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18 July 2018

Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Senators

RE: *Inquiry into the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Cashless Debit Card Trial Expansion) Bill 2018*

Thank you for the invitation to provide a submission to this inquiry.

This being a Federal Government matter, the Fraser Coast Regional Council has not debated nor voted on it; I make this submission in my own capacity as Mayor and as a representative of our community.

I am opposed to this Bill.

Over many years I have been active in working with the community to address disadvantage. I was the president of Hervey Bay's youth homeless shelter, worked in disability support, am the chairperson for our Headspace youth mental health service, and have been a volunteer lawyer with our community legal service for 12 years. I am aware of the issues in my community and hear directly from financial counsellors, social workers and others who work on a daily basis to make our community healthier, fairer and more connected.

In all my work in the community I have always believed that you empower people by respecting them, by valuing them and encouraging them. The policy underpinning this Bill will have the effect of stigmatising, humiliating and segregating people who are already disadvantaged.

This Bill seeks to unilaterally apply controls over the lives of thousands of members of my community without looking into their personal circumstances. Causal evidence linking people under the age of 36 receiving income support with alcohol, drug and gambling problems has not been presented.

I would be very interested to see the rationale behind how the target group was arrived at. The age of 36 and under seems arbitrary. I recently visited a club in Hervey Bay where pokie machines are played. Of the approximately 75 people gambling at the time, not a single one would have been under the age of 36.

I do not believe this proposal has the support of the community. There certainly has not been adequate consultation with the community.

No rationale has been given as to why our community has been targeted for this.

I ask that a public hearing be held by the committee in Hinkler, so that it can hear the views of residents.

Addiction is a complex health and social problem; I am not aware of any expert opinion supporting the proposition that it can best be addressed through the payment mechanisms of the social security system. Nor is there evidence, or any sensible proposition, that it will assist in addressing high youth unemployment.

I have concerns that this will do nothing to address complex social problems, will not address disadvantage, could create a black market in my community, will impact businesses that are cash-based and may lead to an increase in crime. But my primary concern is what the effect of the stigmatisation and humiliation will do to people who need support, understanding and empathy.

This is a form of paternalistic intervention without an evidence base to show possible benefits to the people whose personal autonomy will be curtailed.

Thank you again for providing this opportunity to share my views on what is being proposed for the community I live in and represent. I would of course welcome the opportunity to speak more on this issue.

Yours sincerely,

GEORGE SEYMOUR
MAYOR