

PLENARY: INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

SPEAKER 2 Gina Browne, SUPRA

Travel concessions

History

In 1989 full fee-paying international students lost the right to travel concessions in NSW. This was accompanied by a misplaced stereotyping that international students are wealthy. The only international students who get travel concessions in NSW are scholarship students.

Student organizations have continued to be active around this issue. Some Universities have also been quite active. The University of Sydney has been particularly active and even offered to pay a fee to the State Government to allow international students to be eligible for transport concessions. The Department of Transport has the power to grant concessions.

Numerous petitions have been sent to various areas of State Government but the response has always been that international students state they can support themselves when they sign for visa and so they must be rich and therefore transport concessions are unnecessary.

Facts:

1. There are over 50 000 international students in NSW
2. \$1 billion to the NSW economy comes from international students.

SUPRA & the Legal Challenge

Supra has been working with a lawyer regarding the discriminatory treatment of international students in this instance. This relationship started approximately 3 years ago. A complaint was lodged with the Anti-Discrimination Board under the NSW Anti - Discrimination Act.

Funding and staffing at the Anti Discrimination Board was cut dramatically so it took one and a half years to get to the next level. The Minister for Transport refuses to mediate so SUPRA embarked on many legal arguments.

The full hearing is due next year.

Challenges

- There are many forms of transport - SUPRA's argument is that the government is telling the various public transport entities that provide bus train and ferry services to engage in discrimination.
- There has been little media post ADB, because they don't think it is effective.

Other lobbyists

1. Sydney University is actively lobbying again in trying to get concessions for international students. This is partly because there is a downturn in international student enrolments and they want the students to be attracted to the City of Sydney – high transport costs may discourage students from coming to the University.

SUPRA is encouraging universities to push for travel concessions for international students.

2. There is a call for submissions to NSW Department of Transport by 15 October 2004 on Concessions policy.

Victoria

Young Lawyers have put in a submission from Victoria.

- Review – transports concession review calls for submissions by the 15th of October in Sydney Morning Herald.