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New Australia/New Zealand Social Security Arrangements

I am pleased to announce today agreement on revised Australia - New Zealand social security arrangements, following my visit to New Zealand for annual trans-Tasman high-level talks with New Zealand's Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Helen Clark.

The attached communique, issued by us jointly today in Wellington, outlines the main features of the new arrangements and provides guidance on where those affected by the changes can seek additional information.

Our new arrangements successfully remove a significant long-standing irritant in trans-Tasman relations. They secure a durable and affordable approach to bilateral social security payments for both countries and remove uncertainties about the extent of and responsibilities for future costs. They retain the existing free flow of Australians and New Zealanders across the Tasman to travel, to study, to work, to live and to settle which has greatly benefited both countries. They also protect the position of New Zealanders already in Australia.

The new improved bilateral social security agreement we intend to sign shortly as part of this new deal will ensure that Australians and New Zealanders reliant on Australian age pensions, New Zealand superannuation and veterans' pensions can rest secure in the knowledge that continued payment of their entitlements is guaranteed regardless of which side of the Tasman they choose to live.

As both Miss Clark and I have noted, the outcome strengthens our extraordinarily broad and positive relationship and makes good sense for both parties.

NEW AUSTRALIA/NEW ZEALAND SOCIAL SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS: JOINT PRIME MINISTERIAL COMMUNIQUE

We join today in announcing new bilateral social security arrangements, developed as part of the work of the joint prime ministerial task force established at the Australia/New Zealand prime ministerial meeting in February 1999. The arrangements successfully remove a significant long-standing irritant between our two governments, and, in doing so, secure a durable and affordable approach for both countries, as well as removing uncertainties about the extent of and responsibility for future costs. The outcome strengthens our extraordinarily broad and positive relationship, reaffirms the trans-Tasman travel freedoms we enjoy, and makes good sense for both parties.

The new arrangements are based on two principles. First, that Australians and New Zealanders will continue to be able to move freely between our two countries under the Trans-Tasman Travel Arrangement. Australia and New Zealand have benefited and will continue to benefit greatly from the free flow of people across the Tasman to travel, to study, to work, to live and to settle, and from a common trans-Tasman labour market.

Second, that the free flow of people has been a key factor in the integration of our economies under CER (Closer Economic Relations) and the broadening of our bilateral relationship. This has enabled us to develop better our human and financial capital, to share knowledge and skills and to realise the full potential of CER as it moves towards a single trans-Tasman market. Both countries are committed to free movement across the Tasman and our new social security arrangements will help underpin that free flow.

Trans-Tasman people flows have varied over time in size and direction. The current social security arrangements have had to be updated continuously and revised to reflect these changes, but the results of renegotiation in the past have been to neither government's complete satisfaction. The fundamentally revised structure that we announce today will remove that need to continually revise old and outdated social security arrangements.

The new social security arrangements we are announcing today will provide a more stable, durable and affordable underpinning for the free trans-Tasman flow of people. They will be a better strategic fit for our evolving CER relationship. They will resolve the current complex administrative arrangements and help contain the trans-Tasman social security costs that will in future be borne by us both. Both governments are convinced that the package we have agreed, represents a very effective practical response to our needs and reaffirms the bilateral travel and labour market freedoms which have contributed so strongly to trans-Tasman prosperity.

Our new approach is based on a new bilateral social security agreement that is 'best practice' by the standards of both countries, the text of which both countries intend to sign by April 2001 and to have enter into force by 1 July 2002. Key features of the agreement - and of associated national measures - are attached. Those Australians and New Zealanders reliant on Australian age pensions, New Zealand superannuation and veterans' pensions can rest secure in the knowledge that continued payments of their entitlements is guaranteed regardless of on which side of the Tasman they choose to live. Where people have spent part of their working lives in both countries, both governments will contribute to their retirement incomes, reflecting the shared responsibility we will bear for the costs involved and our desire for a more transparent accountability. Both Governments will also contribute support for people with severe disabilities.

Our new arrangements recognise the right of each country to determine access to social security benefits not covered by the agreement, and to set any related residence and citizenship rules according to their respective national legislative and policy frameworks.

In line with that principle, a number of supplementary changes are being announced by Australia under its national policies, relating to the conditions under which New Zealanders moving to Australia after today will in addition qualify for access to other Australian social security benefits not covered by the bilateral agreement and for Australian citizenship. Australia will preserve the social security entitlements of those currently benefiting under the existing bilateral agreement, and transitional measures will, where appropriate, cover the period from today to the entry into force of the new agreement.

New Zealand does not propose any change to migration/residency and citizenship access for Australians in New Zealand at this time.

In striking these new social security arrangements, we have achieved what has previously eluded us, namely a simpler and significantly more durable bilateral agreement. This reflects and reinforces our long-standing enjoyment of trans-Tasman travel freedoms and of levels of social and economic integration under CER enjoyed by few other countries, which should continue to grow.

The Rt Hon Helen Clark The Hon John Howard MP
Wellington, 26 February 2001

ATTACHMENT

NEW AUSTRALIA/NEW ZEALAND SOCIAL SECURITY AGREEMENT AND ASSOCIATED AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL MEASURES

Australia and New Zealand today reaffirm trans-Tasman travel and labour market freedoms and announce a new bilateral social security agreement intended to take effect on 1 July 2002. In addition, Australia will adopt, with immediate effect, new measures under its own national legislative and policy framework to determine access to social security payments not covered by the new agreement or transitional measures.

New social security agreement

Conclusion of an updated and durable bilateral social security agreement has been a long-standing aim for both governments. We are therefore pleased to announce today our joint endorsement of a new agreement covering old age pensions, superannuation and payments for people with severe disabilities, which both countries intend to sign by April 2001 and to have enter into force by 1 July 2002. Under its terms, Australia and New Zealand will share responsibility for paying age pension / New Zealand superannuation and veterans' pension and pensions for people with severe disabilities to Australians and New Zealanders resident in the other country.

The agreement will cover such pensioners/superannuitants regardless of whether they are permanent or temporary residents in their host country. Under the shared responsibility principle, Australia and New Zealand will each contribute to benefit payments in proportion to the period of working life the recipient has spent in each country (in the case of age benefit/New Zealand superannuation upon qualification for benefits at the age of 65). We have also agreed on a mechanism to cover residence in third countries. Under the equity principle, New Zealand superannuitants in Australia will not be entitled to receive more than other Australian age pension beneficiaries, and vice versa.

Payments made under Australia's Veterans Entitlement Act to New Zealand veterans in Australia and Australian veterans in New Zealand will not be affected by these changes.

The continued issuing of concession cards in Australia and community cards in New Zealand will provide continuing access to other support to beneficiaries covered by the new agreement.

Transitional Arrangements under existing Social Security Agreement

Both countries recognise the need for particular care with transitional provisions to minimise economic disruption or unforeseen disadvantage and ensure a smooth change in the new arrangements. The existing social security agreement covering payments for the elderly, those with disabilities and their partners, as well as sole parents will continue to operate until the new agreement comes into effect on 1 July 2002. Social security clients being paid under the current agreement at the time the new agreement enters into force will continue to receive support in line with the terms of the current agreement.

Simplification of existing administrative arrangements

Both governments have sought to rationalise the current excessively complex arrangements for administering the bilateral agreement and for calculating bilateral reimbursements. More transparent and efficient provisions will apply when the new bilateral social security agreement enters into force from 1 July 2002, under which the respective contributions of each government will be clear.

Access to other social security payments in Australia under new permanent residence and citizenship arrangements

Australia will continue to welcome New Zealanders who wish to move to Australia, whether to live and work on a temporary or permanent basis. In parallel with the new agreement, Australia is announcing on a national basis that from today access in Australia to social security payments other than those covered by the old and new bilateral agreements will in future be available to any New Zealand citizen who can meet normal migration criteria and become an Australian permanent resident.

New Zealand citizens already in Australia as of today will continue to be treated as permanent residents for the purposes of the Australian Citizenship Act and will continue to be eligible for Australian citizenship after the usual residential qualifying period. The same will apply, under transitional arrangements, to New Zealand citizens absent from Australia today but who have been in Australia for one year in two of the two years immediately preceding 26 February 2001 and who subsequently return to Australia.

Unless otherwise covered by transitional arrangements, New Zealanders arriving in Australia after today will be able to apply for citizenship or to sponsor non-New Zealand family members for permanent residence only once they themselves have obtained permanent residence.

Although the new social security agreement will in principle be limited to pensions/superannuation for the aged and people with severe disabilities, the Australian government will continue to pay some additional benefits to Australians temporarily in New Zealand, pursuant to its normal portability arrangements.

Access in New Zealand to other social security payments under new permanent residence and citizenship arrangements

For its part, the New Zealand government has decided not to amend its migration and citizenship arrangements with regard to Australian citizens and Australian permanent residents in New Zealand. There will be some changes to the way in which Australians in New Zealand will access benefits not covered by the bilateral agreement after 1 July 2002.

Other Effects

New Zealand citizens who are resident in Australia currently have access to health, education and a range of other Commonwealth, state and territory services on the same basis as Australian permanent residents from other countries. The changes to arrangements for accessing Australian benefits which Australia is announcing today are intended to address social security costs, not access to these other services.

Further details of new arrangements

Further announcements within the next few hours will provide additional details on the changed social security agreement and associated migration and citizenship-related changes, indicating also where further details on the new arrangements may be obtained. All information on the new arrangements will be publicly advertised and will be available from government web pages and call centres in Australia and New Zealand.

More information is available by:

Visiting the websites www.nz-oz.gov.au or www.winz.govt.nz

In Australia, calling the NZ to OZ Helpline on 133 242

In New Zealand, calling 0800 441 248 (NZ to OZ Helpline direct link)
or 0800 600 555 for an information pack

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