

MEDIA RELEASE



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



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COALITION VOTES TO SUPPORT COUNTRY STUDENTS

Federal Member for Wannon David Hawker today welcomed the Senate's voting down of Labor's Youth Allowance legislation, which would have retrospectively impacted upon thousands of Australian students currently in their gap year and crushed the higher education dreams of thousands of Western Victorian students into the future.

"Last night the Coalition, together with Senator Fielding, took a stand for principle, and for the opportunity for rural and regional Australian students to be able to attend University," Mr Hawker said.

"But although this is a reprieve for these thousands of students, who will no longer have their access to youth allowance ripped away from them, it is terribly disappointing that the Government's stubborn refusal to accept suitable amendments to their legislation has led to this Bill failing.

"This Bill contained a number of measures that the Coalition would have been happy to support – however we will not allow the Government to increase funding to one group of students only by ripping away the higher education dreams of country students.

"The Labor Government has also placed the scholarships of thousands in jeopardy by abolishing the old Commonwealth Scholarship system in a previous Bill, despite warnings from the Coalition at the time that to abolish the Scholarships without concurrently legislating their replacements was pure folly," Mr Hawker said.

"The Education Minister's mismanagement of this matter is staggering."

Mr Hawker said that by refusing to heed the warnings of the Coalition that abolishing Commonwealth Scholarships without an acceptable alternative in place the Government has ensured that there will be no scholarships next year.

"We have made it clear that the Coalition will hold firm on our two primary concerns with this Bill:

- 1) The Coalition cannot support legislation that cuts out the 'gap year' pathway to Independent Youth Allowance for students who must leave home to attend University, unless a realistic alternative provision is put in place.
- 2) The Coalition cannot on principle support legislation that is retrospective in its effect.

"Last night the Government moved amendments that would have done nothing in the long term for rural and regional students, and which would have removed some – but not all – of the retrospectivity in the legislation. The Government's amendments did not address the Coalitions concerns as they were fully aware they wouldn't.

"The Government has learnt that the cost of their putting petty politics above good policy is that everyone loses. The Coalition will not be blackmailed into supporting retrospective legislation, or legislation that unfairly disadvantages rural and regional Australian students," Mr Hawker said.

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