



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**SOCIAL SECURITY  
(ADMINISTRATION) BILL 1999**

**Second Reading**

**SPEECH**

**Thursday, 3 June 1999**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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# SPEECH

**Date** Thursday, 3 June 1999  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Truss, Warren, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

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**Mr TRUSS** (Wide Bay—Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) (9.37 am)—I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Since forming government in 1996, this government has sought to implement its commitment to a simpler and more coherent social security system that more effectively meets its objectives of adequacy, equity, incentives for self-provision, customer service, and administrative and financial sustainability. That commitment can be met in part by seeking to ensure that social security legislation is routinely reviewed to improve its readability and to ensure that it is easier to amend so as not to impede the implementation of new policies.

The aims of enhanced readability and adaptability to implement change are not new to social security legislation. Indeed, the government recognises the efforts of the former government in rewriting the social security law in 1991, culminating in the Social Security Act 1991. But just as the 1991 exercise recognised the need to make social security legislation more comprehensible and adaptable, subsequent experience with the Social Security Act indicates that these aims could be better achieved by consolidating the technical rules provisions of that act.

A technical rules simplification project has been conducted in my department, in conjunction with Centrelink, with the aim of simplifying the technical rules provisions. The objectives of the project have been to implement simpler policies for the Social Security Act through legislation that:

- . is consistent across payment types;
- . facilitates movements between payment types;
- . is easy to administer;
- . reflects current and desired best practice in administration and customer service;
- . is easy to amend;
- . facilitates the introduction of emerging technologies;
- . is in clear English and has a logical structure and flow; and
- . is as short as possible because it avoids unnecessary repetition.

This bill is the result of that project, simplifying the technical rules by standardising them and locating them and other administrative provisions separately from the other provisions of the Social Security Act. The bill deals with technical rules relating to:

- . claims;
- . start days (this concept replaces the somewhat misleading concept of 'provisional commencement day');
- . payment into bank accounts;
- . payment by instalments;
- . protection of social security payments;
- . information gathering;
- . comparable foreign payments;

- . provision of tax file numbers;
- . rate increase, reduction, cancellation or suspension determinations;
- . changes to payments by computers;
- . date of effect determinations;
- . review of decisions;
- . offences; and
- . use of emerging technologies.

The bill covers social security payments and concession cards. However, the bill does not contain any provisions relating to qualification, payability, rates, overpayments, debt recovery, portability or international social security agreements.

Like the 1991 exercise, this bill does not involve any major policy initiatives and it does not have any significant financial impact. The policy initiatives implemented by the bill relate to:

- . streamlining the claims process and providing enhanced flexibility in how claims may be made;
- . making it easier for a person to be transferred between income support payments;
- . making it easier for a person to be placed onto the correct payment where the person has applied for the incorrect social security payment;
- . introducing generic provisions applicable to all payment types wherever possible—for example, commencement provisions being events based rather than being payment type based (and so varying from payment type to payment type); and
- . reducing the number of instalment rounding provisions.

The bill also gives effect to some recommendations of the Guilfoyle report, including:

- . giving the Social Security Appeals Tribunal the ability to consider matters without having to convene an oral hearing if it considers that a review may be conducted adequately without an oral hearing; and
- . establishing a 12-month time limit in which a customer may lodge an application to a Centrelink authorised review officer to appeal a reviewable decision (although there will be scope to extend the time limit in special circumstances).

A significant outcome of the bill will be that there will be much less social security legislation—about 500 pages less—and it will be more consistent. This should be of benefit to Centrelink in administering the social security law.

This bill is not, nor is it intended to be, a singing and dancing exercise. Just as the government's commitment to a simpler and more coherent social security system is ongoing, so is the need to constantly review the legislative basis underlying that social security system. The government trusts that this bill will receive the same bipartisan support afforded to the 1991 rewrite of the social security legislation. I commend the bill to the House and present the explanatory memorandum, which covers not only this bill but the next two pieces of legislation which I will bring before the House.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Melham**) adjourned.