



Mr John Hawkins
Committee Secretary
Senate Economics Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Hawkins

I welcome the opportunity to provide comment on the *National Fuelwatch (Empowering Consumers) Bill 2008* and the *National Fuelwatch (Empowering Consumers Consequential Amendments) Bill 2008*.

By way of background, National Seniors operates for the social and economic benefit of its 280,000 members and has a strong track record in representing the interests of seniors across Australia in a broad range of community, business and government forums. Our members are broadly representative of the three key ageing cohorts: those aged 50-65; 65-75; and 75+. As well as addressing the needs of these different age cohorts our policy agenda encompasses the issues pertinent to those from varied socio-economic backgrounds, including pensioners, self-funded retirees, and those still in the workforce.

As you may be aware, National Seniors has for some time been raising concerns with respect to cost of living pressures on older Australians, particularly those on low and fixed incomes such as age pensioners and self-funded retirees. The issues raised by National Seniors, including the disproportionate impact of rising fuel prices, have been validated by the Senate Community Affairs Committee Report *A decent quality of life*.

National Seniors strongly supports initiatives that put downward pressure on petrol prices and that provide consumers with price certainty and price transparency. In this regard I note the positive claims made by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) and the reported success of the scheme in Western Australia. National Seniors is however also acutely aware of the scepticism surrounding a national Fuelwatch scheme and questions whether, in its proposed form, Fuelwatch will lead to reduced competition and higher petrol prices, particularly for those who have come to rely on price cycles and discounts. Please see specific comments attached ([Attachment A](#)).

I would also like to take this opportunity to underline National Seniors strong belief that the Fuelwatch debate should not be allowed to distract the Australian Government from continuing to look into additional measures aimed at reducing petrol prices, in order to relieve cost of living pressures on Australian households. NSA members are very concerned that the proposed emissions trading scheme, notwithstanding the welcome assurances about relief provided in the Green paper, will serve to exacerbate the pressure increasing fuel prices is placing on the community generally and older Australians on fixed incomes in particular.

I would be happy to expand on our concerns, and accordingly would be available to attend a public hearing if requested. In this regard, please do not hesitate to contact our National Policy Manager, Peter Brady on (02) 6230 4588.

I look forward to a positive response to this request.

Yours sincerely



Michael O'Neill
Chief Executive Officer

18 July 2008