

PRESS RELEASE

The Federal Government's decision to by-pass the Gold Coast with its proposal to give visa extensions to international students is a slap in the face for the local economy.

"It's hard to believe why the government would discriminate so blatantly against the Gold Coast," says council candidate Brooke Patterson.

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The Gold Coast is, and always has been, a vibrant drawcard for international education.

"What we have here — our universities, our TAFE colleges, our private education facilities — provide students with the opportunity to gain a first class education and to do so, in this really great part of the world.

"And you are also looking at the thousands of dollars that the education sector brings into the Gold Coast economy. But with an arbitrary decision, that is wiped away."

The government is seeking to change legislation to allow international students a 12 month extension on their existing visa, which proves an attractive incentive to the education package.

However, the legislative proposal, which appears to be aimed at encouraging focus on regional education areas, sets aside Australia's capital cities from the scheme, and has also targeted the Gold Coast as not being eligible — the only non-capital area in the country to be so.

"It's hard to understand why the government would side swipe the Gold Coast in this scheme," says Brooke, who is running as a candidate for Division Six in the March council elections, hoping to secure the seat formally held by long-running councillor Dawn Critchlow.

"What you want is for governments, whether it's federal, state or local, to support efforts to bring activity, involvement and financial growth into our area. To boost the economy and support jobs growth so our local community benefits."

Brooke says the action by the Federal Government is almost in complete contrast to the State Government's reluctance to recognise the importance of the Gold Coast in relocating a Supreme Court in the area and establishing a Tourism Department here.

"We have this issue, where local legislators, lawyers, businesses, residents, are in great need of having a Supreme Court located on the Gold Coast.

"We have this constant backlog of court hearings that drag on for months, even years. Where people are having to travel back and forth to Brisbane constantly for hearings, and delays.

“It’s the stuff that affects people’s lives greatly.”

Similarly, she says the most obvious location for a State Tourism department is the Gold Coast - undisputedly one of the top tourist destinations, not only in Queensland but in Australia.

“And yet, when it comes to making decisions to relocate these offices to the Gold Coast, we suddenly are not important enough. We are now very regional.”

Brooke is pushing for the State Government to establish both a Supreme Court Centre and a Tourism Department in Southport.

“Both state and federal governments need to decide what the Gold Coast is,” says Brooke.

“At the moment, their schizophrenic approach is to our detriment. “

Brooke says the Gold Coast is conveniently referred to as a to as a regional city when it comes to not supposedly needing a Supreme Court, a permanent Family Court or state and federal government department offices.

“Yet, when it is time to provide an incentive for international students to attend regional universities, we are all of a sudden considered a metropolitan city and not worthy of the same benefit other regional areas (including Canberra)! Receive.

She says she will lobby senators to make the right call in the Senate in the coming weeks, to ensure ‘our education sector is not disadvantaged when they hand out incentives across the country’.

Brooke Patterson
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