

**Minister for Social Development Paula Bennett  
Speech to Welfare Working Group Forum  
9 June 2010**

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Welfare: It's fair to say this is a controversial subject.

I acknowledge that from the outset.

Frankly this debate could get uncomfortable.

It could get emotional.

Perhaps it should.

Every New Zealander is touched by welfare somehow.

Many of us know someone who is, or has been, on welfare.

Many of us have been there ourselves.

In fact many of us are on welfare right now.

One in eight working-age Kiwis are receiving a benefit.

Ultimately we all pay for it through taxes.

So we all have an interest in our welfare system.

This debate could spark prejudices.

We may even see an ugly side to New Zealand.

But I believe we will also see hope and aspiration.

Compassion and understanding.

There will of course be differences.

But it is time for an honest conversation.

It is time to look at the expanding numbers and dependency.

Time we asked ourselves some basic questions.

What kind of system do we want to have?

Who should get welfare and for how long?

How do we pay for it?

## **Welfare Working Group**

I formed the Welfare Working Group to examine these questions.

This is a group of eight people with expertise in social, employment, business, psychology and health issues, through to those working on the frontline.

A great deal of thought went into assembling this group of people.

I recognised we needed different thinkers.

To look at fairness, sustainability, long term welfare dependence, incentives, access, structure.

But this group should not feel constrained.

Instead, you should expand your thinking.

Challenge yourselves.

Challenge each other.

Challenge us.

I want you to think.

What would this look like if you started from scratch?

If you were creating the system what would you do?

Push the boundaries.

I leave it to you to explore these issues with New Zealand.

I could have defined the problems here today.

But I won't.

Believe me I do have a few thoughts on the subject I could share.

But I won't.

This isn't the time for me to talk.

This is your turn.

Don't be scared of this challenge.

I'm asking you to ask and answer some difficult questions.

But at the end of the day it is my responsibility to get this right.

This Government is committed to a sustainable and fair welfare system.

So I believe it is time for this conversation.

This is about changing the society we live in.

It is about having a system that is sustainable and fair to New Zealanders.

Think about what you want this country to look and feel like in 20 years' time.

Let that guide the debate.

It is a pleasure to open this forum.

Thank you.