

**SOCIAL SECURITY AND OTHER  
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (EMPLOYMENT  
ENTRY PAYMENT) BILL 2008**

**Second Reading**

Debate resumed from 29 May, on motion by **Ms Gillard**:

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Mr BILLSON** (Dunkley) (4.25 pm)—Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you for your forbearance. The Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Employment Entry Payment) Bill 2008 is a fascinating piece of legislation. My friend and parliamentary colleague the member for Boothby could no doubt elucidate in a more erudite way than I on what the bill is actually about. I thank the clerks for passing me some material that I can work with. The employment entry payment, which I understand was available primarily for disability support recipients—and please jump in any time, colleagues, if I am misunderstanding the nature of the payment—was introduced some time ago to assist with the costs of taking up employment. That is probably why it was called the employment entry payment. It has been there since 1989. It was designed to give particular assistance to those who were experiencing some barriers to gaining employment, such as those with special employment circumstances. You will have seen some, I suppose, evolution of the idea through the Howard government years, with the training credit accounts and other support that has been available. I particularly liked the measure that saw our apprentices able to be assisted with their tools. Those tool vouchers have been extremely well supported.

We have before us today a bill that I believe the government is advancing to give effect to a budget decision to axe the employment entry payment, which according to the government will save a little under \$61 million over five years. This bill is something that I am sure the member for Boothby would have a lot more to say about than I do. I wonder whether it might be appropriate, with the consent of my colleague across the table, that I defer for a moment and invite the member for Boothby to add his comments. I seek the indulgence of the House to invite my colleague to conclude these remarks if that would be appropriate.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)**—I thank very much the member for Dunkley for assisting the smooth procedures of the House.

**Mr Fitzgibbon**—Madam Deputy Speaker, I intend to be extremely generous and allow this transition to occur. While I am on my feet, I am trying to think of a precedent for this. In my 12 years in this place I do not recall this happening. I will allow it to happen on this occasion but I do so without prejudice and indicate to the opposition that it is not a practice we would be looking to tolerate in the future.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER**—I thank the minister.

**Mr Billson**—If I could thank the Minister for Defence and suggest the parallel of an AFL footballer being awarded a free kick but not being able to take it and instead passing the ball to the colleague nearest to the point of play.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER**—I thank the member for Dunkley and call the member for Boothby so we can proceed smoothly with the business of the House before us.

**Dr SOUTHCOTT** (Boothby) (4.28 pm)—I move:

That all words after “That” be omitted with a view to substituting the following words:

“whilst not declining to give the bill a second reading, the House:

- (1) notes that the Australian Labor Party opposed the repeal of the employment entry payment in 1996 and 1999;
- (2) recalls that the Member for Lilley said in March 1999 that removing the employment entry payment would put ‘up a roadblock for people to move from welfare to work’;
- (3) notes that recipients of the Disability Support Pension and recipients of Newstart Allowance and Youth Allowance with a limited work capacity who move into work will not receive the \$312 payment in future;
- (4) notes that recipients of Carers Payment, Mature Age Allowance, Youth Allowance, Newstart Allowance, Special Benefits, Widow Allowance and Parenting Payments who move into work will not receive the payment of \$104 in the future;
- (5) calls on the Government to release the numbers of recipients of income support payment who will be affected by this measure; and
- (6) calls on the Government to indicate what impact this decision will have on workforce participation”.

The Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Employment Entry Payment) Bill 2008 repeals the employment entry payment, which is currently given to job seekers who gain employment after 12 months or more of unemployment. It provides a payment of \$104 to job seekers who are in receipt of an eligible Centrelink payment. Job seekers who are in receipt of a disability support pension or who have a partial work capacity and are on Newstart or youth allowance may be eligible for the higher rate of \$312. These payments can only be claimed once in a 12-month period.

We have to say that the Labor Party have had a change of heart on the employment entry payment because they did oppose the repeal of the employment entry payment in 1996 and 1999. The member for Lilley, now the Treasurer, said on 9 March 1999 that the employment entry payment was a measure ‘which encourages the movement from welfare to work’. The current Leader of the Opposition, also on 9 March 1999, said, ‘We should be about encouraging people in employment rather than imposing additional burdens

upon them.' The current Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs again was vocal in opposing taking away the employment entry payment. All of these payments were introduced to assist people into employment.

The Labor Party is saying one thing in opposition and another thing in government. We also see that people who move from a disability support pension into work will now not be getting \$312 to assist them with whatever they like—transport, clothing. That will be taken away on 1 July 2008 and will be replaced with nothing—so much for the compassion of the Australian Labor Party. This has been replaced with nothing. This is simply a savings measure.

The opposition raised some questions in Senate estimates to find out how many people will lose the \$312 payment and how many people will lose their \$104 payment. The department was unable to provide an immediate answer but has undertaken to provide an answer on notice. The people who will be most disadvantaged by this decision will be those in receipt of a disability support pension who are enrolled with a Disability Employment Network provider. And, like job seekers engaged with the Job Network, these job seekers have no access to the job seeker account, money which can in essence be used for a similar purpose to the employment entry payment.

We are in the position where something is being removed from income support recipients and we do not yet know, in some of these cases, what it will be replaced with. Certainly from 1 July 2008 to 1 July 2009 it will be replaced with nothing and there will be no additional compensation available for these people. This is \$60 million coming straight out of the pockets of people on disability support pension, parenting payment, carers payment, widows allowance and so on. The opposition has moved an amendment to note:

... that the Australian Labor Party opposed the repeal of the employment entry payment in 1996 and 1999;

- (2) recalls that the Member for Lilley said in March 1999 that removing the employment entry payment would put 'up a roadblock for people to move from welfare to work';
- (3) notes that recipients of the Disability Support Pension and recipients of Newstart Allowance and Youth Allowance with a limited work capacity who move into work will not receive the \$312 payment in future;
- (4) notes that recipients of Carers Payment, Mature Age Allowance, Youth Allowance, Newstart Allowance, Special Benefits, Widow Allowance and Parenting Payments who move into work will not receive the payment of \$104 in the future;
- (5) calls on the Government to release the numbers of recipients of income support payment who will be affected by this measure; and
- (6) calls on the Government to indicate what impact this decision will have on workforce participation".

With those remarks, I thank the House.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)**—Is the amendment is seconded?

**Mr Byrne**—The amendment is lapsed.

**Mr Somlyay**—I second the amendment.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER**—The amendment is seconded. The original question was that this bill be now read a second time.

**Mr Byrne**—Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The amendment was not seconded. As you know, there was no-one in the House when there was a call for a seconder of the amendment and a speaker was on his feet. Therefore, I say, the amendment lapses.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER**—I was calling for a seconder to the amendment. I called twice. I did pause. The amendment has been seconded.

**Mr BIDGOOD (Dawson) (4.35 pm)**—I hear what the member for Boothby has to say, but I will categorically reject each and every point. Past evaluations of the employment entry payment scheme have indicated that it does not appear to have been a major factor in influencing the person's decision to take up work. There have also been changes to the incentive structures of the income support system and the tax system subsequent to the implementation of the employment entry payment in 1989 which mean that the assistance it provides is largely duplicated. The government is simplifying the assistance available to job seekers. This includes not only reducing the overlap and duplication in financial assistance but also building a better employment services system. Under the new employment services model, an Employment Pathway Fund will be available to job seekers. This will be able to be used to assist people with the cost of entering employment.

Other measures introduced subsequent to the last time Labor opposed the abolition of the employment entry payment in 1999 mean that now this specific form of assistance is not necessary. These include the special employment advance of 1999, the job seeker account of 2001 and working credit of 2003—all of which provide financial assistance to smooth people's entry into work. In addition, the government is introducing a new and improved employment services model for assisting job seekers into work.

I would like to take this opportunity to say that, consistent with its theme of responsible economic management, this government has identified a number of programs that were inefficient, wasteful or largely duplicated elsewhere. The employment entry payment is one such scheme. The employment entry payment was initially introduced in 1989 to assist with the cost of taking up employment. Since then, three other schemes have been introduced which provide similar or better assistance and which are more flexible in their applica-

tion. These are the special employment advance, the job seeker accounts provided via the Job Network, and the working credit. Further improvement will be implemented under the new employment services model.

The Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Employment Entry Payment) Bill 2008 will repeal the employment entry payment, effective from 1 July 2008. Removal of the payment will simplify the assistance available to those commencing work, particularly in relation to the complex interactions now in place between the employment entry payment and the special employment advance; will realise savings of \$60.8 million over five years; and will deliver on the government's commitment to responsible economic management.

**Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR** (Gorton—Minister for Employment Participation) (4.39 pm)—I rise on behalf of the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations to sum up the debate on the Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Employment Entry Payment) Bill 2008. I was watching the monitor in my office and I was trying to work out what was going on with the amendment moved by the member for Boothby. I understand there was not a seconder immediately but a seconder was found in time—or the Deputy Speaker was using his discretion to assist the opposition!

The Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Employment Entry Payment) Bill 2008 will repeal the employment entry payment, effective from 1 July this year. The employment entry payment was introduced to assist with costs associated with taking up employment. Subsequent measures have been introduced that mean that this type of assistance is duplicated. These include the special employment advance, the job seeker account and the working credit. These schemes also provide financial assistance to aid the transition to work.

Removal of the employment entry payment will simplify and reduce overlap and provision of financial and other assistance to income support recipients moving into employment. The measure reduces the duplication in the provision of assistance to job seekers and helps deliver on the government's commitment to responsible economic management. I commend the bill to the House.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)**—The original question was that this bill be now read a second time. To this the honourable member for Boothby has moved as an amendment that all words after 'That' be omitted with a view to substituting other words. The question now is that the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question.

Question agreed to.

Original question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

### Third Reading

**Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR** (Gorton—Minister for Employment Participation) (4.42 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

### SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS (EQUAL TREATMENT IN COMMONWEALTH LAWS—SUPERANNUATION) BILL 2008

#### Second Reading

Debate resumed from 28 May, on motion by **Mr McClelland**:

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Dr NELSON** (Bradfield—Leader of the Opposition) (4.43 pm)—We believe in the equal right of every Australian citizen to be treated with dignity and respect. We believe that all must have an equal right to lead their lives in their own way, according to their own choices and their own decisions, so long as they respect the equal right of all others to do the same. We believe that every Australian is equally entitled to a fair go, regardless of who they are, where they live or whether their parents were rich or poor. They are entitled to equal treatment regardless of the colour of their skin, the god whom they worship, if any, the political beliefs which they hold, their gender or professed sexual orientation.

The opposition, therefore, supports in principle the stated purpose of this legislation to 'eliminate discrimination against same-sex couples' in the nine pieces of Commonwealth legislation which are subject to this bill. These deal with superannuation and related matters in respect of Commonwealth public servants, members of the defence forces, parliamentarians, judicial officers and other Commonwealth officers who are in permanent, bona fide domestic relationships with partners of the same sex.

I point out that our side of politics has a long record in ending laws which discriminate against homosexual people. We do well to remember that it is only a generation ago, within the memory of many members of this House, that not only was there no antidiscrimination legislation but even the private sexual conduct of homosexual people was treated as a crime.

The first occasion of law reform in this area occurred only 36 years ago, in 1972, when a Liberal member of the South Australian parliament, the late Murray Hill, the father of former senator Robert Hill, introduced and secured the passage through the parliament of a private member's bill decriminalising homosexual acts between consenting adults. All of the Australian states and territories followed suit over the