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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

To the committee,

This morning I presented on the topic of the *Social Security (Administration) Amendment (Income Management and Cashless Welfare) Bill 2019*. I am submitting this document in response to Senator Rachel Siewert's question on notice. Senator Siewert asked for further comment on the prospect that future rigorous research might serve to establish the success or failure of the cashless debit card trial. **I find it hard to imagine effective research of this kind being undertaken at this stage for the following reasons:**

- It was imperative that 'baseline' research establish a detailed picture of life in those communities where the cashless debit card was rolled out, prior to the card's introduction into those areas. It is too late to retrospectively undertake this research.
- Research would need the capacity to delineate the impact or otherwise of concurrent measures: in Ceduna, there are many initiatives that various local figures maintain are having a substantial impact on everyday life in this region. In my forthcoming story in *Inside Story* I state: "Responses to card proponents' frequent assertions that things are "quieter" in town were mixed. Is it true? If so, is it the card? Or is it the work of the mobile assistance patrol bus, which transports people home or to places where they can rest and rehabilitate? (The bus is part of a concerted "service reform" project under way in Ceduna since 2013.) Or is it the stringent electronic "ID tech" system restricting the purchase of alcohol, introduced in 2012? It could equally be the community paramedics, who have worked humbly and with great success since September 2016, building up relationships with the Aboriginal community and connecting people with the medical system before things get dire." Other factors include numerous community members' conviction that some people left the trial site in an effort to get away from its effects: in a small place, population movement such as this might well be having an impact.
- Finally, I would argue that research into the cashless debit card should involve extensive engagement with the views and experiences of those placed on the card.

This research objective would be difficult to fulfill at this point, as people are reaching a point where they are cynical about whether or not their views will be taken into account and so might not be inclined to contribute to such a research project and/or many locals have adjusted to life on the card since its introduction in March 2016, and often no longer hold a clear sense of daily life without the card.

Yours sincerely,

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