

Restoring the Boarding Away From Home Allowance (BAHA)

The Nationals WA believe that all students, no matter where they live, deserve the right to access a good education.

If elected to government in 2021 The Nationals WA will restore the integrity of State Government BAHA payments and ensure that families sending their children to State residential or boarding facilities are no longer out of pocket for accommodation expenses.

Background:

The Boarding Away from Home Allowance (BAHA) assists regional families with the boarding costs associated with sending their primary or secondary school aged children to an appropriate school. The State Government's BAHA contribution is made in conjunction with the Federal Government's Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) which recognise disadvantages faced by regional families accessing appropriate primary or secondary education.

In 2010, to support our regional families address the challenges and inequalities accessing education in rural and remote areas, The Nationals WA delivered a \$5.5 million boost to BAHA payments through Royalties for Regions. This increased the BAHA payment from \$1,320 to \$2,105 (or an extra \$785 allocated per student, per year).

In 2017 as part of series of cruel cuts to regional education, the McGowan Labor Government began winding back the Royalties for Regions component of BAHA.

On its current trajectory the RfR component will be gone by 2022, reducing BAHA payments back to \$1320. There are currently approximately 1819 regional students and their families affected by this funding reduction. Meanwhile the cost of boarding at Government-owned residential colleges continues to rise.

Discussion:

People living in the bush deserve access to same level of education as those in the metro area. The Nationals support our regional families and education advocacy groups in their call to have the BAHA reinstated.

In December 2017, we presented a petition to Parliament asking for the cuts to BAHA to be reversed, accompanied by a request for a Parliamentary Inquiry. Despite this and subsequent requests to Government by both The Nationals WA and Isolated Children's Parent's Associations (ICPA), this reversal has not occurred.

The only way the BAHA will be restored to adequate levels is by The Nationals WA in government. Our plan will more than double BAHA payments. If students are attending a State residential boarding college, and are eligible for the full suite of Federal and State subsidies, there should be no gap for boarding fees to be paid under our proposal.

Our commitment:

- We will apply an annual indexation of CPI to the base Department of Education payment of \$1320 and top this up with an additional \$16.8 million of Royalties for Regions over five years.
- This will give eligible students up to \$3,132 dollars in the first year under our plan.
- Students attending a State residential boarding college eligible for the full suite of Federal and State subsidies should no longer have a gap in boarding fees.
- The total package delivered through the Department of Education and RfR will be \$30 million over five years.

The Nationals WA invite feedback on this discussion paper.

