

# 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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President, on behalf of Melbourne University Renegades  
Volleyball Club

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This submission addresses the one of the matters that the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Legislation Committee has adopted as part of its terms of reference – “assessment of the likely effect of the legislation on the provision of student services and related consequences”.

Melbourne University Renegades Volleyball Club (MURVC) is greatly concerned about the impact of the proposed Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Union Fees) Bill 2005, both on our future Club operations and the services we provide for our Club members and on the wider sporting community, particularly in reference to volleyball.

The proposed Voluntary Student Union (VSU) legislation will greatly impact upon our Club both financially and through reduced participation, growth and development in our sport both within our University and local community where we operate, and more widely across other Universities and regional communities across Australia. Universities are a critical channel for the development of volleyball in Australia and provide significant funding to assist the growth and development of volleyball within Universities and subsequently, in the wider community.

Whilst we understand the Federal Government's concerns about the appropriate use of student funds, we believe there are many essential services currently provided for students through the Services and Amenities fees and that most students are happy to make a contribution to making these services available.

We believe these fees are critical to maintaining student sporting and recreational services and facilities, and the benefits they provide to the wider communities, particularly in regional areas. Whilst we support the principal of freedom of association, we do not believe that this is in anyway at risk through the collection of general services and amenities fees by universities. Therefore, we respectfully urge your enquiry to consider the following:

- giving students choice as to which university-based organisations they wish to join as members
- the contribution that University sporting clubs and amenities make to the wider community and sports development in Australia
- amending the proposed VSU legislation to recognise the value of the services, such as sporting Club and facilities, through the compulsory collection of General Services and Amenities Fees which is used to support sporting, cultural, welfare, health and artistic services
- requiring universities and higher education providers that collect these fees to be accountable for, and report on, their distribution and application.

**Background**

Melbourne University is one of the most successful sporting Universities in Australia and its sporting clubs have an outstanding history of success. Melbourne University Renegades Volleyball Club (MURVC) is proud to be part of this tradition. Clubs and other sport and



recreational programs and facilities have been funded by students through compulsory Amenities and Services Fees since the early 1900s.

### **About our Club - Melbourne University Renegades Volleyball Club (MURVC)**

Melbourne University Renegades Volleyball Club (MURVC) was incorporated in December 2000 as a result of the amalgamation of two Clubs – the Melbourne University Volleyball Club and the Footscray Renegades Volleyball Club. The two Clubs had been operating in an alliance together since 1992.

Our Club brings together the strong Volleyball tradition of the Footscray Renegades with the proud and strong tradition of the University of Melbourne in the area of sport and recreation.

Among other goals in our Constitution, our aims include:

- ◆ actively promoting, developing and encouraging volleyball amongst members of the Melbourne University Sports Association and in the wider community;
- ◆ competing in all levels of Volleyball available in Australia; and
- ◆ promoting and supporting volleyball as a community, social, competitive and professional sport.

MURVC has grown significantly since 1998 from a base of 45 members to its current membership base of over 140, comprising 53% students and 47% non-students (including many Alumni). The Club is one of the few Australian volleyball clubs that provides access to a full range of competitive and social volleyball opportunities for both university students and the wider community. This includes participation: Victorian State League (seniors and juniors); Australian Volleyball League; the Australian Volleyball Masters; the Australian and World Masters Games; volleyball tournaments organised annually by regional and interstate volleyball associations; social volleyball and skill development clinics for University students and other community members; the Victorian and Australian beach volleyball circuits; University Games participation including both indoor and beach volleyball, junior volleyball development with local high schools; and support for campus-based inter-college social volleyball. Our Club members also help provide skilled refereeing for local social volleyball competitions.

The Club participates in all levels of Victorian State League, fielding 10 teams, including Junior Boys and Girls State League teams, which we have developed through alliances with five local secondary schools as part of our Junior Development Program. We are very proud to be playing our fourth season in the Australian Volleyball League (AVL) this year. In an environment when sponsorship is difficult to obtain for amateur sport and we receive little to no commercial sponsorship from year to year, our participation in the AVL is made possible by the funding and support provided by Melbourne University Sport. This is provided through a special sports grant we receive on top of our normal Club funding, as part of Melbourne University Sport's elite level sports development program. We are one of the few sporting Clubs at Melbourne University, along with football, basketball, rowing and a number of others that have teams playing at an elite level in their sport. We believe our participation in the AVL is an important vehicle required to provide volleyball athletes with access to participate in elite level competition and to promote and encourage volleyball both in terms of participation and as a spectator sport.

The Club has enjoyed considerable on court success over the years of our operation. A number of our past players have represented Australia and Victoria. Melbourne University students have made National squads at the senior level and Juniors developed through our Club have been selected for State level representative sides. Our teams have won State League premierships at various levels of competition within the Victorian State League.

MURVC has a consistent record of its teams finishing within the top of their division at State League. In 2003, we were very proud to have 7 of our 8 senior teams finish in the top 4. Our



track record in the Australian University games has been to regularly take home silver and bronze medals, both in the Men's and Women's indoor volleyball, as well as in Men's beach volleyball. Over our recent history, we have also won a number of regional volleyball tournaments in which we participate annually.

In 2002, when the World Masters was in Melbourne, our Men's 35+ team won gold for their age group. We have also won a number of other gold medals for both Men's and Women's teams that have competed in the Australian Volleyball Masters. Junior teams we have trained and coached have won indoor and beach Junior championships at various age levels, including a Senior Boys win in the Open Division 2 in the National Schools Cup. Our Junior girls finished in the top four for Junior State League in 2004.

MURVC is very active in the local community, through our participation in regional and interstate volleyball tournaments and through our junior development program, which has grown significantly over the past three years. The work we do with local secondary schools has helped them to successfully compete in secondary school sporting competitions such as the National Schools Cup. Our Club members have volunteered hundreds of hours of their time and taken annual leave to provide coaching and support junior participation in our sport.

### **How will the proposed VSU legislation affect our Club?**

#### **Membership and financial support**

As previously mentioned, our current Club membership is now over 140. We expect to see this continue to rise as we develop new programs to encourage university students and community members to try social participation in volleyball. This year we ran a very successful eight week coaching clinic which for the first time engaged over 40 social members in skills development and saw some of them continue to participate by forming teams to enter into local social volleyball competitions.

The proposed VSU legislation would have a significant impact on our membership. Without the financial support of MUS to assist in subsidising the cost of our operations including training grounds and facilities, equipment, insurance, the cost of our membership fees would need to rise dramatically. Many of our student members would be unable to pay the increase level of membership and competition fees set by the Club. This could have the impact of halving our membership, both in term of students and non-student membership. A decrease in membership will also impact on our ability to grow programs and expand our operations, as we are a volunteer and not-for-profit organisation that relies heavily on the volunteer time given by our club members and supporters.

Without the support of MUS funding provided through the collection of the Amenity and Services Fee, our Club would find it very difficult to function in its current capacity. It is highly likely that we would find it difficult to sustain our participation in the Australian Volleyball League and that the number of teams we are to field for participation in the Victorian State League competition would also decrease significantly, as would our capacity to continue our current junior development program.

MUS currently provides a total of around \$50-55,000 annually in direct financial and in-kind support to our club. This is made up of \$25,000 of direct funding to the Club and an estimated \$25-30,000 of indirect funding through the provision of insurance and all facilities for training and AVL matches at no cost, including the hiring cost of any facilities we use off-campus. Some of our members have also benefited from sports scholarships and in-kind support provided for elite players such as gym memberships

In addition to the funding received from MUS, Club members pay an annual Club membership fee of \$10 for social members, \$40 for junior members competing in State League and \$75-80 for student/non-students senior members participating in competitive volleyball. Club



members pay an additional amount on top of this fee to play in both social and competitive volleyball competitions. This currently ranges from \$205 to \$265 for State League participation and \$400 for AVL participation.

Without the funding providing through the Amenities and Services fees, our Club membership fees would need to increase to \$20 for social members, \$55 for juniors and \$110-130 for senior members participating in competitive volleyball. We would need to introduce fees to cover training costs for social and competitive volleyball for the first time (estimated at between \$500-1000 per year per player depending on commercial rates charged for venues) and competition fees would increase to between \$410-\$440 for State League participation and up to a possible \$3000 for AVL participation, because of the interstate travel required.

The financial and in-kind support from MUS assists us in the provision of access to both social and competitive volleyball for Club members. In addition, it provides students who participate in Australian University Sport events with a subsidy to minimise the cost of their participation in the University Games.

Since 2000, over \$9 million has been invested in the development of the University's sports facilities, most of which comes from the Amenities and Services fee and any surplus generated from MUS's fee-for-service activities. The heritage listed Beaurepaire Centre was recently re-opened after a major refurbishment, and is now a state of the art facility available to all students for their health and fitness needs. These facilities have been utilised by our Club members in fitness, preseason and injury management programs. The cost to use commercial facilities would prohibit the provision of most of these services to our Club members.

### **Reduced Services**

MURVC is one of the largest volleyball Clubs in Australia. As mentioned previously, the proposed VSU legislation would decrease our membership and reduce our physical and financial ability to participate in the range of competitive volleyball competitions, in which we currently field teams. This would mean that players would have less opportunity to gain access volleyball training and competition and that local school communities would find it hard to gain access quality coaching skills at very little cost. Thus, overall participation in the sport is likely to drop.

The current level of funding we receive from MUS has allowed MURVC to pay its coaches a small amount per year to cover their travel costs. This coaches payment is performance-based and amounts to a token contribution as a thank you for the many hours of volunteer time they give. We have also been able to provide subsidies to assist new coaches and referees to get qualifications and to meet competition requirements that our teams have to provide formally qualified coaches. For our elite teams – AVL and the Honours Division of State League - we have provided special fitness training and injury management, including access to a qualified physiotherapist, who travels with the AVL teams to their matches.

Without the current funding we receive from MUS, which is the likely outcome of the proposed VSU legislation, we will not be able to continue to provide these and other services to their current extent in the future.

### **Training and playing facilities**

MURVC currently benefits from the use of well maintained, safe facilities that meet the requirements of our participation in the AVL, as a home ground venue. As previously mentioned, we train in both on-campus and offsite venues, as the demands of our Club for training space across all of our social and competitive teams, and playing for AVL home matches, cannot be met by the facilities provided on the Melbourne University Parkville Campus alone.



The quality of University sport facilities will suffer as maintenance and capital funds diminish as a result of the decrease in funds that will occur if the VSU legislation is implemented as proposed. Based on the Western Australia experience of VSU, we expect that investment in new facilities and maintenance of the quality of current facilities would significantly decrease. Given that volleyball is a facilities intensive sport requiring courts, nets, electronic scoreboards etc and PA system access for matches, we can foresee a significant decrease in the quality of the facilities available for our Club.

MUS provides for our access to all training facilities at no cost to our Club. As mentioned above, we estimate the in-kind and financial subsidy for the facilities provided for the training of our State League and AVL teams, is around \$25-30,000 per year. As shown above, we would find it difficult to cover this cost and would have to introduce new fees of \$500-1000 per player per year additionally cover this cost. A fact that would have a detrimental impact on our Club membership and participation in our sport.

### **Detrimental impact on the Australian Volleyball League**

Five out of the 11 current Australian Volleyball League Clubs are university-based. These include Queensland University of Technology, Sydney University, University of Technology Sydney (UTS), Monash University and MURVC.

All these Clubs rely significantly on the support of their universities to facilitate their participation in the competition. The support is both financial and in-kind through the provision of venues for training and matches etc. Currently our Club receives a specific grant of \$15,000 towards our participation in the AVL, which is part of our annual grant mentioned previously, as well as the provision of venues for training at no cost.

Under the proposed VSU legislation, we will no longer receive this funding. Given our past experience of getting sponsorship for volleyball sporting events, it is unlikely that we will be able to easily replace this source and quantum of funding, making our continued participation in the AVL very difficult to sustain even in the short-to-medium term. Given that the same impact is highly likely across all participating university-based Clubs, this puts the whole AVL competition in jeopardy. Thus, the proposed legislation will have a significant detrimental impact on a key development pathway for Australian volleyball.

### **Loss of opportunity to participate in Australian University Games Competitions**

Introduction of the proposed VSU legislation will also have a disastrous impact on intervarsity sport. Many universities have signalled that increased costs of participation will mean that students will not be able to participate and many Universities will not enter teams, making the current Games and the opportunities they provide for competition, no longer viable. This will reduce the standard of Australian university sport and ultimately reduce opportunities for talented and elite athletes.

### **Loss of sports Scholarships**

MUS currently provide a sports scholarships program, and as previously mentioned, this has benefited some of our Club athletes and provided them with assistance so they can participate in both academic studies and their chosen field of sport. In an environment where the VSU legislation is implemented as proposed, these scholarships will be discontinued. The loss of assistance to some students receiving these scholarships to defray the high costs of combining their tertiary studies and high-level sport, will mean they are unable to continue to participate in the sport and we will lose some very talented athletes.



### **Loss of development opportunities**

Should the proposed VSU legislation be implemented, the resulting decrease in the size of operation and competitive participation of our Club will decrease the opportunities we have to provide development programs, which currently extend well beyond the development of sporting, coaching and refereeing skills. As a result of its administration requirements, and our participation in State League and the Australian Volleyball League, students have the opportunity to develop sports and general administration, financial, marketing, web development and other business and organisational skills. In Committee roles, they are also given the opportunity to develop leadership, decision-making and management skills.

### **How will the proposed VSU legislation affect our sport?**

The impact of the legislation will be felt at all levels of sport participation. At a time when obesity and the nation's health are never far from the headlines, necessary increases in user charges will discourage the general student population who currently use university-based sporting facilities.

The wider volleyball community around Australia benefits from the facilities developed, maintained and provided by Universities. These facilities are particularly important to regional communities to facilitate their participation in not just volleyball, but a wide variety of sports.

Also, at the high performance end of sport, which has included our volleyball Club over the last three years, the combination of greater demands in elite sport and rising tertiary fees will see many top young student athletes forced to choose between study and sport. You will doubtless recognise that many of these people are not only aspirants for representation in Australian teams, but also future community leaders.

Prepared by

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gus Cirillo'.

Gus Cirillo  
President, Melbourne University Renegades Volleyball Club

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rosemary Bissett'.

Rosemary Bissett  
Vice-president, Melbourne University Renegades Volleyball Club