



people with disability
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NGO in Special Consultative Status with the
Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

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Dear Committee

People with Disability Australia (PWDA) strongly urges the Committee to recommend that the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Ending Carbon Tax Compensation) Bill 2017 not be passed. The proposal to abolish the Energy Supplement is deeply unfair and will cause substantial financial pain to people in receipt of social security payments.

Our social security system provides for the basic needs of our citizens. It is a safety net for all Australians who, through no fault of their own, are unable to secure work either in the short or long term. This includes a large number of people with disability who have proven to be eligible for a wide range of payments, not just the Disability Support Pension (DSP). People who have made it through the hurdles of their payment's uniquely strict eligibility rules and stringent, multi-layered application process.

This is not the first time legislation to abolish the Energy Supplement has come before this Committee and the parliament. PWDA, both individually and as part of Disabled People's Organisations Australia (DPO Australia) have argued to reject this bill in the past and we are urging you to maintain your opposition to this Bill. We did so as part of the Inquiry into the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Omnibus Savings and Child Care Reform) Bill 2017 and the Inquiry into the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Omnibus Savings and Child Care Reform) Bill 2017 [Provisions]. These past attempts to cut the energy supplement have failed and we urge you to maintain your opposition to these cuts.

If the Bill is passed those on the lowest incomes, including people with disability, will be further pushed into poverty and financial hardship. Increasing numbers of people with disability are being shifted or diverted from the DSP to Newstart Allowance, which only entrenches poverty; it doesn't provide jobs. Removal of the Energy Supplement would mean a loss of \$4.40 per week for people receiving Newstart Allowance. The low payment rate of the Newstart Allowance is already a barrier to economic participation.

In the past these proposals were only to apply to new applicants. This current Bill extends the financial pain to more people, by applying to some people already on social security payments and those that newly apply.

We also endorse the submission made by ACOSS, as we have done in the past. ACOSS also point out the harsh and targeted nature of these cuts to social security, noting that this cut is being made while wealthy people continue to receive the benefits of the tax cuts that were introduced as compensation to others as part of the introduction of the carbon tax.

The Explanatory Memorandum for the Bill provides a statement on the compatibility with human rights that correctly identifies that this Bill relates to International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), specifically “The right of everyone to social security in Article 9, and the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for an individual and their family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and the continuous improvement of living conditions in Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights”.

Yet in June 2017 the Concluding Observations of the review of Australia’s compliance with ICESCR, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights urged the Australian Government to:

“Reconsider the financial cuts to the social security system, with a view to ensuring that all beneficiaries, especially disadvantaged and marginalized individuals and groups and those in need of income support benefits, are able to enjoy an adequate standard of living. In this regard, the Committee refers the State party to the letter concerning austerity measures, which was sent to all States parties to the Covenant by the Chair of the Committee in 2012”¹

We urge the Committee to consider this most recent observation by UN experts on social, economic and cultural rights, and conclude as we do that the current proposal to abolish the Energy Supplement is incompatible with Australia’s human rights obligations.

PWDA thanks the Committee for the opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry, and we would welcome an opportunity to appear before the committee to elaborate on any of the matters we have raised.

Yours sincerely

Ngila Bevan
Co-Chief Executive Officer
People with Disability Australia

¹ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights *Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Australia E/C.12/AUS/CO/5* 2017. Available at: http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2fC.12%2fAUS%2fCO%2f5&Lang=en

About People with Disability Australia (PWDA)

PWDA is a leading disability rights, advocacy and representative organisation of and for all people with disability. We are the only national, cross-disability organisation - we represent the interests of people with all kinds of disability. We are a non-profit, non-government organisation.

PWDA's primary membership is made up of people with disability and organisations primarily constituted by people with disability. PWDA also has a large associate membership of other individuals and organisations committed to the disability rights movement.

We have a vision of a socially just, accessible, and inclusive community, in which the human rights, citizenship, contribution, potential and diversity of all people with disability are recognised, respected and celebrated. PWDA was founded in 1981, the International Year of Disabled Persons, to provide people with disability with a voice of our own.

PWDA is also a founding member of Disabled People's Organisations Australia (DPO Australia) along with Women With Disabilities Australia, First Peoples Disability Network Australia, and National Ethnic Disability Alliance. DPO's are organisations that are led by, and constituted of, people with disability.

The key purpose of DPO Australia is to promote, protect and advance the human rights and freedoms of people with disability in Australia by working collaboratively on areas of shared interests, purposes, strategic priorities and opportunities. DPO Australia has been funded by the Australian Government to be the recognised coordinating point between Government/s and other stakeholders, for consultation and engagement with people with disability in Australia.