Greens: Labor should block Coalition’s $2.3 billion cuts to higher education

The Greens are calling on Labor to vote with them to block the Coalition’s Bills to amend to Higher Education Support Act and Social Services Act that implement the $2.3 billion cuts to the higher education budget.

Greens spokesperson for higher education Senator Lee Rhiannon said: “The Greens campaigned strongly against these cuts during the federal election, and we will continue to stand alongside staff, students and the community by opposing them in the House and in the Senate.

“The cuts, originally proposed by Labor, will further exacerbate declining education quality and already struggling student welfare schemes.

“The cuts will rip out $900 million of funding from Australian universities and will increase the debt of an estimated 80,000 students. Students enrolling in University next year, who are on Youth Allowance, will lose out with the conversion of Start Up Scholarships into loans estimated to add an extra $2,000 a year onto their HECS debt.

“In total these cuts will add an extra $1.2 billion in student debt over the forward estimates.

“Responding to questions I asked in Senate estimates this week, the Department of Education confirmed HECS debt, as a result of these planned changes, would increase from $26 billion currently to $42 billion by the end of 2016.

“What’s not yet clear, and what I will be pursuing in Estimates today, is how many students will potentially be deterred from studying, or will reject the scholarships now that they have been converted into loans.

The Member for Melbourne and Deputy Greens leader Adam Bandt said: “In my electorate of Melbourne, these cuts will affect an estimated 3500 students enrolling in the University of Melbourne next year. It’s projected that the estimated debt increase, in the seat of Melbourne alone, will be almost $30 million over the next four years.

“The $900 million so called efficiency dividend will take millions of dollars of much needed funding currently going into teaching, research and student support out of the University of Melbourne.

“The Labor Party shocked many in the community when it first announced these cuts earlier this year. They now have an opportunity to redress this by joining The Greens in opposing these cuts in Parliament. If Labor votes with The Greens these cuts will not become law.

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