

THURS

Mrs Anna Burke MP

10th March 2010

Dear Mrs. Burke,

I was disturbed to read in the attached article that not only are Muslim men exploiting the system but that Centre Link do not see this as their responsibility to bring these illegal incidences to the attention of the law.

Can you please advise who is responsible and what action is being taken to bring these men to justice and answerable to the law.

Yours faithfully

Men with multiple spouses receive taxpayer handouts

You pay for extra wives

A GROWING number of Muslim men and their multiple wives are exploiting a loophole to get taxpayer handouts.

Centrelink has confirmed it has investigated up to 20 cases of multiple relationships, including polygamy, in the past two years for payment irregularities.

It has forced some families to pay money back. Polygamy is illegal in Australia, but a Centrelink spokeswoman said it was not the welfare agency's job to police polygamy laws.

"It's not our concern if they are a member of a polygamist relationship," the spokeswoman said. "We look at whether they are receiving the correct rate of payment. We treat each couple independently."

But Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria director Jumanah El Matrah said some men were exploiting Australia.

"It (polygamy) was a minority but it's certainly a growing minority because Muslim men realised it was possible to

Mark Dunn

get away with it," she said. She said Muslim men who took more than one wife and relied on Centrelink payments to support their families were not following Islamic law, which dictated they could take multiple wives only if they could afford it.

"What these men are

'What these men are doing is exploiting Islam and ... the system in Australia'

— JOUMANAH EL MATRAH

doing is exploiting Islam and they are exploiting the system in Australia," she said.

A 2008 report by the women's group found Centrelink payments had encouraged polygamy in a small section of the Islamic community.

"Community workers who have provided support to women whose

husbands took another wife religiously, said that women blame the availability of Centrelink benefits ... since one or the other wife will be claiming it, relieving the husband of the responsibility of supporting two families," the report stated.

Centrelink general manager Hank Jongen admitted the agency was making payments to people in multiple-couple relationships.

"There's nothing preventing them from being in more than one 'member of a couple' relationship at a time," he said.

"In these cases, Centrelink pays each person the relevant payment at the partnered rate."

Some Muslim men have married several wives in their country of origin or at local mosques so they are not recognised under Australian law by state-based births, deaths and marriage registries.

Islamic Friendship Association of Australia president Keysar Trad said he believed "not many more than 50" Muslim families in Australia were polygamist.