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REGIONAL UNIVERSITIES NETWORK CALLS FOR AN INCREASE TO REGIONAL LOADING

The Regional Universities Network (RUN) has called for an increase to Regional Loading to help regional universities get through the current COVID-19 crisis and stimulate the economic recovery in regional Australia.

Appearing before a hearing of the House Select Committee on Regional Australia today, the Chair of RUN, Professor Helen Bartlett, said that an increase in the current loading would help support university employees and communities.

"Job losses from regional universities have a significant impact on regional communities when there are few alternatives for professional employment locally.

"It is of critical importance to retain university staff in the regions to train the next generation of professionals to work in regional Australia, including in healthcare, teaching and agriculture," Professor Bartlett said.

"Regional loading provides additional funding to universities with regional campuses to assist them meet the higher costs associated with those campuses. A doubling of the current funding level of \$74m per annum would greatly assist regional universities to manage the impact of COVID-19, particularly in retaining staff in regional locations.

"RUN is already considering post-pandemic opportunities to support regional industry and boost economic development, including targeting our research expertise and capability to align with areas of need in our communities.

"We are developing our research collaboration across the network in food and crops for the future; health and wellbeing in regional, rural and remote Australia; and new industries," Professor Bartlett said.

"Implementation of the recommendations and actions from the 2019 National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy will help us in this task.

"In particular, our three priorities are more university places funded for regional Australia to develop regional human capital; investment in research and research infrastructure to address regional challenges; and appointment of a Regional, Rural and Remote Education Commissioner to drive the strategy through a holistic and long-term commitment."

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