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Inquiry into the Social Security (Administration) Amendment (Income Management and Cashless Welfare) Bill 2019

Thank you for the opportunity for National Council of Women Australia (NCWA) to make a short submission to the Standing Committee on Community Affairs Legislation Committee addressing the Social Security (Administration) Amendment (Income Management and Cashless Welfare) Bill 2019.

NCWA is a national non government umbrella organisation with broadly humanitarian and educational objectives. It has an extensive membership of Affiliate organisations in all states and the ACT. NCWA membership also includes a large number of Associate members and advocates to improve conditions for women and their families, especially the most vulnerable.

This bill extends the cashless debit card in three trial sites and the income management program in Cape York to 30 June 2020. Currently the cashless debit card trial is due to end on 30 June 2019 in Ceduna region (South Australia) East Kimberley region (Western Australia) and Goldfields region (Western Australia). In the Bundaberg and Hervey Bay region (Queensland) the cashless debit card is being rolled out progressively and is due to end on 30 June 2020. Extending the cashless debit card and income management in the three trial sites listed above brings all existing locations to end 30 June 2020.

The objective of reducing immediate hardship and deprivation, reducing violence and harm, encouraging socially responsible behaviour and reducing the likelihood that welfare payment recipients will remain on welfare and out of the workforce for extended periods of time is a good one. However in the evaluation during and at the conclusion of the trials it is important that all in the community members are consulted including Aboriginal women.

As President of NCW Western Australia I visited Kununurra in the East Kimberley Region in Western Australia last year. A number of women from Kununurra are members of NCWWA. It is the only trial site that I have first hand experience of and have held numerous discussions about the cashless debit card. In Kununurra the trial has been going for almost three years and as such should be able to provide reasonably accurate evaluation data.

During a round table conducted with men and women community leaders in Kununurra I heard first hand from many Aboriginal women that the 'Government' only consulted with a key group of Aboriginal men from the Aboriginal community and other community leaders before the introduction of the cashless debit card. Aboriginal women want to be part of the cashless debit card evaluation. NCWA calls on the government to ensure women and women's groups and organisations are also included in the ongoing evaluation of all the trial sites.

NCWA, noting the independent evaluation of the card to date as stated in the Minister for Families and Social Services second reading speech found a 'considerable positive impact' in the initial trial sites supports the extension of the trial sites and the bill to extend the date of the trial sites.

NCWA also notes that this bill will align the legislated review date for the first three trial sites with the newest trial sites of Bundaberg and Hervey Bay region and is a positive move for ongoing and concluding evaluations.

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