I would like to make some comments on ENTITLEMENT TO LIFE GOLD PASS HOLDERS; however, first I would like to give a brief background of my service of 31 years and 3 months in the House of Representatives:

1958 to 1990 I served as a Member of Parliament
1972 to 1975 I served as a Minister in the Whitlam Government
1975 to 1977 I was Deputy Federal Leader to Whitlam until our defeat
1977 to 1983 I was Federal Spokesperson on Urban and Regional Affairs.
1983 to 1987 I served as a Minister in the first two Hawke’s Governments.
1987 to 1990 I was Leader of the Australian Delegation to the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU).
1988 to 1990 I was the Chairman of Asian Pacific Group in the IPU.

From 1958 to 1972 members had free air travel to Canberra and other destinations within Australia where a member might want to serve; however, from your home to Sydney Airport you had to provide your own form of transport at your own expense. If you arrived at any destination excluding Canberra you had to provide your own transport.

In 1969 when I became Shadow Minister for Urban Affairs and the Environment; Shadow Ministers received no overnight allowance, excluding Canberra or extra privilege with car.

From the time of my election to the Whitlam Government to my stepping down from the Hawke Government I was a privileged person and had a Commonwealth Car, if I required one. However, I have always been a supporter of and have use public transport which was free given that I had a Gold Pass which I have had for about 36 years.

During the whole of my parliamentary and post-parliamentary life I have acknowledged that I hold a privileged position and that I have been on the public pay role for over 50 years and I respect that I am on the people’s payroll.

I became disturbed when some former members abused the system. I can understand that a few people think we are on the gravy train.
I am an activist for human rights, social issues, urban planning, environmental and as a former POW of the Japanese I have been fighting both sides of politics for justice for our people for over 20 years. Since the invasion of East Timor by the Indonesian militarists I have battled for their self determination.

In the late 1990's I was elected "a living national treasure" by the National Trust. That keeps me busy!

In all my years as a member of parliament I never sought any special benefit from the Remuneration Authority.

In 2008 I wrote to my colleague, John Faulkner, seeking assistance for ex-members of parliament, when leaving on an aircraft from their home city or at their destination be restricted to those 85 years or over, or a further option was 90 years or over. John was sympathetic; but he was not successful with the Expenditure Review Committee. He said, "Tom, I will use the words which you once said, "they have cash registers for hearts".

I am now 88 years old and I find my balance is a real problem. A couple of years ago I was returning to Mascot I was trying to get to the electric trains when I lost my balance at the bottom of an escalator and fell over; the bloody escalator kept moving, cutting part of my arm until I was eventually assisted to my feet.

Some may argue, 'why don't you catch a taxi?' However, if you have luggage with you; you have to line up, sometimes for quite a while. If a driver is made available they can be so helpful and give you that extra security.

You might consider my suggestions; although, I don't know what you can do with those that abuse the system. When I first retired there were no restrictions to my air travel, now the number of journeys is limited to 25 trips. I can understand the Committee's responsibilities, but should those who adhere to principles and conditions of the Gold Pass be punished because of the selfish and greedy.

Yours sincerely

Tom Uren

October 16 2009

If you seek me to give evidence orally, I would be pleased to meet your committee.