



SUBMISSION: Social Services Legislation Amendment (Strengthening Income Support) Bill 2021

February 28, 2021

We are three religious congregations committed to working together on a range of justice issues of concern to our members. From their foundations, religious congregations have served with those at the margins of society.

As members of these congregations today, we continue to work and advocate on a range of issues of concern to our communities. The accelerating gap between rich and poor, the plight of those trapped and abandoned at the edges of our society, the exclusion of so many from basic protections, continue to propel us to speak out for fairness and justice.

We are pleased to offer this submission to the Committee.

The intention of the minimum wage decided by the Harvester Decision of 1906 was to set a fair and reasonable living wage that was sufficient for a human being in a civilised community to live in frugal comfort. The paltry increase for Jobseeker decided by the Government has none of those attributes.

A living wage surely means you can live in frugal comfort. That presupposes you can eat healthy, good food every day, pay your bills, attend to your hygiene, health and dental needs, purchase necessary clothing and enjoy the occasional social outing or entertainment. An increase of \$3.70 a day to the previous ludicrous payment of \$40 per day will keep unemployed people below the poverty line, which defines a level of income below which people are regarded as living in poverty.

What kind of community establishes rules and regulations that do little to develop trust between Government and the people and a caring attitude for those struggling to survive the challenges of unemployment? The harsh so-called Mutual Obligations: the demands to make 20 job applications per month when it is well-known there are 10 people for every one job; the hotline set up to do in any unemployed person without proper analysis of their circumstances. What kind of a community allows some of its citizens to try to survive in poverty while allowing franking credits to the already well-off for tax they haven't paid, and which gives generous tax cuts to those earning above \$90,000.

We believe there is nothing fair or reasonable, nor anything that promotes a civilised community in the Coalition's ideological, miserly increase in JobSeeker. For them and others who have never had to experience the humiliations of poverty and who enjoy far more than

frugal comfort, it may benefit the Coalition, the Labor Opposition and all MPs making decisions for the unemployed to examine the history of the Harvester Decision that led the way to make Australia the egalitarian nation for which it once was renowned, but sadly no longer.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of those who will suffer under the Government's proposed changes.

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