



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA

Senate Community Affairs References Committee

**Centrelink's automated debt-recovery system  
– Senate inquiry public hearing**

The Senate Community Affairs References Committee has commenced an inquiry into the Centrelink automated debt-recovery system.

The inquiry will examine the design, scope, cost-benefit analysis, contracts awarded and implementation of the Better Management of the Social Welfare System initiative.

The committee's first public hearing will be held at Parliament House in Canberra on **Wednesday 8 March 2017**.

The Department of Human Services, other Commonwealth departments involved in the implementation of the debt-recovery system, the Australian Council of Social Service and the Community and Public Sector Union will appear.

"This first hearing will set the scene for the committee's future hearings, by providing an opportunity to gain an understanding of the implementation of the automated debt-recovery system and an overview of the key impacts" said committee Chair, Senator Rachel Siewert.

While individual members of the public will not be called to give evidence at this first hearing, Senator Siewert stressed that the committee would be allocating time at future hearings to hear evidence from individuals who have been impacted by the automated debt-recovery system.

"It is very important for committee members to hear first-hand accounts from individuals. We are hearing accounts about the impacts of the debt-recovery system and we will provide opportunities at our future hearings to give individuals the chance to tell us about their personal experience under the protection of parliamentary privilege. Members of the public are also encouraged to make a submission to the inquiry through the committee's website," Senator Siewert said.

Most committee hearings are held in public and anyone is welcome to come and listen. The audio and video of the 8 March hearing will also be broadcast live on the internet:

[www.aph.gov.au/News\\_and\\_Events/Watch Parliament](http://www.aph.gov.au/News_and_Events/Watch_Parliament)

The committee will hold further public hearings at locations around Australia. A program of hearings will be released shortly.

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**DATE REFERRED**

08 February 2017

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**SUBMISSIONS CLOSE**

22 March 2017

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**NEXT HEARING**

08 March 2017

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**REPORTING DATE**

10 May 2017

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**COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

Senator Rachel Siewert  
(Chair)

Senator Jonathon Duniam  
(Deputy Chair)

Senator Sam Dastyari

Senator Louise Pratt

Senator Linda Reynolds

Senator Murray Watt

Senator Helen Polley

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**CONTACT THE COMMITTEE**

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## **Making a submission**

Written submissions have been requested by Wednesday **22 March 2017** and can be lodged online via the committee's website: [www.aph.gov.au/senate\\_ca](http://www.aph.gov.au/senate_ca)

If you would like to make a submission you may find it helpful to read the guide to making a submission available on the Senate website: [Preparing a submission to an inquiry](#)

If you have questions, or need more time to write your submission, contact the secretariat.

Further information about the inquiry, including published submissions and hearing programs, is available on the committee website: [www.aph.gov.au/senate\\_ca](http://www.aph.gov.au/senate_ca).

## **Inquiry Terms of Reference**

- a. the impact of Government automated debt collection processes upon the aged, families with young children, students, people with disability and jobseekers and any others affected by the process;
- b. the administration and management of customers' records by Centrelink, including provision of information by Centrelink to customers receiving multiple payments;
- c. the capacity of the Department of Human Services and Centrelink services, including online, IT, telephone services and service centres to cope with levels of demand related to the implementation of the program;
- d. the adequacy of Centrelink complaint and review processes, including advice or direction given to Centrelink staff regarding the management of customer queries or complaints;
- e. data-matching between Centrelink and the Australian Taxation Office and the selection of data, including reliance upon Pay As You Go income tax data;
- f. the process of awarding any contracts related to the debt collection system;
- g. the error rates in issuing of debt notices, when these started being identified and steps taken to remedy errors;
- h. the Government's response to concerns raised by affected individuals, Centrelink and departmental staff, community groups and parliamentarians;
- i. Centrelink's Online Compliance Intervention (OCI) and its compliance with debt collection guidelines and Australian privacy and consumer laws;
- j. the adequacy of departmental management of the OCI, including:
  - i. the adequacy of staff numbers to manage the workload associated with the OCI, including customer complaints,
  - ii. what impact the roll-out of the OCI has had on other areas of work and whether resources have been diverted from other areas,
  - iii. training and development provided to staff who are working on this program or in related areas (for example, telephony and complaints),
  - iv. how the Department of Human Services and Centrelink are tracking the impact of the OCI rollout on staff, including stress and incidents of customer aggression,
  - v. any advice and related information available to the Department of Human Services in relation to potential risks associated with the OCI and what action was taken as a result, including feedback arising from system testing and staff, and
  - vi. decisions taken in relation to IT systems and service design that may have contributed to problems experienced by Centrelink clients; and
- k. any other related matters.