



*A cross-party group calling for an end to the freezing of expat pensions met for the first time at Westminster yesterday Photo: GETTY*

## Expat state pensions: Cameron 'sympathetic' to calls for end to freezing

*New campaign for end to frozen pensions for British expats receives encouraging response from Prime Minister*

By Richard Evans 11:13AM BST 02 Apr 2014 Comment

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The Prime Minister is sympathetic to the plight of British expats whose state pensions have been frozen, according to an MP fighting for a change to the policy.

British expats in many countries, mostly commonwealth members, do not receive inflation-linked increases to their state pension each year. As a result, some have had their payments frozen for decades and receive just tiny sums each week.

Sir Roger Gale, the Conservative MP for Thanet North, said he had recently met David Cameron to lobby him for a better deal for the

pensioners affected. He said the Prime Minister was "not unsympathetic" over their plight but that no change was imminent.

"Some of these people do not have long left," Sir Roger told a meeting of a new cross-party parliamentary group formed to fight on the pensioners' behalf. "We need urgent action."

But he added that while the Prime Minister himself had been sympathetic, others in his office had not. "The attitude towards expat pensioners was 'they don't vote, do they'."

The group received strong support from the governments of Australia and Canada, where many of the expats with frozen pensions live. David MacClennan from the Australian High Commission said Britain's failure to pay full pensions to expats in Australia was the "biggest bilateral issue" between the two countries.

"We always raise it at meetings," he said. "We wholeheartedly support this campaign."

Chris Chant from the Canadian High Commission said: "Our sentiments are similar, this is a question of simple fairness. This issue comes up between us and the UK all the time."

Lord Jones of Cheltenham, who also spoke at the inaugural meeting of the group at the Palace of Westminster last night, said: "We have to get George Osborne and Danny Alexander [the Chief Secretary to the Treasury] in a room and lock the door. We won't let this issue die – it's just plain wrong."

Campaigners said they were not seeking payment of all the index-linked increases that pensioners had missed out on over the years but simply a restoration of the full pension from today.

Last year the International Consortium of British Pensioners, which also took part in last night's meeting, over the issue.

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