**Aussies over 60 rack up $1.2b study debt they'll never pay back**

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**EXCLUSIVE SOPHIE ELSWORTH**

"TENS of thousands of Aussies at retirement age have amassed more than $1.2 billion in university debts they are unlikely to repay. alarming statistics from the Australian Taxation Office reveal that in the 2018-19 financial year, three million Aussies accrued Higher Education Loan Program debt totalling a record $66.8 billion. ATO data also shows that, as of the 2017-18 financial year, there were 92,400 Aussians aged 60 and over who still owed on average $13,400 each. In total, they owed a massive $1.27 billion.

After the lodging of final tax returns from a deceased person's estate, any remaining HELP debts are wiped. To avoid these write-offs, the Federal Government has been forced to take action to get people to pay back their debts sooner. This year, the Morrison Government lowered the threshold for people to start paying back debts once they earn $45,888 or above. The previous threshold was $51,907.

Despite the mass amount of debt owed, Federal Education Minister Dan Tehan said the Government was working hard to get the debts repaid quicker. He said the recent changes meant an additional 136,000 debtors would be forced to start making compulsory repayments.

"We did this to help ensure the long-term sustainability of Australia's generous HELP scheme and manage the escalating growth in outstanding student debt," Mr Tehan said.

"Only the Morrison Government was prepared to tackle the record levels of student debt, which currently stands at a staggering $66.8 billion."

Mr Tehan said the Government was working hard to get the debts repaid quicker. He said the recent changes meant an additional 136,000 debtors would be forced to start making compulsory repayments.

The ATO data also shows that the age group that owed the largest amount of debt was those aged 20 to 35 - $38 million Australians who owed $33.6 billion.

Some of the biggest HELP debt balances racked up by Australians sit at $530,000, $450,000 and $445,000.

Jemma Sargeant, 25 (pic-ture) completed a 3-year Bachelor of Business degree at the University of Technology Sydney. This week, she started her first full-time job as a trust analyst.

She ran up about $35,000 in HELP debt and was now being forced to make compulsory repayments of about $5 per cent of her income to wards the money owed. "Knowing I owe so much money isn't a very good feeling," she said. "Having a debt like this plays on my mind."

However, financial experts say people should not rush to pay back student debts. "Young loans are one of the cheapest forms of debt because they do not attract interest charges. Lifeline Financial Planning's chief executive Eugene Ardito said people should be focused on paying down debts that attract interest.

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**Fisherman's body found**

POLICE have confirmed that a body found in Moreton Bay on Monday is Carlene Massey, one of two fishermen who went missing three weeks ago during a fishing trip.

Mr Massey, 25, was last heard from on the evening of August 30, sparking a five-day air, sea and land search covering large swatches of Moreton Bay and its islands.

Their distinctive blue tins, life jackets and fishing rods were located on Green Island on August 31.

A statement from Queensland Police yesterday said no further items had been located at the scene and Timothy Mathers' body had still not been located.

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**Reading in Tomorrow’s Bumper Courier Mail**

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**Java child sex arrest**

**ONYD HAYWARD**

AN AUSTRALIAN man has been charged with pedophilic crimes on the Indonesian island of Java and could face 15 years in prison. Duarte Linskler, 38, is being held in jail in Banyuwangi. Deputy Chief of Banyuwangi Police, Andi Yudha Pratama, confirmed that Linskler was charged.

Police allege that Linskler—a restaurant worker in Australia who regularly holidays in Bali and Banyuwangi—took a 14-year-old boy to his rented house and gave him a mobile phone containing a pornographic video and asked him to watch it. It is alleged that Linskler then sexually abused the boy orally as many as five times and gave him $200 (IDR1,000,000) (KAR).

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