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## MEDIA RELEASE

### **Increase to minimum wages and Newstart urgently needed: Bishop Long**

Bishop Vincent Long Van Nguyen, Chairman of the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, has called for an urgent increase in minimum wages and the Newstart Allowance.

‘Australia is facing a wages crisis, and low-paid workers and their families who rely on the National Minimum Wage and the award safety net are in danger of falling into poverty’, Bishop Long says in his annual Pastoral Letter for the Feast of St Joseph the Worker (1 May).

He points to estimates that over 1.5 million workers and almost 2 million people who are unemployed or who have withdrawn from the labour market are in poverty or at risk of it.

Workers’ bargaining power has been eroded by threats from automation and overseas competition, dwindling trade union membership and tight restrictions on industrial action. Casualisation and the rise of the ‘gig economy’ have also contributed to job insecurity.

‘Wages have stagnated since 2012, while costs such as childcare, electricity, gas, health and education have increased between three and five times average consumer price increases’, Bishop Long says. ‘Most families are feeling the pinch, but the most vulnerable, including the working poor, are finding it virtually impossible to make ends meet. Meanwhile, the Newstart Allowance has not increased in real terms since 1994’.

‘Building an economy that is inclusive and serves all is a key challenge of our times. For the common good, Australia needs a new consensus between government, business and workers to solve the current impasse of wage stagnation,’ Bishop Long says. ‘The common good will not be served unless we ensure the greatest support to those most in need’.

**The 2018 Pastoral Letter can be downloaded at: [www.acsjc.org.au](http://www.acsjc.org.au).**

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