



MEDIA RELEASE

Senator the Hon Chris Ellison

Minister for Human Services

CB04/07

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2007-08 Budget

Improving the integrity of Centrelink payments and services for customers travelling overseas

The Minister for Human Services, Senator Chris Ellison, today announced a 2007-08 Budget measure to prevent fraud and non-compliance in relation to Centrelink customers who travel overseas.

“The Australian Government will enable a real-time link between Centrelink and the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. For new claimants, this link will enable the confirmation of eligibility on residence and visa-related grounds prior to granting social service payments and concessions.”

Senator Ellison said the link will address a deficiency by automatically updating client records for departures from and returns to Australia, and residence status changes to help determine ongoing eligibility for social service payments and concessions.

“Approximately 700,000 Centrelink customers travel overseas each year, and of these, 500,000 do not notify the agency of their departure,” Senator Ellison said.

The measure will enable Centrelink to immediately advise customers of any relevant matched information and give them the opportunity to verify any of the material. Customers will also be advised of any changes to their entitlements.

It will apply to both new and existing Centrelink customers. From July 2008, anyone claiming a social security or family assistance payment for the first time will have their residence information or past absences from Australia confirmed automatically through the real-time link.

Over time the Australian Government expects to recoup the costs of this measure through reduced incorrect payments and the recovery of debts.

Senator Ellison said it will streamline the claiming process for customers who have difficulty providing visa or travel information that they may not have on hand.

While the link will confirm and update their departure and arrival dates automatically, customers can still contact Centrelink for information on how their travel may affect their ongoing payment.

“This measure represents another way the Australian Government is working to streamline access to payments and services and better ensure payments and services are provided only to those who are eligible”, Senator Ellison said.

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