

Due Monday 3 July

**Social Services and Other Legislation Amendment (Strengthening the Safety Net) Bill
2023**

Submission from Religions for Peace Australia

Committee Secretary
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Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this vitally important Senate Inquiry

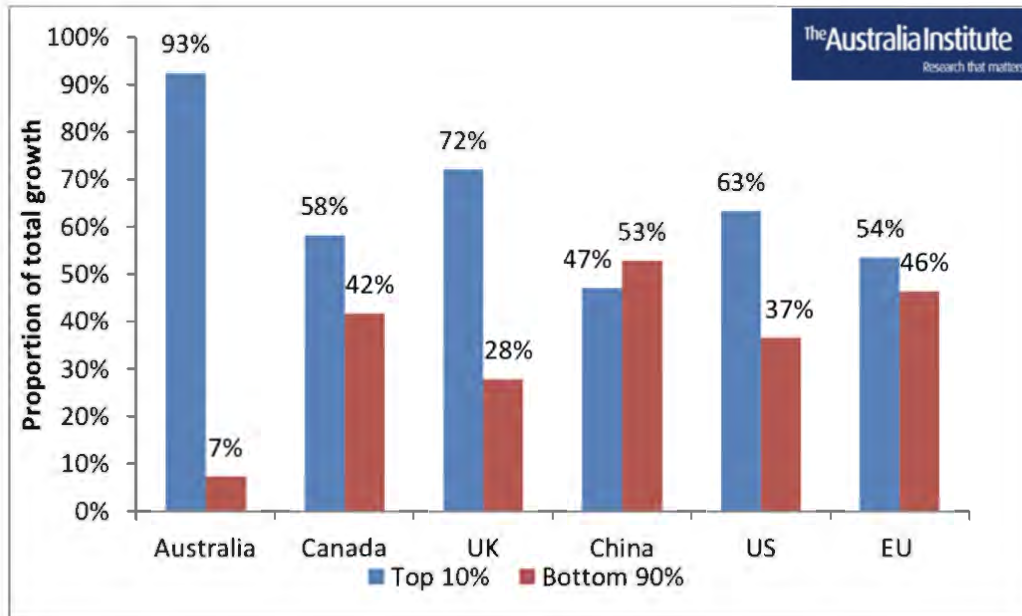
We write as the elected members of the Religions for Peace Australia national executive to provide our considered comments on this important welfare matter. Religions for Peace Australia is the only multifaith network in Australia with branches/affiliates or links in all Australian States and Territories. RfPA is committed to promoting peace, social justice, and the well-being of all individuals. Religions for Peace Australia (RfPA) is affiliated with the World Conference of Religions for Peace (now known as Religions for Peace International) with its headquarters presently in New York – its website is www.religionsforpeace.org. It is also a member of the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace (ACRP), known as Religions for Peace Asia, with its headquarters presently in Tokyo.

We commend the Federal Budget's announcement of a \$20 per week increase in the base rate of JobSeeker, Youth Allowance, and related income support payments. However, we believe that more needs to be done to ensure that individuals and families can afford their everyday basics and live with dignity.

Religions for Peace Australia has long been concerned about the disproportionate spending on weapons rather than on welfare, environmental sustainability, and peace-making efforts. (See our *Submission to the Senate Inquiry into international armed conflict decision making November 2022*). We believe that redirecting funds from military expenditures to social welfare programs would have a significant positive impact on the well-being of populations across the world and within Australia.

We note the Australian Institutes <https://australiainstitute.org.au/> report this year which stated “From the 1950s to the 1980s Australia was considered the land of the fair go” but note now “Internationally Australia is an outlier, falling behind the EU, US, UK, China and Canada on the unequal distribution of gains” which the graph below evidences.

Figure 5: Per adult real economic growth: share of growth (%) going to the top 10% and bottom 90% for selected countries and the EU from 2010 to 2019



Source: Author's calculations based on the World Inequality Database.

<https://australiainstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Screen-Shot-2023-04-10-at-9.28.48-pm-1210x823.png>

We urge the committee to consider the implications of income inequality and the need for a fair and just society.

Religions for Peace Australia stands with welfare agencies such as St Vincent De Paul, The Salvation Army, Uniting Care, Food Bank, ACOSS, and other organisations who have been advocating for improvements to NewStart, JobSeeker, and other payments. These organizations witness firsthand the struggles faced by individuals and families who are trying to survive and care for their basic needs.

We urge Senators to hear these agency voices and the voices of Australian Job Seekers, Youth Allowance recipients and other related income support recipients seeking increased support.

Therefore, Religions for Peace Australia urges the Senate to carefully consider the Social Services and Other Legislation Amendment (Strengthening the Safety Net) Bill 2023. While the \$20 per week increase is a step in the right direction, we believe that more comprehensive measures are needed to ensure that all individuals have access to the resources they need to live with dignity.

To conclude we are mindful of the great moral leader Hindu Mahatma Gandhi who said '*the true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members*'. Therefore, as faith leaders we ask you – Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs – to assist by prioritizing social welfare and addressing income inequality within Australia so we can become a fairer and more inclusive society.

Thank you for considering our submission.

Yours sincerely,

Susan Ennis PhD

Secretary of Religions for Peace Australia

<http://religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au>

Associate Secretary General (Oceania) Religions for Peace Asia

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There is no separation between the land, the spirit and the person in Australia's First Peoples, Religions for Peace Australia supports First Peoples and Constitutional Recognition of the Voice to Parliament.