

AUSTRALIAN GREENS DISSENTING REPORT

1.1 The Australian Greens do not support the majority report into the Social Security Legislation Amendment (Strengthening the Job Seeker Compliance framework) Bill 2014 (bill), we do not believe the bill should be passed. Rather than supporting people into work this legislation will further demonise vulnerable Australians and increase hardship.

1.2 Newstart and Youth Allowance are insufficient to the degree that they inhibit job seekers in finding work, any discussion of encouraging people into work should start with an adequate payment system. This government is determined to punish people rather than support them into work. Job seekers, particularly older job seekers, those in remote areas and people with disability already face multiple barriers in re-entering the workforce after a period of unemployment. Support rather than further financial hardship, and more straight forward compliance measures, not further reduction of income support are needed.

1.3 The Australian Bureau of Statistics for July 2014 puts Australia's unemployment rate at 6.4 per cent, with a much higher youth unemployment rate of 14.1 per cent, yet by contrast, there are only 146 100 job vacancies, indicating that there simply aren't enough new jobs being created to meet the demands of jobseekers.¹ This is making the search for work even harder for job seekers and can lead to further alienation and depression.

1.4 The bill contains several concerning schedules.

Appeal rights

1.5 Our core concern with the bill is the removal of appeal rights; it is unacceptable to remove the essential safeguard of administrative appeal rights. All submissions to the inquiry were concerned about this measure, including National Welfare Rights Network and Jobs Australia:

Administrative appeal rights are critical to ensure the ongoing integrity of the system and the confidence of the public at large as well as social security recipients.²

The denial of review rights reduces accountability in the system and may encourage less prudent decision-making.³

1 Australian Council of Trade Unions, *Submission 8*, p. 8.

2 National Welfare Rights Network, *Submission 1*, p. 4.

3 Jobs Australia, *Submission 3*, p. 7.

Suspension and penalties changes

1.6 The bill allows harsher, more severe payment penalties, extended penalties, changes to back-pay, removal of the important warning penalty, changes to penalty start dates, and discretion for whole payment rather than just penalty payment suspension. There wasn't any evidence provided for why these changes are required and why the current penalties and sanctions are insufficient. The recent changes enabling providers to do follow up appointments with job seekers has already improved attendance indicating that a supportive approach is working.

1.7 It was made clear by evidence and submissions given to the inquiry that there are several vulnerable groups which will be particularly disadvantaged by these changes.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

1.8 Aboriginal job seekers are subject to financial penalties to a much greater extent than non-Indigenous job seekers, this is for a range of reasons including access to transport, lack of service facilities, lack of secure mail services and mobility.

1.9 It is essential that there are safeguards in place to ensure that these barriers do not result in termination of payments.

Older jobseekers

1.10 The Australian Greens are particularly concerned with the provisions in the bill that remove the ability of certain people on Newstart Allowance, Special Benefit or Parenting Payment who are 55 or over from satisfying the activity test via 30 hours of approved voluntary or paid work. This provision dismisses the valuable work that older volunteers contribute to the community.

1.11 Older Australians face multiple barriers in re-entering the workforce, including age discrimination.

In the absence of adequate public investment in employment assistance and work with employers to shift attitudes towards older workers, the repeated rejections that would result from imposition of the standard requirement to apply for up to 10 jobs a fortnight would demoralise older unemployed people without greatly improving their employment outcomes.⁴

1.12 There is strong evidence that age is a distinct barrier to employers hiring job seekers over 45 years. This needs to be addressed with incentives not punitive measures.

4 Australian Council of Social Services, *Submission 7*, p. 1.

People with disability

1.13 People with disability already face barriers in entering the workforce and engaging with the social security system.

People with disability experience one of the highest levels of unemployment and poverty with almost one in two people with disability in Australia living in or near poverty (45%) and almost one in two people with disability disengaged from the labour market (47%).⁵

1.14 These changes will adversely affect people with disability, particularly those that are deaf or hard of hearing.⁶

Recommendation 1

1.15 That the bill not be passed.

**Senator Rachel Siewert
Australian Greens**

5 Australian Federation of Disability Organisations, *Submission 11*, p. 1.

6 Deaf Australia, *Submission 10*, p. 4.