CENTRELINK has failed to update its website a year after announcing changes to how long people can stay overseas without being cut off welfare. Welfare groups yesterday accused Centrelink of causing confusion and angst among pensioners about the measures announced in the 2003/04 Budget that reduced from 26 weeks to 13 weeks the amount of time that people could remain on benefits while overseas.

They said many people had been wrongly advised on what to do as a result of the oversight.

Centrelink's national manager Hank Jongen said the website would be updated overnight after The Australian alerted him to the problem.

"Centrelink is moving quickly to amend information," he said.

"We are also in the process of updating printed brochures and booklets that contain references to this change".

But president of the National Welfare Rights Centre Michael Raper said the mistake had confused many. "It is scandalous that Centrelink could not keep its own website up to date," he said.

"There needs to be an independent audit of the accuracy and currency of the whole site".

Mr Raper said many people go overseas to look after frail and sick family or friends and were being trapped without any means of support. "This is a pretty mean measure, and it's extremely unfortunate that wrong information is being bandied around," he said.

Mr Raper said Centrelink had left itself wide open to compensation claims for defective administration.

This report appears on australianIT.com.au.