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MEDIA RELEASE

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The Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) survey for the period of June to September reported that 77% of the population believe that the gap between the rich and poor was widening.

Laurie Maher, Executive Officer of Coast Shelter, said that this perception was validated by numerous surveys and in the number of people approaching Coast Shelter for assistance.

Coast Shelter's Annual Report, released last week, reported that through the Donnison Street Restaurant, local Churches and community groups had supplied almost 64,000 meals to people in need.

In addition, Coast Shelter had provided accommodation to 563 homeless men, women and children who stayed in refuge accommodation for an average of 58 days while waiting for more permanent accommodation.

"That's the good side" said Maher. "The dark side is that we had to turn away almost four homeless persons for everyone we could accommodate".

"The national picture, where 21% of Australian households or 3.6 million people in Australia live on less than \$400 per week is even worse on the Central Coast where the number of households in this category is closer to 30%" Maher said.

"No wonder some 850,000 Australians have approached charities for assistance to pay energy and power bills, that there is a 12-15 year waiting list on the Central Coast for public housing and 500,000 Australians are on the waiting list for dental care and that the average waiting time is 27 months" Maher said.

A recent report by the Australian Council of Social Services revealed that 25% of Australian adults experience dental pain from problems with their teeth.

Add these figures to the number of people who have to approach charities for Emergency Relief to buy food and other essentials and the "Lucky Country" seems to be lucky for the "haves" rather than the increasing numbers of "have nots".

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