

Treasurer, Scott Morrison:
Budget Policy Division,
Department of the Treasury,
Langton, Langton Crescent,
Parkes ACT 2600

Subject: 2017-2018 PreBudget Submission

Dear Minister,

Please accept this letter as a PreBudget Submission.

I am a Buddhist and a member of the electoral district of Newtown. I believe it is significantly important that the 2017-2018 budget encourages an Australian society that treats all of its members ethically and with compassion.

Like many, I believe this means allocating funding to those sectors of society most in need and avoiding a continued pattern of unfair tax-breaks and subsidies for large corporations, whose activities harm our ability to offer strong social welfare and do untold damage to Australia's unique and precious environment.

I have outlined recommendations for a Budget that I believe will achieve an economically fair and just society below.

Invest in a fairer tax system

I have listed this item first, as I believe a fair tax system can support far greater investment in all the key areas I have outlined below for a fair and just society. The Australian public is increasingly aware of and unhappy with the unfair tax-breaks and subsidies handed out to large corporations, whose activities harm our social and environmental welfare.

ABC News recently reported that 600 major corporations paid no tax in 2013-2014, amounting to a loss of \$8.4 billion a year. This budget should invest in a transparent tax system that ensures multinational corporations like Apple and Microsoft, pay their fair share of tax, so this enormous sum can be put towards providing the revenue needed to support a fair Budget for all.

I understand the immense resources at the disposal of these corporations and the Big 4 accounting firms makes it difficult to stop tax avoidance. However, the current Government at times appears as though it is a willing assistant in helping corporations to minimize the payments

they owe to the Australian public. This was most recently and most unethically demonstrated by the Government's current policy of handing out tax-breaks to major corporations, whilst simultaneously hounding low-income earners for old Centerlink debts.

I ask that the Government invest in smart and sustainable policies for collecting the corporate tax owed to the Australian public and cease immediately its targeting of vulnerable low-income Australians as a revenue-building resource.

Invest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and repay our historical debts for stolen land and generational trauma inflicted upon our Indigenous peoples.

Apologising for the history of stolen land, genocide and generational trauma inflicted upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) people by Western colonial settlements is worth little if we do not invest heavily in ATSI communities. The current conditions experienced by ATSI communities are unacceptable in any first world country. ATSI people have a life expectancy at least 10 years shorter than other Australians, a rate of infant mortality 2-3 times higher, suffer extreme rates of mental illness and youth suicides and low rates of literacy, particularly in rural areas.

Placing ATSI communities at the forefront of Australia's Budget concerns is thus an ethical and moral imperative. We must not continue to repeat the same mistakes of subjecting ATSI communities to extreme disadvantage, discrimination and institutionalised violence.

I therefore support the recommendations outlined in the Close the Gap Federal Budget 2016 position paper and ask the Government to invest proper funding into the following areas of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities:

- Fund the Implementation Plan for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013-2023
- Better support for Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS)
- Senate Inquiry into institutional racism in the health system (particularly in hospitals)
- Primary Health Networks (PHNs)
- Disability Targets and service support alongside the NDIS
- Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS)

- Reverse Advocacy Funding Cuts

Invest in LGBTI rights

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex people account for up to 11% of the Australian population, but face extreme discrimination within our society. LGBTI young people report experiencing homophobic abuse, including physical abuse, cyberbullying, social exclusion and humiliation at high rates. Unsurprisingly then, LGBTI people also experience mental illness at significantly high rates and have higher rates of suicide than other Australians. This includes the recent and tragic death of young Australian Tyrone Unsworth, who committed suicide at just 13 years of age after experiencing bullying and abuse because of his sexuality.

Disturbingly, the Australian Government carries out a large amount of the homophobia directed at Australian LGBTI people. The current Government has failed to legalize gay marriage, putting us well behind the international trend of countries who have formally recognized the human rights of LGBTI people, including: Netherlands, Belgium, Canada, Spain, South Africa, Norway, Sweden, Portugal, Iceland, Argentina, Uruguay, New Zealand, France, Brazil, United Kingdom, United States, Greenland and Ireland. This is an embarrassment.

The Government has also failed to enforce the following human rights and equalities for Australian LGBTI people:

- State-wide legislation allowing all Australian LGBTI people to adopt.
- State-wide overturning of legislation allowing ‘gay panic’ as a defence.
- Allowing transgender people to change the sex on their birth certificate.
- Overturning legislation that forces married transgender people to divorce their partners to transition on official documents.
- Overturning legislation that prevents men who have had sex with men in the previous 12 months from donating blood.
- Overturning legislation that allows religious schools and hospitals to be exempted from LGBT anti-discrimination laws in Australia.

The rates of mental illness, linked directly to social and institutionalised homophobic discrimination against LGBTI people, increases pressure on medical and mental health services and therefore, the Budget. Investing in long-term public education campaigns to reduce homophobia and in improved mental health and medical services for LGBTI Australians, particularly in rural areas, will create significant savings in the future, as this pressure is alleviated.

The bureaucratic discriminations faced by LGBTI people, as listed above, also create unnecessary costs, including extra administrative work, a loss of medical resources and wasting judicial hours in those states that allow the 'gay panic' defence to make a mockery of our legal system.

Furthermore, Australia's global reputation for being a 'gay-friendly' tourist destination will also be impacted if we do not catch up with global political leaders on this issue. Events like Sydney's Mardi Gras parade contributes an estimated \$38 million to the NSW economy and is thus a significant economic contributor, at risk because of Australia's regressive LGBTI policies.

I ask that the Government invest in the rights of LGBTI people and end their demeaning policies, which put the lives and mental health of our beloved LGBTI community at risk.

Invest in the environment and sustainable human development

Climate change and the recent devastation to fresh water supplies and clean air occurring globally, is among the most pressing ethical and moral issues of our time. To address this tragedy, the Australian Government has signed agreements including the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement. However, I am disappointed that the current Government is not demonstrating any serious intention to fulfil these agreements.

The Finkel report has said that Australia is not on track to meet its international climate commitments and it is estimated that the Government would need to commit \$4.4 billion by 2025 to meet those commitments. However, instead of investing properly in much needed climate finance, the current Government has pursued reckless and unethical investments in fossil fuels, including the Adani mine in Queensland. This is also yet another example of the Government's insistence on supporting corporations above and beyond the needs of the citizens it is meant to serve.

I ask that the Government stops investment in fossil fuels and industries that damage our environment and instead invests in sustainable energy sources that will support an environmentally positive and sustainable future.

Immigration and refugees

The current Government claims to it has “restored the integrity of Australia’s borders.” This is a claim with which I must strongly disagree. Australia’s treatment of refugees coming to our country by boat has seen Australia condemned by the United Nations Special Rapportuer on Torture for implementing asylum seeker policies that violate the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. This is unacceptable.

Furthermore, a recent Save the Children/Unicef [report released in September 2016](#) found that the government’s deterrence policies against refugees cost a total of \$9.6 billion over four years between the 2013 and 2016 financial years. It has also cost \$1 million each for [every detainee imprisoned](#) on Manus Island since 2012, according to the Parliamentary Library.

I ask why the Government pays private detention centres millions of dollars to torture vulnerable refugee men, women and children? I demand the Government put an end to this practice of torture and invest in ethical and more economically sustainable measures for addressing current and new refugee arrivals.

Finally, I ask that the Government invest in a public campaign to educate the Australian public about the lives and circumstances of refugees coming to Australia, in order to address the consequences of its participation in the public demonising of refugees.

Return the aid budget to \$5.5 billion in the coming term of parliament, and reinstate the Australian aid budget to 0.7% GNI.

In 2000, Australia made a commitment to put 0.7% of our national income into the Australian aid budget. Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Luxembourg and the UK have all met this commitment. As the 12th largest economy in the world, we are capable of following their example.

We are now spending less on international aid than at any time in Australia’s recent history. This jeopardises Australia’s reputation and influence in the international community and most importantly, stops hundreds of thousands of people living in conflict and/or poverty from accessing lifesaving support.

I ask that the Government meet our commitment of 0.7%; an ethical necessity, during this time of intense global conflict, with the numbers of displaced people at their highest since WWII.

Invest in Gender Equality

Domestic violence is a national epidemic in this country. I applaud the current Government's efforts to recognise domestic violence as an issue in need of urgent awareness and action. I also applaud the Government's commitment to invest \$100 million into a Women's Safety Package.

However, I am disappointed that the Government has, at the same time as promising to invest in ending domestic violence, stripped vital community shelters of their funding, including women's shelters and legal services, funding for the National Partnership Agreement on Ending Homelessness, the Rental Affordability Program and promises no extra funding for Family Violence Prevention Legal Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services.

The total cuts the current Government has made to these vital women's services far outweigh the \$100 million investment into the Women's Safety Package. I therefore argue that the Government has not spent \$100 million on ending domestic violence, but in fact, slashed funding from services aimed at supporting victims of domestic violence. I ask that the Government reinstate funding for these crucial services, as well as maintaining the \$100 million investment in the Women's Safety Package.

Yours sincerely,

Claire Carpenter