

A Submission to the Senate Enquiry into the New-Start Allowance.

The New-Start rate needs to be raised drastically and immediately, it's true.

But there are other issues that need to be addressed as well.....

a/ INDEXATION

New-Start needs to be indexed to wages like the pension is, and NOT to the CPI. This is what's causing, and aggravating, the widening gap between the pension and New-Start. Whenever the average wage goes up, so should New-Start, by the same amount as does the pension. This is only fair, and more than reasonable. In the pension and New-Start were at parity, with extra concessions (such as cheap car rego, phone, utilities etc., none of which were or are available to the unemployed) to enhance the value of the pension. A major effort must be undertaken to restore this parity.

b/ WORK FOR THE DOLE

WfD (Work for the Dole) needs to have a valid training component installed. The training MUST be relevant to a real-world job situation, and MUST be such that it is recognised by employers. Pointless 'make-work' schemes with no training are demeaning and counter-productive. This will also help to stop WfD being used as, and seen as, nothing but a punishment. There are many 'tickets' that these people could be trained for, but there's nothing at all on offer.

c/ WfD SUPPLEMENT

The WfD 'bonus' (\$20 per f/n approx.) is no-where near adequate, and usually won't even cover the cost of attending and buying lunch. Those doing WfD OR volunteer work should be receiving SIGNIFICANTLY more than those who are not. This needs to be done whether the dole is raised or not. An acceptable figure would be \$20 per DAY that you attend. So, for example, if you did one day per week of WfD, you'd get an extra \$40 on top of your normal payment, if you did four days a week, you'd get an extra \$160. This is not excessive or unreasonable, nor is it unaffordable. What it IS, is fair (that word seems to have been forgotten when it comes to the unemployed). And it would certainly give a powerful incentive for people to participate. You may even find yourselves with a waiting-list of people who WANT to do WfD.

d/ INCOME QUARANTINING

Income quarantining MUST be rejected, once and for all. People can ALREADY choose to VOLUNTARILY 'quarantine' important payments such as rent, power etc, and have them paid automatically through Centrelink's 'Centre-Pay' scheme. This should be encouraged, by all means. But to make it COMPULSORY is simply obscene.

The ONLY time I'd find this acceptable is if there is DOCUMENTED PROOF from the Police, Family Services etc. that children are at risk.

The current plan to make quarantining compulsory for ALL long-term unemployed is offensive and extremely discriminatory. It plays firmly to the mind-set that all long-term unemployed are alcoholics, drug-addicts or problem gamblers. This is plainly not the case, and the plan must be firmly rejected. The idea of food-stamps and/or vouchers MUST also be rejected, on similar grounds, as should any attempt to introduce drug and/or alcohol testing unless DOCUMENTED PROOF is available to show that it is necessary.

Under NO circumstances should ANY of these measures be considered for the mature-aged unemployed (over 50-55s), most have worked for most of their lives, can budget, have raised their kids and paid taxes, and aren't druggies or drunks. They would quite rightly regard this as nothing but a spit in the face for their efforts.

e/ TRAINING

There must be more, and easier access to widely varied training. And NOT just for the entry-level, menial jobs. While they are fine for the young, they are useless to the mature-aged unemployed or those looking towards a different career. Also, while undergoing any training, the requirement to look for work must be waived, they can't effectively do both, and shouldn't be expected to abandon the course if work is found.

f/ THE MATURE-AGED

Regardless of whether any other increases are granted, and on top of any other increases if they ARE granted, the mature-aged unemployed (over 50-55) should get an immediate \$50-\$75 p/w increase above and beyond the standard rate. They have higher expenses, and, in many cases and areas, very little chance of gaining anything but intermittent, part-time work, if that. They also tend to have higher medical costs.

g/ PENALTIES

Penalties for missing appointments or a day at WfD are Draconian in the extreme. Most unemployed are already hanging-on by the skin of their teeth, and these excessive penalties can often tip them into homelessness or worse. The idea that the unemployed should be punished in this way should never have been implemented.

Except in the most extreme circumstances, reducing or cancelling payments should not be an acceptable option.

Also, if a situation arises where a payment is to be cancelled, Centrelink should be compelled to notify the recipient in writing and give 7 days to respond BEFORE cutting the payment. Cutting it first, then notifying (up to a week or more) later, should not be regarded as acceptable.

h/ JOB INSURANCE

A system urgently needs to be implemented for those situations where job-seekers are taken advantage of by employers. An example would be a situation where a provider obtains work for a client, who then performs the job satisfactorily but the job falls through (company fails etc) through no fault of the client.

Often, the client does not receive all the pay due to him. The provider can apply limited pressure, but no more. Centrelink generally prove either unable or unwilling to be of any assistance.

I myself was recently the victim in this type of situation, and remain approx. \$800 out-of-pocket with, it seems, no hope of recompense. There should be a 'fund' from which these people can get the money they've honestly earned. And they shouldn't have to jump through circus-hoops to get it.

Thank you for taking the time to consider the points raised in this submission.