

SENATE COMMUNITY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO THE COST OF LIVING PRESSURES ON OLDER AUSTRALIANS



I am an Australian citizen, Australian born, aged 76 years.

I learned of this Inquiry only a few days ago. Since then, my efforts to access the "notes to assist in the preparation of submissions for a Committee" have all met with the information that "the page is not available" or words to that effect.

- (a) The cost of living pressures on older Australians, both pensioners and self-funded retirees, including:
- (i) the impact of recent movements in the price of essentials, such as petrol and food,
  - (ii) the costs of running household utilities, such as gas and electricity, and
  - (iii) the cost of receiving adequate dental care;

Certainly the costs of petrol and dental care have both taken a great hike in recent times, but one wonders whether the powers that be realise that the costs of food and running household utilities have increased dramatically over a period of years. In particular, the weekly food and grocery bill has risen by 40% in the past three years. Here is one example - in April 2006, the cost of a Coles Home Brand one litre packet of Skim Milk was 99c. In the middle of May 2006, the price jumped to \$1.39 and it has remained at that price. The fact that it has not increased may be due to the fact that Safeway still sells it at 99c.

I attach two pages from the Coles supermarket brochure which was delivered to my home a few days ago. I do not exaggerate when I state that, in my opinion, all the items shown are too expensive for a pensioner to buy.

- (b) the impact of these cost pressures on the living standards of older Australians and their ability to participate in the community;

Older Australians were scraping the bottom of the barrel even before these pressures escalated. Private Health Insurance contributes very little towards paying the dental bills of an older Australian with their own teeth. I cannot comment of the position of those with or needing dentures. As for participating in the community, the poor simply cannot.

- © the impact of these cost pressures on older Australians and their families, including caring for their grandchildren and social isolation;

I cannot comment on caring for grandchildren, their parents care for mine. As for social isolation, it has been around for 40 years and more and one gets used to it. Putting the food on the table and keeping the household bills paid push social isolation into the background. It is truly unbelievable that in this day and

age, one should have to allow \$90.00 a week to cover Council rates, water and sewerage charges, insurance premiums and the pest man's annual inspection. That total will be higher in each of the coming years.

- (d) the adequacy of current tax, superannuation, pension and concession arrangements for older Australians to meet these costs; and

There can only be one response to this - **YOUMUST BE JOKING!** Take the recent action of the Australian government, allowing Australians aged 74 years and under to add large chunks of money to their superannuation. What did the government give to those Australians aged 75 years and over and still working? Nothing at all, except to reduce them to the status of 6<sup>th</sup> class citizens.

Those of them whose employers did not introduce superannuation until forced to do so do not have sufficient superannuation to live in luxury. What did they do before the introduction of superannuation? They took out life insurance to cover their families in the event of death. How has the Australian government treated those who took out life insurance? It has decreed that they will be "deemed" to be earning income on the value of that life insurance, even though it knows perfectly well that they are earning no interest at all on those assets.

Of course, it may be all very well for the government to seek to protect the public purse against those with a large volume of life insurance and large quantities of assets, but it hits very hard against the Aussie battler who has struggled to keep an insurance policy going for 40 years and now finds that they are "deemed" to be receiving income from it. The government could protect the genuine Aussie battler, but it has chosen not to do so.

- (e) review the impact of government policies and assistance introduced across all portfolio areas over the past 10 years which have had an impact on the cost of living for older Australians.

This is quite impossible for me to do, other than to state that very little has been helpful to older Australians who are pensioners. When a pension increase occurs, it is immediately swallowed up, if not by living expenses, Council rates, etc., then by the increased charges of the Nursing Homes.

Now that we have a separate class of Australian citizens aged 75 years and over and still working, whom I have labelled 6<sup>th</sup> class citizens, I believe the time has come for the Australian government to realise that we must be allowed to decide when and how we will die, before we reach the stage of dying in the gutter or suffering the indignity of death in a nursing home. I have discussed this with many older citizens and their carers. They agree with me that we must be allowed, not only to die with dignity, but to decide when we will die. The Australian government must permit voluntary euthanasia, if it is not prepared to provide adequate pensions.

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