

24 September 2019

Ms Sophie Dunstone

Committee Secretary
Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee
Australian Senate
Parliament House Canberra 2600

Submitted via email to: legcon.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Ms Dunstone

Thank you for inviting the Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN) to make a submission to the Inquiry into the New Skilled Regional Visas (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2019 ('the Bill').

ATN is a national collaborative group of four major Australian universities: University of Technology Sydney, RMIT University, University of South Australia and Curtin University.

ATN supports boosting economic participation and development in all parts of Australia, especially in our regional, remote and rural areas. We cautiously welcome the measures in the Bill which amend Commonwealth legislation to ensure that provisional skilled regional visa holders can access government payments and other services.

ATN makes the following comments:

New industry development in regional areas

ATN supports initiatives to generate employment in new, emerging and transitioning industries in regional areas. We believe these should be co-created with tertiary education providers to ensure the sustainability and continuing professional development of the future workforce.

Commonwealth Supported Places

ATN strongly supports a system that ensures every Australian, regardless of their background or circumstance should have a pathway to a university education.

ATN supports extending access to Commonwealth supported places to provisional skilled regional visa holders. However, the Government's policy to cap funding growth rates for undergraduate places may impact the ability of universities to deliver education in regional areas. We note that growth in places for regional students was a recommendation in the final report of the Napthine Review into Australia's Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education.

Practical issues and potential unintended consequences

ATN notes that there may be practical implementation issues around ensuring visa holders remain in a regional area for the prescribed period of three years. We would encourage the Government to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the policy and recommend adjustments if necessary.

Regional/rural classification

ATN notes that the regional/rural classification creates some inequalities in relation to Perth being excluded from the definition, while areas such as Canberra, Adelaide and Wollongong would be included. Perth is considered one of the most isolated cities in Australia and as a consequence has been at considerable disadvantage in relation to attracting international students to the state. A reconsideration of this classification would assist in addressing this matter.

In conclusion, ATN strongly supports policies that encourage stronger population growth in regional, remote and rural Australia. We would recommend that the Government continue to monitor and evaluate this policy in the context of the broader approach to skills and industry development to ensure a fair and equitable approach is maintained.

Please contact the ATN Directorate on (02) 5105 6740 or info@atn.edu.au should the Committee wish to discuss anything further.

Yours sincerely



Luke Sheehy
Executive Director
Australian Technology Network of Universities

