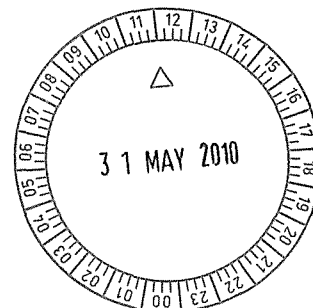


Rural, Remote and Regional Women's Network

Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia
Locked Bag 4
BENTLEY Delivery Centre WA 6983



31 May 2010

Ms Renae Jewell
Estimates and Financial Operations Committee
Legislative Council
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Renae

RE: SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO THE REMOVAL OF SENIOR SCHOOL ALLOCATION FUNDING FOR YEAR 11 AND 12 COURSES AT DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOLS

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the Inquiry into the Removal of Senior School Allocation Funding for Year 11 and 12 Courses at District High Schools.

I have sought input from members of the Rural, Remote and Regional (RRR) Women's Network of WA. I trust their candid observations of the impact on rural, regional and remote families and communities will assist in some useful strategies being developed and implemented in the near future.

The RRR Network would like to keep up to date with any progress being made with the inquiry and are happy to be consulted over any other issues you may have queries about. We look forward to future updates.

Kind regards

Louise House
Chair
RRR Network

SUBMISSION

Name of Committee	Estimates and Financial Operations Committee
Inquiry Name	Inquiry into the Removal of Senior School Allocation Funding for Year 11 and 12 Courses at District High Schools
Name	Louise House, Chairperson
Organisation	Rural, Remote and Regional (RRR) Women's Network
Organisation Contact	Locked Bag 4, Bentley Delivery Centre WA 6983 Ph. 08 9368 3182 Fx. 08 9367 4265 Email: rrr.network@agric.wa.gov.au

About the RRR Network

The Rural, Remote and Regional (RRR) Women's Network was established in 1996 to recognize, promote and expand the contributions that women make to their communities.

Our main role is to provide a mechanism for networking, sharing and disseminating information relevant to the development of women and communities in rural, remote and regional WA. It continues to bring together RRR women from WA to recognise, promote and expand the contribution women make to their communities.

We provide a communication network for women across Western Australia through our website, fortnightly e-news and quarterly magazine (approximately 10,000 copies per edition). We encourage members to contribute articles, photographs, stories and other information to provide a wide view of all communities in WA.

The Reference Group comprises 15 members appointed by the Minister for Regional Development and the Minister for Agriculture and Food from a public application process.

The Reference Group sets the strategic direction of the Network, ensures the Network is on track to meet its charter and achieve its objectives and provides advice and feedback to the Ministers for Regional Development and Agriculture and Food on issues impacting women in RRR WA.

RRR Network Reference Group members provide a broad range of interests, expertise, demographic, background and networking capacity, and members are acutely aware of issues which impact on women. The Reference Group provides an important forum for issues and opportunities affecting RRR women, their families and communities to be communicated to government.

The Estimates and Financial Operations Committee has resolved to inquire into and report to the Legislative Council on the Government decision, announced in March 2010, to cease senior school allocation funding* for year 11 and 12 courses at 21 district high schools across Western Australia, with particular reference to:

a) the decision-making process and rationale behind the decision

The RRR Network is concerned that the decision to discontinue senior school allocation funding to district high schools is shortsighted and will cause increased hardship to some rural students and families. The information that we have received regarding this issue is that it is the transitional funding given to District High Schools (DSH) under the previous Government, to cater for the raised school leaving age, which is being cut. This means that if these affected schools wish to continue to deliver year 11 and 12 education opportunities to their communities, they must attempt to do so out of their K-10 budget.

It is an accepted fact that not all students excel at academic pursuits, however the 21 DSH in the state have an important role to play in ensuring all levels of education are facilitated. The majority of the 21 schools in WA affected by this cost cutting provide fantastic VET programs, which allow for those students who are less academically minded to engage in an alternative important life skills education that will be of benefit to themselves, their communities and the state of Western Australia.

It would be a major blow to these students and their communities to have these alternative programs removed. The students who will be impacted are those who are 'at risk' and, by removing them from the security and support of their families and community, we may lose those students to truancy or unacceptable behavioural activities.

All students deserve the right to an education at their level and forcing these students to be removed from their home and family will not allow them to achieve their best.

b) the effect of the decision on the State budget, the affected students and communities

The RRR Network believes the state government is doing the community a disservice by removing this funding and thereby effectively limiting access for rural and remote students to become educated citizens. This is perceived as another hurdle for rural and remote people to overcome in a metro-centric focused government.

The impact on rural and remote communities of the cut in subsidy to the affected 21 rural WA schools is disproportionate in comparison to the effect it has on the state budget. The amount saved by the government is miniscule, even short sighted, when looking at the drop out rate of students around the state, who will not continue their schooling if they have to travel long distances to a senior high school with no guarantees that there will be a VET program in place, or that their chosen TEE subjects will be available. The cost to continue funding these 21 DHS is far outweighed by the cost of funding the social welfare for the students who will disengage from high school through the tyranny of distance, the separation from their daily family support, increased travel costs and the potential lack of suitable VET programs at the SHS geographically closest to them.

The recently announced State Budget did not identify the SHS schools that will need to be enlarged and upgraded to receive and cater for the additional students from affected DHS. This is a concern for the RRR Network and will need further investigation if this funding is removed from DHS.

c) The adequacy, cost effectiveness and social impact of the educational alternatives proposed;

For those rural, remote and regional families whose year 11 and 12 children wish to pursue an academic career or need to achieve a university entrance score, the cost of transport or the need for a boarding facility will be increase dramatically if forced to go outside their immediate community.

This additional pressure placed on families to ensure their children are educated will directly impact on the communities in which they live. The flow on effect of additional costs for education placed on families will be seen in a decrease in locally raised and funded community projects for example. In many cases families are split as one parent moves to a larger region during the week to care for the children and maintain a support system. This increases the stress on rural, remote and regional families emotionally, socially and financially.

Removal from their families can cause emotional upheavals at a time in a teenagers' life that is stressful enough. This can be supported by the increasing suicide rates, especially for teenage boys. The government's own Health Advisory Committee has stated that having your children at home in a stable environment, with the support networks that that entails, is the best choice for our children and communities to remain healthy.

In conclusion, we ask that your committee take into account the social and emotional impact this cut in funding will have on rural, regional and remote students and their families, not merely the increased financial burden. The impact on these small towns when a high percentage of their teenage populations leave because of a lack of local schooling opportunity, and the recorded fact that many don't come back is distressing.