

To Whom it May Concern

I am writing this letter as a lay person of the general public. I heard your interview on the ABC recently (within the last week), regarding your view of pensions being made available to everybody in Australia. Some countries already do this.

I hope this isn't going to be boring!

I had thought many times of writing this letter to Members of Parliament but never ever thought that it would ever be seen by them as it would never get past the bureaucrats. If it was ever read in parliament their speaking time is so limited that anything from the general public wouldn't have a chance. It probably would never be tabled for presentation.

I thoroughly agree with you that everyone should be entitled to the pension. It is difficult in a country where a very large proportion of the money collected from taxes goes to a very large population of the country to various types of benefits/income from Centrelink. This often includes people who have never contributed by paying tax to receive their benefit/income.

I had said to our accountant many times that we are people from the era where you did not splurge on unnecessary expenditure that didn't meet your reasonably basic needs.

People's expectations on how they should be able to spend their money does not often align with life's reasonably basic needs.

For example, we do not:

- *Have tattoos - these are not cheap!
- *Smoke
- *Do drugs
- *Drink
- *Go to restaurants
- *Constantly spend on luxuries such as nail, feet and hair salons
- *Constantly spend money on fashion
- *Frequently have take-away or take out as it is called now
- *Walk around the streets with coffee in hand and eating smashed avocado
- *Constantly keep up with the latest of everything - latest phones, large tvs
- *Have any data streaming from subscription services
- *Have not had much travel - cruises, etc.
- *Have gym fees - and all the gear that goes with it - some of this seems a fashionable thing to do.
- *Gone to expensive ticket items such as concerts and/or sports games and all the supporters/fans clothing that goes it.

Some of the above expenses would count towards people not being able to save very well for a house or pay off their mortgage.

We have only had minimal holidays in many years. We went on a cruise recently and when we mentioned to people that it was our first, the reaction was that we must have been living in a cave for many years!!

Certainly not an extravagant life compared to how life is lived now.

"Some might say "Well what has been the good of you to the economy?" Where have you been spending your money?

1. We spent a lot of our money in hardware shops and rural produce shops. We do have a small Property (47 acres) west of Ipswich in Queensland. We used to camp there in a tent, then lived in a shed on the property while travelling to Brisbane for work. We eventually built a house and several outbuildings on it. This property is not in an expensive area.

Before that we lived in a flat. We then bought a caravan. This was to get our first credit rating as well as to save rent. If you had your own caravan in the park the rent was cheaper.

2. We had three children. They were all in various activities in their early years. So, like many families you have the expense of those activities (guides, scouts, martial arts, golf, music lessons, gymnastics, their education) and general life expenses.

3. We did take them camping a few times. We figured that if you saved on accommodation (camping - living in a tent) you could then spend money on the experiences such as whale watching, etc.

4. We have worked physically hard on our land, spending our money improving the place, paying it off and adding outbuildings.

5. I then went to University later in life to try and improve our income.

6. My husband spent many hours away from home to try to improve our income (as many families do).

7. We had paid off the mortgage early by making higher or extra payments. The mortgage was at quite high interest rates in the 1980s.

As superannuation wasn't available when we started work we did purchase the 42 acres next door thinking one day that we could sell that to help with our retirement. We still own that. We will likely have to pay capital gains on it when it is sold. We had paid extra or higher payments on this as well. As soon as you try to improve income the capital gains tax is more expensive.

What I am trying to say in all of this is that our assets do not add up to the value of some people's homes. Usually those people have more expensive furniture or antique furniture.

Yet, they are able to receive the pension.

We know people who have had very good incomes but now are going on New Start. They spent their money as they earned it.

Here are some examples of circumstances that we hear/know of:

1. People going on quite lengthy holidays, spending their money on brand new caravans and cars. They run out of money and come back to go on New Start.
2. Someone being given a small business. Didn't really want it and didn't work constantly for many many years. Is now retired and is a very heavy smoker and drinker and can receive the pension. Others given land that was allowed to be cut off for family members at one time.
3. We have seen many people lead extravagant lives (as mentioned in the list above) and are able to receive the pension.
4. People receiving cash rent and receiving the pension. Obviously the tenants, I guess, can't receive rent assistance - their rent would be cheaper anyway.
5. We know people who spending a lot of money on their home because the value of this isn't counted in the assets test. They are then applying for the pension as the value of the home isn't as limiting as having a few things worth the same amount as the home.
6. We know people that have had land given to them which is a really good start for anyone. One of the partners didn't want to work full time even when they were offered it, Of course, that is a life choice. Now, though, they are on New Start and will eventually get the pension.

With all the complications and paperwork involved in applying for pensions it takes much of Centrelink's time. It would actually be cheaper for the taxpayer if everyone received the pension because Centrelink wouldn't have all these hours spent trying to unravel/assess everyone's circumstances to see if they are eligible for the pension.

We feel like we are being penalised because we lived life less extravagantly. We spent our money differently in rural supplies shops (fencing, etc.), hardware shops. Physical work goes with this sort of spending. We purchased machinery and seed for pasture. Fencing, pasture and machinery has to be replaced at times. We grew up in a time where doing without many things was how you could get ahead.

I believe that everyone's assets should be valued appropriately regardless of how many you have. As mentioned previously we may have several assets that would never ever add up to value of some people's homes.

I have taken care not mention names as some of the people mentioned we know fairly well.

Thank you very much in taking the time to read this - as mundane as it may seem.

