

Submission

No 48

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ACCOMMODATION IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Accommodation Association of Australia
Name: Mr Richard Munro
Position: Chief Executive Officer
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Mr Bruce Notley-Smith MP
Chair
Legislative Assembly Social Policy Committee
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000
By email: socialpolicy@parliament.nsw.gov.au

11 October 2011

Dear Mr Notley-Smith

The following is a submission from the Accommodation Association of Australia (the Accommodation Association) to be considered as part of the NSW Parliament's Legislative Assembly Social Policy Committee Inquiry into International Student Accommodation.

By way of introduction, the Accommodation Association is the national industry body for the Australian accommodation industry. Members of the Accommodation Association include major hotels, resorts, motels, motor inns, serviced and holiday apartments, bed and breakfasts, guesthouses, backpackers and time-share establishments in metropolitan, regional and rural Australia across all states and territories. The Association's membership base includes almost 2000 properties and more than 110,000 guest rooms.

The international education sector is one of the fastest growing in Australia and student accommodation has experienced commensurate growth. This has corresponded with the entry into the market of commercial businesses in the sector, alongside universities who continue to control and manage the majority of student housing in Australia.

The Accommodation Association's primary interest in the issues the inquiry is examining is ensuring the safety of international students within accommodation facilities across Australia. Accommodation businesses invest significant capital in conforming with the Building Code of Australia, building fire safety requirements and various other local government regulations to ensure that when guests stay at a tourism accommodation business, they do so in the knowledge that if there is to be an unforeseen catastrophic event, then the building in which they are staying provides the safest possible environment for them (as well as the staff who work within the establishments).

This commitment to safety extends to tourism accommodation businesses strictly enforcing stipulations about the maximum number of guests permitted to stay in a room, apartment, cabin, chalet, etc. Compliance with these requirements is critical in promoting high standards of safety.



Although there is high demand for students who are looking for accommodation in Australia, servicing this demand must not be done by taking safety risks.

Central to high safety standards is accreditation – or lack thereof – of student accommodation. The Accommodation Association is an advocate for a broader policy-making process in NSW – and in other Australian jurisdictions – to determine the most effective method of introducing formal accreditation of student accommodation.

In order to achieve this, the Accommodation Association recommends that consideration be given to the establishment of an independent statutory agency which would have primary responsibility for accreditation of designated student accommodation. A key plank of accreditation would be ensuring that designated student accommodation buildings conform to occupancy laws, including the Building Code of Australia and building fire safety requirements, among others. Accreditation would not be compulsory, but with adequate promotion and branding, the attraction of a student accommodation facility being accredited by the proposed agency and therefore receiving an internationally recognisable symbol would invariably attract guests because the confidence accreditation would engender in the accommodation product that is being offered.

Although it may be necessary to establish such agencies in each Australian state and territory, there should be national coordination through an over-arching federal secretariat to ensure consistency.

The economic impact of international students travelling to Australia for educational purposes, as well as diplomatic considerations means that it is important that safety is paramount in accommodation facilities that specifically cater for international students, just as it is within the wider tourism accommodation sector.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Munro', is written over a faint, light blue circular pattern.

RICHARD MUNRO
Chief Executive Officer