similar numbers of members of the general public.
- Facilitates entry into band, film and art competitions.

The SRC:

- Provides a free public address system for many musical and cultural events.
- Supports a student newspaper, the production of which involves up to 50 students each year, and which is read up to 4000 members of the university and the general public.

## **Representation and advocacy**

The SRC:

- Provides student representatives to the university Academic Board, Appeals Committee, and Disciplinary Committee, and supports student representatives on School and Divisional Boards and the University Council.
- Involves over 200 students in its Council and associated committees and working groups, who have helped many other students with many issues and who receive valuable experience in management and leadership.

- Provides an advocacy and advice service on academic and welfare matters, which has been utilised by over 200 students since its inception in 2003.

### **Dentist**

The SRC subsidises the **only** free dental service in the Lismore area, which was used by 2109 students in 2004.

### **Shuttle bus**

In an area of limited public transport, Campus Central subsidises a shuttle bus that provides over 1000 trips per week.

### **Student Drop In Centre**

The SRC operates a very popular Student Drop In Centre that provides free tea and coffee and computer access and help/training, and subsidized printing, copying and binding, which is used by over 300 students per week.

### **Other services**

Both student organisations provide a range of other services and activities including:

- Subsidised food outlets, bar and stationary shop.
- Orientation programs of events and activities including campus tours, free O Week bags.
- Childcare subsidy.
- Student accident insurance.
- Travel agency.
- Chaplaincy subsidy.
- Second hand textbooks.
- Book scholarships.
- Library rebate.
- Free publications including a Student Diary, Wall planners, and Whats On
- Graduation: gown hire, morning and afternoon teas, entertainment and merchandise.

### **Community support**

SCU student organisations provide much needed support to a huge range of community organizations. For example Campus Central facilities are used by:

- The Lismore Masters Games
- The Lismore Council

- Far North Coast Soccer
- Far North Coast Baseball
- Far North Coast Rugby Union
- Marist Brothers Rugby League Club
- East Lismore Tennis Club
- Lismore Badminton Club
- Department of Sport and Recreation
- The North Coast Academy of Sport
- The NSW Rugby Union
- The Vietnam Veterans Association
- Local Physiotherapist and Rehabilitation companies
- Westpac Rescue Helicopter
- The Northern Region Area Health Department
- St Vincent's Hospital
- SES – Flood Evacuation Centre
- Australian Cancer Council
- Local Churches and Religions
- Care for Kids
- Our Kids
- Local drama schools
- Weekend Warriors
- University International Home Stay
- Schools
- Australia University Sports
- National Park and Wildlife
- Local businesses e.g. Telstra, Macadamia Magic, Norco

We hope the above makes clear that the proposed legislation will have a negative impact on the academic, sporting and cultural life, and even employment, of thousands of people associated with SCU or living within the communities of which SCU is an important part, and we urge the committee to reject the legislation.



## Appendix: SCU student organisation fees 2005

### Lismore

Attendance Mode	Total (\$)
<b>Full-time</b>	
– Semester	174.90
– Trimester	116.60
<b>Part-time</b>	
– Semester	111.10
– Trimester	74.10
<b>External</b>	
– Semester	52.80
– Trimester	35.20

### Coffs Harbour

Attendance Mode	Total (\$)
<b>Full-time</b>	
– Semester	99.00
– Trimester	66.00
<b>Part-time</b>	
– Semester	79.20
– Trimester	52.80
<b>External</b>	
– Semester	52.80
– Trimester	35.20

### Port Macquarie

Attendance Mode	Total (\$)
<b>Full-time</b>	
– Semester	85.80
– Trimester	57.20
<b>Part-time</b>	
– Semester	66.00
– Trimester	44.00
<b>External</b>	
– Semester	52.80
– Trimester	35.20

### Tweed Gold Coast

All Modes	Total (\$)
– Semester	52.80
– Trimester	35.20