

Committee Secretary,
Senate Standing Committee on Rural & Regional Affairs & Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT
2600
Dear Sir or Madam,



I am writing to explain the difficulties that would arise from changes to the criteria for Independent Youth allowance. We are farmers in the Upper northern marginal cropping area of South Australia, 250km from Adelaide. Our youngest daughter, Lisa, has been accepted into University for 2009 (after working hard at school and gaining a TER of 90) and deferred to commence in 2010. We have agreed to a "gap" year with the sole purpose of gaining her Independent status, which will entitle her to an allowance while attending University. We realise there are many financial and social costs to country students relocating to the city, and we expect she will need support ongoing from us in many ways (not just financial). We accept this as responsible parents. However, I would like to describe what her year has involved, so you understand what the current criteria mean in a practical sense. She has worked hard to gain and keep jobs in the difficult employment circumstances that just happened to befall her "gap" year. She has been working up to 7 part-time jobs *at the one time* and has been employed by *10 different businesses* over the last 6 months. This has been necessary to maintain enough earning capacity when averaged over the 18 month period.

She has worked at

- Pt Augusta Aquatics centre, instructing students
- Woolworths, Pt Augusta, check out
- 1 Pt Augusta pub, lunch and dinner service and late night bar
- 3 Pt Augusta pubs, singing
- Assorted other "one-off" singing gigs
- Orroroo Pub, bar
- Orroroo cafe and grocery store
- Orroroo Visitor tourist info centre

This has meant living in 2 different locations, her home at the farm, near Orroroo and boarding at Pt Augusta. The distance between our farm and Pt Augusta is approx 110km. She drives an old car between the 2 locations, sold to her by her older sister. At times, she drives between these towns to do shifts for different employers on the same day. We put a stop to her working 3 shifts in one day. This is obviously over 7-day-weeks, every week.

Her wage has been at a very low rate for most jobs, meaning she feels compelled to work longer hours to achieve the income required.

And so the picture is clear. Under present criteria, a student needs a high degree of motivation, organisation, sacrifice and determination to earn the required amount to qualify for "independence". How many people can maintain this degree of discipline to "never knock back a shift", doing sometimes unstimulating work, when fatigue and exhaustion take hold?

Now to hear that there is a proposal to change the rules right in the middle of this outrageous routine, so that she may need to GO ON FOR ANOTHER YEAR before she will qualify, is the cruellest blow. I don't think you realise how impossible and impractical the criteria will be to meet.

Country students have NO alternative than to leave home to study at a tertiary level. It is predictable that when they consider all the financial imposts of relocation, many will back away from their aspirations and not attend University at all.

Please reconsider the real effect that these changes will have to young country people who have already made plans for 2010 and have goals for future careers in their sights.

Yours Sincerely,
Mrs Gaye Kuerschner