

Senator BOYCE (Queensland) (10.57 a.m.)—It is an absolute delight, as Senator Polley said, to be able to stand and agree with all of the comments made by the other members of the committee in regard to the inquiry—although not the comment about being a grandmother, Senator Polley. This was an inquiry brought about because of the anecdotal evidence that was being brought to many of us, day after day. The one thing that I would like to push for immediately is support for all of the comments made in relation to Commonwealth superannuants. They appear to be having an injustice done to them at this very minute.

It was interesting to bring together all the evidence, because intuition is not the only way to look at things. It was good to have a lot of this material brought together in one place. It demonstrated the fact that a large number of older Australians are okay. They are not going out and buying a bottle of Moët every day, but they are getting by; they are reasonably comfortable. It is that group that has been mentioned—the people who are not homeowners, and particularly single pensioners and older women—who are the ones who are in trouble and needing more help than they are getting. I had personally hoped that we would get to the situation where we could say that we recommend that the pension go up by X amount or that the pension should be indexed to this as well as what it is currently indexed to and that we recommend that the single pension go up as a percentage of a couple pension. That was where I hoped we would get to. It became obvious during the inquiry that there were many views there. What is really needed now and what we are recommending as the way to come to a decision on this is a short, sharp government review focusing completely on economic modelling. We received fairly disparate views about where the single pension should be set in terms of the couple pension, for instance—views from 60 per cent to 70 per cent.

As Senator Humphries pointed out, generally aged pensioners are in a better position because of the combination of CPI and MTAWÉ than they would have been simply relying on CPI. Over the last few years this has meant an increase, so they are about \$20 better off as couples than they would otherwise have been. But it is pretty clear that we need to reassess this. There was certainly no science involved in the early development of it, and we need to look at it again.

Yesterday I was involved in a briefing around the handling by the Department of Human Services of child support. They pulled together three different methodologies for determining the cost of raising a child and did that in a relatively short space of time. You still end up with blunt instruments, of course, because the cost of raising a child in Augathella is probably quite different from the cost of raising a child in Sydney's CBD. But it is a far more explicable and far more defensible way of going about developing a pensioned rate than we currently have, so I very much recommend that the government immediately conduct some economic modelling so we can reach a situation where we can help the people in trouble as quickly as possible.

The evidence that concerned me most was around non-homeowning, older, single women who, right now in Australia, are becoming homeless, are on the streets and are being helped by groups that assist people experiencing homelessness. It is not good enough. We need to act to do something about it very quickly, and I hope very much that the government will react to the recommendations that we have given. I seek leave to continue my remarks later.