



**GOVERNMENT OF THE COOK ISLANDS**  
**OFFICE OF THE MINISTER**  
**FOR HEALTH, INTERNAL AFFAIRS, OMBUDSMAN**  
**& PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES**

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**MEDIA STATEMENT**

Attn: News Editors/Chief Reporters

**WELFARE ACT AMENDMENTS PASSED**

Parliament has approved amendments to the Welfare Act 1989 now making it easier for local pensioners seeking reinstatement of their pension if they have lost eligibility for being out of the Cook Islands for more than six months.

“I was very pleased with the support from all sides of Parliament last night for these amendments,” stated Minister of Internal Affairs, the Hon. Nandi Glassie. “These amendments will help address hardships faced by eligible pensioners on return to the Cook Islands.”

Cook Islanders in receipt of the local pension that are away from the Cook Islands for more than six months lose eligibility to the pension. On their return, they had to reside for a continuous 12 months in the Cook Islands before becoming eligible to re-apply.

The amendments allow immediate re-qualification for pensioners that were away for more than six months but less than one year. A pensioner that is away for more than 12 months but less than 2 years will face a three-month re-qualification period instead of 12 months. Pensioners that have been living away from the Cook Islands for more than 2 years will still face the current 12 month period.

Pensioners that are on a Ministry of Health medical referral, regardless of time away from the Cook Islands for medical treatment, will be able to re-apply without facing a stand-down period.

Other changes include the tightening of the general qualification time for the pension to be counted from the age of 18 rather than at birth and enable those posted on diplomatic service to continue to be considered resident in the Cook Islands.

Amendments to the Income Tax Act were also passed in Parliament and have clarified that the Ministry of Internal Affairs is able to tax the local pension at source, which will assist pensioners in meeting tax obligations if and when they arise.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs is waiting for royal assent by the Queen’s Representative before these changes will have legal effect.

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