

27 March 2018

**\*\*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE\*\***

## **Student loan bill resurrected, killing opportunity for future students**

The National Union of Students (NUS) and the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) are deeply concerned that Government's proposed changes to student loans may become a reality tomorrow afternoon. The proposed changes erode the character of the HECS-HELP system, going against its principle of enabling access for all Australians to obtain a university education if they have the inclination and the ability.

The Higher Education Support Legislation Amendment (Student Loan Sustainability) Bill 2018, having passed the House of Representatives, will likely be voted upon in the Senate tomorrow. Last year, senators stood up for students and voted against the earlier version of the bill. Now, the resurrected bill has returned, to be voted upon just before parliament breaks for Easter.

The legislation will force lower-earning graduates to start paying back their student loans when they are earning not much more than minimum wage, and locks students out from postgraduate degrees unless they can afford to pay a large deposit - of tens of thousands of dollars - upfront.

NUS and CAPA note that the changes could not even be agreed upon by the Liberal party, as their own senators suggested an amendment to the flawed bill to implement a loan balance cap, rather than a lifetime loan cap. This amendment fails to address the issue of the student loan changes disadvantaging young and lower or middle income Australians.

NUS and CAPA are furthermore concerned with the pace at which these changes have been introduced, with the Government trying to force the legislation through before the Easter break. This means that students and others in the sector have not had a fair chance to communicate their opposition to the changes.

"There already exist postgraduate courses which exceed the current FEE-HELP limit. By introducing a combined debt cap the Coalition government will be forcing students to take up dodgy private loans, or pay upfront for a postgraduate qualification. This is irrespective if a lifetime or debt cap is imposed", said Mark Pace, NUS National President.

"Australia should be continuing to lead the way with our equitable HECS-HELP system. It has taken a long time to build our higher education system, but the Government is dismantling it for the sake of their myopic goal of short-term budget savings," said Natasha Abrahams, CAPA National President.

The Coalition Government has pursued the controversial bill, despite overwhelming opposition from the Higher Education sector. If the Government is concerned about outstanding graduate debts, they should prioritise meaningful legislation to lift wages into the existing repayment thresholds.

NUS and CAPA encourage senators to stand with the over one million domestic students in Australia by voting to bury the bill.

For further comment;  
**NUS National President**  
**Mark Pace**  
E: [president@nus.asn.au](mailto:president@nus.asn.au)  
P: 0411 606 808

**CAPA National President**  
**Natasha Abrahams**  
E: [president@capa.edu.au](mailto:president@capa.edu.au)  
P: 0430 076 993