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**TO: MEMBERS OF NUS NATIONAL EXECUTIVE**  
**FROM: CHAIY DONATI, NATIONAL SMALL AND REGIONAL OFFICER**  
**SUBJECT: REPORT OF THE NATIONAL SMALL AND REGIONAL OFFICER**

### **National Executive Round 2: April 4<sup>th</sup> 2009**

A Report from the National Small and Regional Officer.

He wasn't born the National Small and Regional Office of the National Union of Students...but you wouldn't know it! They say farmers breath the land, Russians breath communism and cows breath milk, well the National Small and Regional Officer breathed small and regional students. He also breathed smaller student class sizes, and freedom@. He wasn't cut out for dealing with those fancy 'big city' students with their elaborate public transport and impressive (working) buses and trains . He liked things simple. Real simple. He liked the country, the long roads, the friendly surroundings, the apple pies on the window sills, that dude who'd always hang around the school with a big smirk on his face, and then slowly help the kids cross the road...actually he thought that was a bit creepy! He also liked small campuses – wherever they be found. He found them comforting like a mothers womb...before the doctor told her to "start pushing". [REDACTED]

He was used to tough situations, so improving the plight of small and regional students was an impressive task, but one he was passionate about and committed to. Growing up in small and regional Australia he was made tough. He once told Mr T to "get some nuts, fool" and beat *Germaine Greer* in an arm wrestle, though he was never the same afterwards, and didn't like to talk about it much. He knew if you wanted to get anywhere in life, you'd probably have to learn to read, but more than that you'd have to treat others like you, yourself, would like to be treated. So that was his mission. Improving the plight of Small and Regional Students. The year was 2009.

The following is a true account of events that have taken place between January 30 2009 and April 3 2009. This report has been written for the NUS National Executive meeting of 04/04/2009.

#### **Demand a Better Future Campaign:**

##### **Griffith University NDA**

On Wednesday the 18<sup>th</sup> of March at Griffith University, Nathan Campus, stalls and events were held which promoted the issue of student poverty and the need for an overhauled student income support system. Material from the national welfare campaign were used and distributed. The response was good, and it was recognized by numerous observers that it was an issue worth fighting for, and one that many students could identify with. Moreover, several suggestions were made throughout the day that

NUS, in the past, ran campaigns that the 'regular' student felt disinterested in. This was interesting as it highlighted an issue which manifests itself in many contexts – it is that of student apathy, when confronted with an issue that doesn't affect them. It is likely that this can never be fully overcome, though it does lend credibility to the assertion that NUS campaigns should be representative and inclusive of a broad range of students concerns, and continue an active dialogue with students on the ground (not just the politically boisterous ones) and seek 'issue specific' feedback from students as to what currently is of concern to them during their studies. Less prompting and more listening.

### **NDA Brisbane - Centerlink Sleepout**

On 25 of March I attended the Centrelink sleep-out in the Brisbane CBD. The turn-out wasn't huge, but the courier mail (Queenslands Fourth Estate) was there to document and raise awareness of the issue. The protest sought to raise awareness of the inadequate student income support system we have in place throughout Australia and sought to encourage the lowering of the age of independence and increase payments so they are at least over the Henderson poverty line. James Butchers, the NUSQ Education officer was organizing and running the event, and his dedication to the cause should be commended.

### **Transportation for Small and Regional Students:**

Ongoing discussions have occurred with the National Welfare Officer James Mentor and the National General Secretary, David Wilkins, regarding the situation of Queensland students who attend JCU, USQ and CQU. Currently students that attend these universities are disadvantaged by the system the Queensland Government has put in place. It currently doesn't afford automatic concessions for students that attend these institutions. This places a further financial burden on students that need to be liberated from the shackles of poverty. Extensive consultation has occurred between myself and student representatives at JCU and USQ. We are in the process of formulating a briefing of this situation which we intend to present to the Queensland transport Minister **Rachel Nolan MP** in a future meeting.

### **Small and regional OB Consultation:**

I have liaised with other small and regional office bearers in the respective states of Queensland, Victoria and South Australia. I have taken on board concerns and issues that they have with regards to small and regional students. The broad issues of student income support, transportation and education equality have surfaced during these discussions. While internally, student concerns seemed to be focused on the provision of adequate and affordable campus services, such as free/cheap parking, subsidized food outlets and an increased download quota on the universities computer network.

### **Incorporating regional campuses into NUS:**

**James Cook University:**

Since the last national executive meeting, substantial gains have been made. Increasingly, the JCU student union in both Townsville and Cairns are receptive to the idea of once again affiliating to NUS. Through discussions we have had, they have been interested in the services that NUS can provide as the peak representative body of Australian University Students.

**University of Southern Queensland:** Recently links have been established with Student activists out at the Springfield and Toowoomba campuses of USQ. The goal of NUS affiliation has been preliminarily discussed, though a further consultation and cultivation of networks need to be developed.

**Griffith University:**

Although not a small and regional campus, there are a core group of student activists at Griffith University (Nathan Campus) who are determined to have an SRC by the end of 2009, or at least a framework for its establishment in place. As a representative of NUS I have been on the ground encouraging and cultivating this grassroots movement, setting up meetings with the VC, and encouraging those involved to affiliate to NUS if they do manage to establish an SRC. Progress on this front is encouraging, but not necessarily forthcoming.

**Small and Regional Schools Program:**

Since the last National Executive meeting I have liaised with university hierarchy at several regional campuses. The goal of our discussions has been to increase the participation of secondary school students in small and regional campuses, so that they view it as an accessible and worth-while option. Encouraging students to disregard factors that may deter them from attending higher education institutions, such as the cost of living, commuting and other social deterrents (low self esteem, social norms and disadvantaged backgrounds). The benefits of attaining a university degree and the quality education provided at regional campuses needs to be further (effectively) communicated to school students in these communities. This program requires the permission of local school authorities and the active involvement of local universities. The idea has been received well, however, requires further development.

**Small and Regional Queer Issues:**

I have identified the importance of providing educational campaigns that aim to encourage the acceptance of queer persons on campus. At Gatton UQ regional campus, only recently has a club started, promoting queer health and equality (albeit unsuccessfully). After collaborating with the queer collective, it was found that the union was against providing this club with a budget or safe space. After a brainstorming session with members of the queer collective, ideas in order to discourage blatant discrimination were discussed. These include further promoting equality on campus, providing queer students with a 'safe space', enabling them to remove themselves from the daily stresses that discrimination can bring about.

### **Small and regional Indigenous Issues:**

A meeting recently took place where indigenous issues were discussed and I heard first-hand the lack of consideration for indigenous students (shame!). Attendee's argued that aboriginals are responsible for their own education, and should not rely on any government support or assistance. They disregarded factors that deter these people from attending educational institutions such as poverty, discrimination and negative social norms. It prompted me to review the living conditions of these people and has encouraged me to further consider the plight of indigenous students at small and regional universities. I intend to work more closely in the future with the National Indigenous Officer, Carla McGrath, to overcome these problems at Small and Regional Universities. There is a need to eliminate a prejudice viewpoint that is held by some students that attend small and regional campuses. Higher indigenous participation would benefit not only the respective academic institution(s) but also the community, of which these people are an integral, vital and necessary part.