

To: THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS  
From: Ms J. MacDonald, Chair, State Policy Group (WA) NATIONAL SENIORS AUSTRALIA  
Subject: PETITION NO. 160 – Amelioration of Energy Costs Levied on Senior Citizens.

---

This submission is presented at the invitation of the Committee (3 May 2012). The subject has not been placed before the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Affairs.

### The Plea

The petition is a plea for the granting of relief from frequent and significant increases in energy costs affecting a disadvantaged group of the population – specifically those Seniors on low and fixed incomes. The plight of this group has been a focus of attention for the Western Australian membership of National Seniors Australia for more than 12 months. We trust and earnestly urge the Committee to respond not merely to the wording, but also to the seeking for fairness and equity for a disadvantaged sector of the Electorate.

### The Precedent

This particular action was prompted by the broader concession granted to qualified beneficiaries in the State of Victoria by that State's legislature. In this State we have chosen to limit our request to the one energy source – electricity.

### The Parameters

The following points are particularly pertinent and deserve full consideration of the Committee:

1. The petition provides a qualification as to age in respect of the beneficiaries of the proposed rebate.
2. The petition provides a qualification as to financial status (a means test if you will) by specifying particular income sources which by their condition of eligibility would direct the proposed rebate to low and/or fixed income beneficiaries.
3. The petition provides for a method of embracing all of the electors in the low/fixed income category, thus overcoming the anomalous discrimination effected by previous plans – especially in relation to earlier concessions related to solar power generation.

The petition in support of the elderly poor was prepared with the support of

#### **-National Seniors Australia –**

The largest active representative body of the over-50's via its 160 branches in Metropolitan and Rural areas across Australia.

#### **W.A.R.C.R.A. –**

The representative body of occupants of retirement and lifestyle villages.

#### **R.V.A. –**

The major organisation of retirement village operators and managers.

This demonstrated unity of concern by such a cross-section of organisations merely emphasises the strength of the argument for fairness and equity for Seniors.

### The Precursor

As the Committee has limited this submission to a mere 2 pages, we cite the examples given as only a representative sample of the inequities in more than one village where

some residential units were accepted for rebate whilst others in the same village were rejected, simply because of using a "regular" street address which wasn't verified by the administering power supplier.

During 2011 many households were encouraged by government support to invest in Solar panels for domestic electricity generation.

In particular, residents of retirement villages responded to subsidies of capital expenditure and the expectation of an on-going rebate of energy costs by way of a "buy-back" plan. Due to the wording of the relevant legislation, many thousands of this State's elder citizens were deemed ineligible for acceptance in the plan. This was a major disappointment – and some cause for anger – in this cohort of the electorate.

How did this exclusion come about?

1. The legislation was designed to benefit home "owners". Whilst residents of substantial means could install as many panels as they liked, residents of, for instance, retirement villages were declined access to the programme. The vast majority of such housing clusters are subject to a "lease for life" structure, and the energy administration deemed them non-homeowners.
2. The legislation was implemented by Synergy and limited to "Synergy clients". Whilst some villages do have direct Synergy billing to each residential unit, many do not. Whilst Synergy does supply power to a majority of users in this State, other suppliers are active.
3. What were other anomalies?

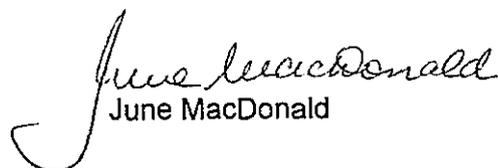
A number of villages receive electricity at a central metering point and re-distribute the power via individual sub-metres to ensure "user pays" distribution of cost. Central consumption, such as for lighting, heating and cooling of communal facilities (eg. – dining, pools, medical and other services) is then shared in the regular instalment of operating costs allocated to each residential unit. The administrators of the subsidy/rebate plan deemed this category of village consumption to be a single metered customer and classed as "commercial" and thus disqualified such residents from being eligible for the rebate plan.

These instances were revealed in a survey conducted jointly by National Seniors Australia, Western Australia Residential Complexes Residents Association, and Retirement Villages Association. The survey received responses from 3,300 residential units representing more than 7,000 aged residents. The respondents were located in rural communities from Geraldton to Esperance as well as the greater Metropolitan area of Perth.

### The Prayer

We trust and earnestly urge the Committee to respond, not merely to the wording, - but also to the thrust for fairness and equity for a disadvantaged sector of the electorate – presented in this submission.

We pray that you will recommend a form of relief for all citizens who meet the relevant and appropriate qualifications which are proposed.

  
June MacDonald

24/5/12



## Media release



The Hon Mary Wooldridge MP  
Minister for Mental Health  
Minister for Women's Affairs  
Minister for Community Services

Monday 31 October 2011

### **Annual electricity discounts to help low-income Victorians**

A Victorian Coalition Government commitment to extend concessions on electricity bills kicks in from tomorrow, Community Services Minister Mary Wooldridge announced.

The Annual Electricity Concession has replaced the Winter Energy Concession for electricity so that eligible Victorians can now access a 17.5 per cent rebate on their electricity bills all year round.

The \$381.6 million initiative ensures concession card holders receive a discount on their electricity bill all year. Previously the concession stopped on 31 October, meaning low-income Victorians received no support through half the year, including the hot summer months of December, January and February.

"Energy bills can be expensive, especially during Victoria's hot summer months when people continue to rely on electricity, including for cooling," Ms Wooldridge said.

"With no support on offer, we know that many low-income Victorians have decided to turn off their electrical appliances, even in extreme hot temperatures.

"Under the Annual Electricity Concession low-income households will see a year-round saving of 17.5 per cent on their electricity bills."

The concession will benefit approximately 850,000 households and over 1.5 million Victorians. The Victorian Government estimates 38,000 households will receive this concession for the first time this financial year.

Holders of a Centrelink pensioner concession card, Centrelink health care card or Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) gold card may be eligible. Recipients of the Winter Energy Concession will automatically receive the Annual Electricity Concession.

Victorians who believe they may be eligible for the Annual Electricity Concession should call the Concessions Information Line on 1800 658 521 or visit [www.dhs.vic.gov.au/concessions](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/concessions)

**Media contact: Michael Moore 0400 719 355**

Visit [www.premier.vic.gov.au](http://www.premier.vic.gov.au) for more news

