



Government must use budget to increase remote area allowance

Central Land Council members are upping pressure on the federal government to increase the remote area allowance as part of the federal budget in May and deliver real cost of living relief to their communities.

Meeting at Woolanger [WOO-lin-ger] on Anmatyerr land this week, elected council members from across the southern half of the Northern Territory said rising fuel prices affect every aspect of their life.

“We completely depend on diesel for power, food, water supply, transport and access to health services,” CLC chair Warren Williams said.

“Our people are the country’s poorest. People on fixed incomes out bush are at breaking point and simply can’t pay more for life’s essentials,” he said. “We’re struggling like never before and it’s only going to get worse.”

“We need this Labor government to help us when we are really hurting.”

Mr Williams said rising fuel costs will wipe out the benefits of Labor’s very welcome low-cost essentials subsidy scheme.

“Rising fuel costs will keep pushing up the price of fresh food and other essentials. The subsidy helps, but rising fuel prices will quickly erode any savings,” he said.

“Only last week the CLC heard that freight companies can no longer absorb increased fuel costs. That means prices for fresh food will rise sharply.”

Substantially increasing the remote area allowance is the most straightforward and targeted way to compensate remote residents for the extreme cost of living out bush.

The council first called on the government to increase the allowance last August, before the current fuel and inflation crisis.

The 42-year-old allowance is a small supplementary payment to income support recipients in remote areas, where groceries cost an estimated 40 per cent more than in towns.

More than half of all allowance recipients live in the Northern Territory. Single allowance recipients get just \$9.10 a week and couples \$15.60. The allowance pays \$3.65 per child.

The payment is not indexed and has increased only twice in more than four decades.

“The government last increased the allowance more than 25 years ago. With fuel prices hitting our people so hard and more price rises on the way it’s crunch time to raise the payment,” Mr Williams said.

“Australians everywhere may feel cost of living pressures, but rising prices are hitting poor families in remote communities the hardest.”

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