

MEDIA RELEASE



The Hon **David Hawker** MP
Federal Member for Wannon



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GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO DENY COUNTRY STUDENTS YOUTH ALLOWANCE

Early this week the Senate passed Coalition amendments to Youth Allowance, which would allow students in Western Victoria to access vital financial support as they pursue their studies.

However these changes were rejected on Wednesday by Labor in the House of Representatives.

Federal Member for Wannon, David Hawker, expressed disappointment at the Rudd Labor Government's refusal to accept them, and urged the Government to reconsider when the Bill returns to the Senate later this week.

"The Coalition is committed to supporting rural and regional students being able to access University education," Mr Hawker said.

"But as part of their legislation, the Rudd Labor Government is making it almost impossible for students from farming families, as well as other rural and regional students who do not have the option of staying at home while studying at University, to access Youth Allowance.

"The Coalition amendment to fix this was based on the recommendations of the Senate's Rural and Regional Affairs Committee, and passed with the support of the Greens and Independents. The Labor Party is on its own in its refusal to admit that there is a serious problem with their legislation."

Mr Hawker said the Government has also moved to retrospectively cancel the Independent Youth Allowance for 25,000 students who have taken a 'gap year' under the current rules. This would pull the rug out from under thousands of students who are already on their gap year.

"These students acted on the advice of Centrelink and guidance counsellors, and deserve to gain Youth Allowance in 2010," Mr Hawker said.

Under present regulations, students must earn \$19,532 within an 18 month period to qualify for Youth Allowance. However, changes proposed by the Rudd Labor Government would see this criteria abolished. Instead, a young person would be required to work full time for a minimum of 30 hours a week for at least 18 months in a two year period to be considered financially independent.

"Because this legislation will have a start date of 1 January 2010, all students currently undertaking a gap year will no longer be eligible, as this criteria has been axed," Mr Hawker said.

"The Rudd Labor Government needs to swallow its pride and accept the Coalition's amendments, so students all over Australia, and particularly in Western Victoria, have the chance to fulfill their dreams of going to university and succeed in their chosen career."

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