

12 March 2015

Workplace Relations Framework
Productivity Commission
GPO Box 1428
Canberra City ACT 2601

Dear Submission Administrator,

Please find attached my four page submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry.

I work from a smartphone and am unable to download a coversheet.

I wrote this discussion paper for publication in the Older Women's Network (OWN) newsletter last year and it elicited considerable positive response from members.

The Federal Government has the explicit responsibility under Affirmative Action legislation which dates back to the 1970's in Australia to oppose discrimination in the workforce as in the wider national context.

Unfortunately, it is clear from the content and orientation of a number of Intergenerational Reports that older Australians are now being quite deliberately targeted and made the scapegoats for inadequate long term planning by Governments, both Labor and Liberal Coalition, for an ageing population about which I was teaching as an academic in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at UTS in the early 90's.

Older women in particular are more at risk of living in poverty and becoming homeless. Governments should be mindful of recent Reports by organizations such as COTA, CPSA and other advocacy organizations which appear to be more accurate and in touch with reality than most politicians and senior highly remunerated public servants.

Governments are elected to govern on behalf of the entire population of this country not just privileged groups.

The whole question of Productivity is a very poorly understood and poorly researched area especially by quantitative economists many of whom appear to be as myopic as many ill informed politicians.

I hope that this submission will prompt some serious analysis and discussion which includes those who are most disadvantaged by current policy directions including those on very high incomes suggesting a rise in the GST which will most unfairly further disadvantage those at the poorest income levels on tiny below poverty level and fixed pensions. This belies the notion of a "fair go" for all Australians.

Yours sincerely,

UNPAID PRODUCTIVITY

In 1988 in New Zealand an important book was published by Allen and Unwin. It was written by activist, economist, environmentalist and politician, Marilyn Waring. Her book was titled "Counting for Nothing" and subtitled "What men value and what women are worth".

Waring's insightful analysis of the glaring lack of value attributed to women's work and her ability to simplify the basics of economic theory for those not trained in the discipline of Economics made her book a new benchmark and a challenge to the assumptions which have continued to guide and influence national Budgets and international economic decisions.

In writing this book, Waring removed Economics from the realm of the experts, mainly men, who have mostly ignored the contribution of women to The Economy, both national and international, in the developed and developing worlds alike.

I sincerely recommend that everyone read "Counting for Nothing" and ask why in 2014, more than a quarter of a century later, we are still not recognizing the truths she enumerated then and now, challenging the economic status quo, national accounting systems and political leadership which still rely on outmoded and unsophisticated economic theory and inadequate and outmoded economic measurement.

In recent years, not only have most women's efforts both, within and without the paid workforce, continued to count for nothing, or for very much less than men's productivity in this country as elsewhere, but we now also have a deliberate and vindictive assault on "the ageing population", of all genders.

Although most older women might agree that possessions don't in themselves make you happier, having the benefits of one's labour, in fair and reasonable financial remuneration, is one of the basic tenets of Productivity, particularly in later life when maintaining good health and preventing serious illness becomes an often costly priority.

Producing or tending to produce goods and services which have exchangeable value is not just a modern post industrial phenomenon. It is, however, a feature of the industrial scenarios with which we are now so familiar, including negotiations between employers and employees known as productive bargaining, and the often feared collective bargaining which has historically given workers so many rights they do not appreciate.

In these negotiations there is usually a skewed power relationship between the employers and employees. The power usually lies with the employers,

Various measurements have evolved to put a numerical value on labour, and so we have Consumer Price Indexes, Standard of Living, Gross Domestic Product, Gross National

Product and in more recent times a great deal of attention has been given to the Productivity Commission, as some all encompassing reservoir of wisdom on the subject of Productivity.

Upon closer and more sophisticated investigation, many of the outpourings and public statements of the Productivity Commission, and the politicians whose mantras reflect its views, we discover that their earnest statements are grossly inadequate when it comes to valuing, or rather undervaluing or totally ignoring the unpaid productivity of certain individuals and groups in the Australian economy and in particular women and older Australians.

Little regard is given by economists and politicians to the ongoing unpaid efforts of older Australians as volunteers, and as backup services in caring, chauffeuring and tending to the needs of family members, especially the sick and disabled, and in particular grandchildren, as quasi childcare workers.

All mostly done with love and no expectation of remuneration which of course counts for nothing in the Economics of Productivity. Love is not productive unless it adds to population growth it seems.

It is a mystery to me when my grandchildren go to pre-school and my daughter pays \$100 per day for the privilege, that the work of childcare within that context is counted as productivity, but if the same grandchild or grandchildren stay with me in my home and I am not paid, that same childcare is not counted as productivity.

In 2010, then Treasurer Wayne Swan circulated a Report, "Australia to 2050: future challenges, the 2010 Intergenerational Report" whose content and thrust has been very influential in subsequent Budgets warning of the disasters ahead.

Swan's moaning rhetoric has now been taken up by subsequent politicians, in particular Treasurers of all political orientation and Governments especially the current Federal Coalition Government. The same misguided thinking can be expected to influence economic decisions made in the upcoming 2014 Federal Budget.

Shadows of the catastrophes to befall us if this Government does not make "hard decisions" and make "cuts" especially to those pariahs on welfare, namely pensioners, the disabled and unemployed have already started with the New Year's media reportage.

I consider that the underlying thrust of this Report is to scapegoat "the ageing population" rather than examining the informal, unpaid and "voluntary" contributions that many of the ageing population have made in the course of their working lives and continue to make.

Much the same as the consistent and ongoing undervaluation of unpaid women's work much of which supports those in the paid workforce.

The Executive Summary Overview states:

“Australia faces a complex mix of long-term challenges – an ageing and growing population, escalating pressures on the health system, and an environment vulnerable to climate change. These challenges will place substantial pressure on Australia’s economy, living standards and government finances over the next 40 years. These are challenges affecting developed countries around the world.”

In general, I consider that this Report was dangerously simplistic, limited in its scope, demonstrated little understanding of both the actual and potential contribution of older Australians, and in particular older women to the community and nation, and I consider it to be discriminatory in essence.

Polarising our population, and increasingly demonizing those on welfare is a simplistic and ignorant grab for the support of equally ignorant and conservative voters, many of whom have tied their incomes into innumerable family trust and other tax minimizing arrangements.

Politicians, many of whom demonstrate gross ignorance of some of the realities of life that most of the rest of us seem to understand, need to acknowledge and respect the facts that it has been the hard work of older Australians, many of whom devoted 30-50 years of their lives in the workforce and in unpaid labour has created the thriving economy most Australians enjoy.

Some lost their jobs and careers prematurely, often through no fault of their own, and many would still welcome the opportunity to be in full or part-time paid employment earning and income and superannuation.

Many now the target of misguided and increasingly punitive Government rhetoric need to be able to say without guilt that they have made and continue to make a contribution and despite considerable thinking to the contrary, we are not placed on this earth merely to be cogs in some great big industrial and technological wheel for the purpose of being economically productive.

Nor should anyone be made to feel inferior or humiliated because they may have been less able to accumulate vast wealth to insulate them from the realities of life.

We used to be a nation which shone as a beacon of decency and humanity in our region and further afield, and as Julian Burnside stated in the conclusion of his 2013 address for the Barry Jones oration, it is not too late to look at ourselves and where our misguided leaders have been and are now attempting to take us.

Compulsory reading for all Federal politicians and all thoughtful Australians are two significant Reports from two Federal Government Inquiries relevant to this discussion:

June 2000 “Age counts” An Inquiry into issues specific to mature age workers.

April 2009 “Who cares?” An Inquiry into the personal costs in terms of lost income, and the health and well being of carers. Their contribution though poorly paid is extremely productive.

I made submissions and appeared before both of these Federal Parliamentary Committees because the Inquires related to concerns I had both personally and professionally, then as now.

Little has changed, because it is much easier to vilify the marginalized and vulnerable and find scapegoats, than to honestly try to address the hard issues of our times.

This article has been a discursive attempt to address some of the glaring inadequacies of recent and current economic measurement of Productivity and the political propaganda which accompanies the issues of Productivity.

The questions of who is considered productive and who is not and more importantly, why, are questions that we now need to ask over and over and over again until the penny drops and we can begin to see long overdue changes to political policy making and the economic measurement which underlies such thinking.

I welcome further comments and discussion of these issues because I believe without such input we will all be experiencing political and budgetary decisions which will have long reaching effects on the health and well being of many deserving Australians.