

Pollies keen to avoid fare go for foreign students

By Joel Gibson and Tim Dick
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Q: WHEN is racial discrimination OK? A: When it costs the Government too much to stop.

The NSW Government will continue discriminating against international students because it would cost too much to give them public transport concessions.

The Administrative Decisions Tribunal ruled that withholding discounts on buses, trains and ferries contravened anti-discrimination laws.

The state's 45,000 students are treated worse than Australians in similar circumstances, it found, on the grounds of their nationality. That's against the law.

But the Minister for Slow Trains, Noisy Buses and No More Trams, John Watkins, is considering appealing, and does not plan to let them travel cheaply.

His spokesman, Matthew Martyn-Jones, told our man in Macquarie Street, Jonathan Pearlman, that doing so would cost "tens of millions, possibly hundreds of millions" of dollars.

"The NSW Government already offers generous concessions to a range of groups such as school students and pensioners," he said. "The international students apply for a visa, and one of the conditions is that they agree to be self-sufficient for the duration of their stay."

(Another explanation, students said, is that foreigners can't vote.)

The students each pay about \$18,000 in annual tuition fees - on top of an estimated total contribution to the economy of \$657 million - but the concessions are worth only about \$1600 each.

The Sydney University Postgraduate Representative Association, which lodged the claim, protested outside Parliament yesterday. Its spokeswoman, Jenny Leong, said high fees meant many students already felt used.

"These students are a massive part of our community, but they don't vote and so their concerns are not being heard by the Government."

<http://www.smh.com.au/news/stay-in-touch/pollies-keen-to-avoid-fare-go-for-foreign-students/2006/03/27/1143441086050.html?page=fullpage#contentSwap1>