

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Re: Changes in Youth Allowance

Dear Sir or Madam,

I write to you in response to the proposed changes to the youth allowance.

I have lived in Karratha in rural Western Australia for the last nine years. My three children (currently aged 18, 16 and 12 years old) have undertaken the majority of their primary schooling in the town; however my wife and I chose to send our older two children to boarding school in Perth for their secondary education. We will also be sending our younger child to boarding school next year.

We did not make the decision to send our children to Perth for their education lightly as it is both a huge drain financially and emotionally.

However, due to the poorly supported and funded education system in Karratha we felt the best opportunity for our children's future was to give them the education offered to children in the city. To date our two older children have vindicated that decision in their academic results.

That said, our children enjoy the sense of community along with the lifestyle of the country and as my wife and I intend to remain in the town indefinitely; Karratha is their home.

My eldest daughter is in her first year at Curtin University studying Speech Pathology and has recently completed and passed her first semester of exams. My daughter's intention is to complete her degree and return to Karratha with her qualifications and live and work in the town she calls home. My younger daughter is currently in year 12 and is on track for a university placing next year. She hopes to move into a science field of some sort; specifically in the animal sciences. She too, plans to return to Karratha when she has completed her studies to live and work.

As children growing up in a rural area, they are well aware of the shortages in services that country people experience every day. They have developed a sense of loyalty to the town they live in and would love to return something back to the community. As such, their wish is to return to the town with qualifications that will assist the community and obviously give them a comfortable lifestyle that will allow them to live in an incredibly expensive town such as Karratha.

Unfortunately the cost of keeping our children in school and now university has reached a point where my wife and I are struggling beyond our financial means. Our older daughter, along with a large study load, has worked to support herself to the best of her ability. She will meet the current requirements to qualify for the youth allowance which will obviously reduce our financial burden if it were to remain in its present form. The changes to the current structure will prevent her from qualifying for the allowance as she will not have been working for a full 18 months before the end of 2009. Along with 'punishing us' it also decreases the time available to our daughter to study as she is required to work longer hours in order to keep herself.

The stopping of this allowance for my older daughter and subsequently my other children as they commence their tertiary studies, will make living in the country financially unsustainable for my wife and I.

Without the support of this allowance we will be required to move to Perth and I will be forced to work away from the family home, possibly as a fly in fly out worker in the North West, in order to provide for my family.

By moving to Perth, our children will be able to live in the family home and therefore reduce the burden of supporting them in other accommodation and all the expenses that come with young adults living away from their parents.

With their parents and siblings in Perth it is very unlikely that our children will return to the country. Once again the rural community will suffer through the further erosion by governments of opportunities to bring professional services to the country.

If the proposed changes are made, this government will be responsible for taking a family away from the country town they call home. They will indirectly stifle the opportunity for a country town to receive professional and qualified (more importantly – contented and willing) people to live in their community.

I strongly oppose the changes in their present form and would hope and expect that the government will support rural Australians.

Yours truly,

Kieran Steadman