



PRIME MINISTER

Press Statement
23 May 1975

Pension Benefits

The Prime Minister and member for Werriwa, Mr Gough Whitlam has reminded pensioners that they can soon expect lump sum payments of pension benefit/increases backdated to 1 May. The pension increases had been delayed by Opposition tactics in the Senate, and reflected the low priority the Opposition parties gave to social welfare payments.

"The standard rate of pension for aged persons, invalids, widows and supporting mothers has risen by \$5 a week to \$36 a week," Mr Whitlam said. "The rate for a married couple has been increased by \$8.50 a week to \$60 a week," he added. Additional payments for children of pensioners and other beneficiaries have also been increased by \$1.50 to \$7 a week for each child.

"Most importantly, this latest legislation has kept the Australian Government's promise to abolish the means test for people aged between 70 and 74 years," Mr Whitlam said. This meant that an estimated 56,000 people in that age group who were previously ineligible for pensions under the means test were now entitled to draw pensions. Mr Whitlam urged people to apply to the nearest office of the Department of Social Security if they thought they were now entitled to a pension. He stressed that this was especially important for first-time pensioners.

The full pension will also be paid to about 43,000 aged between 70 and 74 who had only been getting part-pensions because of the means test. Mr Whitlam said the full pension payments would be backdated to 1 May.

However, Mr Whitlam pointed out that guardians allowances, additional payments for children and supplementary assistance would remain payable subject to existing means tests. In addition, "fringe benefits" such as entitlement to a Pensioner Medical Service card would also remain subject to a means test.

Mr. Whitlam explained that widows and supporting mothers would receive a special cheque about June 4, covering the arrears back to the May 6 payment date. They will receive benefit at the new rate of \$36 a week in their normal cheque on June 17.

Old age and invalid pensioners will receive a single cheque on June 12, covering the fortnight's payment at the new rate and lump sum payment backdated to May 1.

Mr. Whitlam said he was proud that since the Australian Labor Government had been elected in 1972, the standard rate of pension had been increased by 80% and the combined married rate by nearly 74%. Costs generally had risen only 31.6% in that time so it meant that pensioners had more real purchasing power now.
