Re-Victorian Government’s Parliamentary Education and training committee’s inquiry into geographical differences affecting the rate of participation in higher education for rural students.

To whom it may concern,

As a body of parents concerned for the educational and life chances of our children we wish to inform you of our concerns relating to geographical differences encountered by our families in regards to higher educational opportunities.

Our organisation operates, most successfully, within the Loddon, Campaspe, Mallee region approximately thirty kilometres from the nearest secondary educational facility. Choice of enrolment at other secondary institutions is almost obsolete due to the lack of transport options either public or private being available. Most families are employed within the rural sector, i.e. dairy or broad acre cropping, with an increasing number of families requiring second income employment necessitated by the current and long standing drought. Many families are also recipients of Education maintenance allowance thus assuming private vehicle conveyance to venues further than thirty kilometres away to be logistically and financially unviable. Bus travel only operates to the secondary school thirty kilometre’s away. This poses issues in regards to the choice of subjects offered that may enhance a student’s chances of acceptance into a tertiary institution and/or to the career path of their choice.

Whilst we appreciate that subjects can be studied by correspondence, further isolation, lack of peer and professional support coupled with increased technological pressure upon families hinders student achievement and choice of subjects studied.

The tyranny of distance also hinders attendance at information/open days of higher education venues. Work experience placements at logistical and financially convenient venues are also a concern.

Given the fact that country students are less likely to complete higher education than their city counterparts we also know that if they do, they are more likely to practise their chosen profession back in the country. This would alleviate many shortfalls across all sectors of employment that we, as geographically isolated communities, are currently experiencing.
Suggested solutions to these concerns may be: increased incentive for families to attend open days etc possibly through transport assistance.

- Greater coverage of transport facilities between secondary and tertiary institutions.
- Improved access for all and financial assistance to families in regards to technology provision, i.e. internet connection, laptop acquisition.
- Lowering of means test and asset income to assist rural families towards study subsidies and greater access to scholarships.
- Increased awareness of career choice options for rural students, i.e. Increased number of visiting professionals highlighting pathways to employment.
- A greater choice of work placement practicum’s being made available with some financial assistance for city experience.

We have many stories of hardship and injustices however we hope that these concerns and practical solutions assist in some way towards making the divide between rural and city students smaller.

Looking forward to learning for the future,
Yours sincerely,
Members of Murrabit Group School Parents and Friends club.