

No reprieve for pension battlers in first Rudd budget

Single age pensioners, hoping for a reprieve from spiraling living costs in the Rudd Government's first budget, will be bitterly disappointed this morning, says the consumer lobby for older Australians.

Despite intense community pressure and a Senate Report* which, earlier this year, acknowledged the inadequacy of the single age pension, the base pension rate has not been increased.

Expressing his disappointment, National Seniors chief executive, Michel O'Neill, said older people entirely dependent on the single age pension - often women with no superannuation due to the circumstances of their times - represented Australia's most vulnerable seniors.

"These people who live off \$273 a week while grappling with significant food, fuel and health cost increases are now starting to feel excluded under the Rudd Government's *Working Families* mantra," said O'Neill.

"Older people are an integral part of the Australian working family – they're not separate. They've done a lifetime of the nine-to-five slog and daily commute, and now as grandparents they're providing child care and helping their children into their first homes."

"Even at the best economic times living on the meagre single age pension was difficult.

"Seniors pushed this issue unsuccessfully during the Howard years. But with steeply rising living costs, a senate inquiry confirming what pensioners have known all along, and a new government with a strong sense of social justice, older Australians expected change," said O'Neill.

Whilst welcome, the continuation of one-off allowances and bonuses introduced by the Howard Government does not provide real short term relief or the basis for a sustainable pension long term.

Funding under a pre election commitment to fix an anomaly in interstate seniors travel concessions is welcome.

In 2006/07 there were approximately 570,000 full single Age Pensioners

Currently the single Age Pension is around 59 percent of the couple pension. National Seniors Australia wants it raised to two-thirds of the couple pension.

***Senate Inquiry into the Cost of Living Pressures on Older Australians (findings handed down March 2008)**

Michael is available for interview on 0448 125 898

With almost 300,000 members aged 50 and over National Seniors is the largest consumer organisation for older Australians. It is the fourth largest group of its kind in the world.

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