

I live in Echuca. I have a daughter in Year 11 this year. She wants to attend university in 2012, after taking a gap year in 2011. The courses she has chosen are all in Melbourne. As she will not be able to live at home whilst studying as a family we would have to spend approximately \$13,000 per year on her accommodation whilst she completes her degree – a total of \$39,000. As rural people we are disadvantaged because it costs us more to send our children to university than city based families, whose children can live at home whilst they complete tertiary studies.

My husband and I are both professionals. There is a shortage of many professions in the country. There will be a greater shortage if people like us choose to move to the city because of the huge expense of sending their children to tertiary institutions. Many country families find the expense of sending their children to complete further study too expensive so country kids are not gaining qualifications that would enable them to return to the country to engage in a profession. The government will have a huge problem providing services to the country if this 'brain drain' continues.

The government espouses the advantages of decentralization and admits there are problems caused by the growth of Melbourne. Shouldn't it be encouraging those of us who wish to work and run businesses in rural areas? However when decisions like restricting access to youth allowance occur we feel like second class citizens, whose special needs and concerns are not understood. In our area our limited water supplies are being pumped to Melbourne while we are on severe water restrictions and watch our river levels drop. We haven't the same access to hospitals and culture as city residents.

Our area has been in the grip of a severe drought for many years. Studies show that rates of mental illness are high. Unlike city kids who remain at home for many years, as country people we expect to lose many of our kids to the city at 18. They go to university, become independent and because of the distances involved come home very infrequently. The independent youth allowance recognized this and enabled rural families to send their teenagers to tertiary institutions. Now, unfortunately many will not be able to do so.

My husband and I, as older parents, will be semi retired when our daughter is due to start university in 2012. We don't know if we'll be able to afford \$13 000 per year for the accommodation she will need to live in Melbourne whilst she studies.

A special scheme that assists country students to attend tertiary institutions (if they have to live away from home) is essential. We shouldn't have to suffer because city families abused the previous youth allowance rules.