

The Case for the Stay at Home Mother (SAHM)

According to figures from the 2006 census 32.6% of women having three or more children accounted for 56% of the children that had been born to all women. (ABS, 2006) The great majority of these women are stay at home mothers. (PC, 2009)

Who we are

The Awesome Mothers Association

We are a Sydney-based Mothers' Group who are all without exception, university educated, with a significant number holding post-graduate degrees, including two Masters degrees and one PhD.

We currently have around 25 members ranging in age from 30 to mid-40s with something in the region of 75 children between us and more currently on the way.

We have been meeting for over 8 years. We are essentially a group of mothers who share the values and ideals that children are a precious gift and that being a mother is great privilege but invariably involves sacrifice and hardships.

We meet weekly to enjoy each others' company, to provide playmates for our children, and to offer ongoing support and respect to each other (and to other mums outside the group), especially during difficult times. The friendship and emotional support the group provides to each of us is a key factor in helping us maintain our mental and physical health.

While the majority of mothers in the group dedicate themselves to the full-time care of their children in the home, some members also study or work part-time.

Introduction

The economy is the means to an end and that end is the nation's people. As John Howard (2010, p.487) said, "As prime minister, I frequently reminded Australians that good economic policy was not an end in itself; that economic changes made no sense unless there was a human dividend."

Through this submission we hope to encourage the government to ensure their childcare policy will assist the Australian people to best provide for the future of this country's citizens. We believe it is vital that Australia's childcare policy is structured towards long term prosperity ensuring it is not manipulated to engineer an economic position that provides favourable short-term statistics and economic outcomes at a cost to future generations. The government must not ask how can we make the people support the economy, but ask itself, how can we make the economy work better to support the people of this nation.

The idea that parents who provide primary care to their children are unemployed or not contributing to the economy is downright dishonest and redundant. Current childcare and taxation policy settings fail to adequately acknowledge the important work that stay at home parents provide, and fail to adequately support parents who wish to provide this form of care for their own families. Anne Manne articulates this in her Quarterly Essay, *Love and money, the family and the free market*, (2008, p.72), "We have to find ways of attributing economic value to non-market reproductive activities - like having and rearing children - which profoundly affect the economy, in both the short and the long term."

Summary of recommendations

We seek:

- Statistical recognition – a category of employment "full-time SAH parent/carer" It should be mandatory for all companies, bureaus, agencies to include this category as an employment option on all forms.
- To be listed as a recognised category of childcare within Australian – we want to be seen as a valid method of childcare.
- To have our economic contribution acknowledged - included in economic scenarios and equations especially where productivity and workplace participation are paramount.
- Better research on Stay at Home Parents and single income couple-families – for example, the financial status (perceived affluence) of couple families with only one parent in the paid workforce.
- Income Splitting – fairer tax consideration for families supporting greater number of dependants.
- Tax rebate for every child born after the third.

Terms of Reference

1. The contribution that access to affordable, high quality child care can make to:

a) increased participation in the workforce, particularly for women

...despite the blithe confidence of those promulgating the Get To Work program, unless conditions are very carefully thought through, societies aspiring it will encounter a version of the Demographic winter faced by the Eastern European countries that adopted, post-war, the "employment for all" approach. Simply providing child-care and short maternity leaves was not enough. (Manne 2008, p 72)

The stated objective of increasing the rate of women's participation in the paid workforce is misguided and short-sighted. Women who leave the paid workforce (temporarily or permanently) to give birth to and care for their own children perform an essential task in generating and forming the next generation of workers and tax-payers. This is especially true for women who have larger families.

Women who have larger families provide greater future productivity

If an Australian female attends university and begins full-time work at the age of 25 she will have contributed 40 years of productivity to the Australian economy by her retirement at 65.

If that same woman leaves the workforce and has two children, returning to full-time work when those two children are in school, she will have contributed 33 years of labour over her working life as well as the possible future 80 years of labour of her children. (A collective labour contribution of 113 years.)

If that woman does not return to the workforce but decides to stay home and have, say, 3 more children, she will have contributed 6 years of her own productivity and a further possible 200 years of future productivity by her children (5 children at 40 years each).

Even if she had 3 girls (who may also leave the paid workforce) and 2 boys she would still have contributed 80 years of future labour by her sons and a possible 15-120 years labour of her daughters to this country's future economy, making a possible total contribution of 101-200 years, a much greater possible contribution to the long term productivity of this country than if she returned to work after 2 children.

The fertility rate is falling and the labour force is shrinking. "Latest ABS show, "In 2011, Australia's total fertility rate (TFR) was 1.88 babies per woman, down very slightly from the 2010 TFR of 1.89 babies per woman. Since 1976, the total fertility rate for Australia has been below replacement level" (ABS, 3301.0, Births, Australia, 2012).

According to figures from the 2006 census (ABS) 32.6% of women having three or more children accounted for 56% of the children that had been born to all women.

Women who raise larger families are creating Australia's future "human capital". It is vital that the government seeks to support those women who are ensuring the future viability of the Australian labour force by raising a large family and consequently shoring up the future productivity and economic strength of this country.

Falling fertility rate and delayed parenting

By focusing solely on increasing and maintaining women's participation in the workforce, the Government risks further amplifying Australia's low fertility levels.

Don and Patricia Edgar assert in their 2008 publication *The new child, In search of smarter grown ups* (p.40), "Australian research shows that economic security and job uncertainty are major factors relating to the decision to defer having a child. Employment today is precarious, not something you can plan on as a secure base, and children need security of income."

But there are those willing to take the risk and raise a large family, to not delay having a child for the sake of a career. They are courageous and generous. Some people have a strong desire to raise their own children and that choice needs to be respected, especially when they are willing to sacrifice income, opportunities, lifestyle.

Australia's ...population [is] projected to grow to 45 million by 2100 according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics. This will see people aged 65 and older increasing from 13 per cent in 2007 to 23 per cent in 2056, while the working-age population declines from 67 per cent to 60 per cent and the old age dependency ratio nearly doubles from 20 per cent to 38 per cent, increasing the ratio from 1:5 to more than 1:3 - a challenging but manageable situation, largely achieved by continuing high levels of immigration. (Bendle, 2013)

Peter Costello (2008, p.319) noted that the Australian fertility rate started to rise again the introduction of the baby bonus, making Australia the only country in the Western world able to reverse the decline.

The baby bonus is scheduled to be discontinued after 1 March 2014 and the current Liberal government has not indicated any plans to reinstate it.

The economic value of unpaid work, particularly by women

It has been calculated by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001) that unpaid work in Australia constitutes approximately 50% of the gross domestic product (GDP). And yet, although the Stay At Home Mother has forgone income and career opportunities, amongst other things, to use her time, unpaid, to care for others, there still seems to be little regard for her effort and there is an astounding lack of recognition for the contribution of her unpaid work to the economy. Angela Shanahan (2013), mother of 9 children and journalist for the Australian newspaper, writes, "Only the 'strong modern' family with an employed mother is now recognised as 'productive', relegating the business of having and raising children to a mere expensive hobby." Anne Manne (2008, p.72), in her Quarterly Essay, *Love and money, The family and the free market*, recognises the same sentiment, "A woman who bears and cares full time for 5 children is an economically irrational and unproductive citizen. She is worth 'less' because she is outside the paid workforce." This is what Manne refers to as the "care penalty" or the "devaluation of care".

When Peter Costello was treasurer he constructed a paradigm for measuring the current state of the economic growth that he referred to as the '3 Ps': population, participation and productivity.

Our economic growth is driven by the proportion of the population of working age. The higher the level of productivity of those participating, the higher the economic growth. The law of the 'three Ps' became a paradigm that we could run over all policies to see whether they helped long-term economic growth. It became widely accepted by policy makers and in time the Opposition also came to accept this framework.(Costello 2008, p.320)

However we believe there is a fourth 'P' that Costello has left out in this calculation - the Perspiration, or Philanthropy, of Australia's unpaid work that, according to the ABS, generates 48-56% of this nation's GDP. If that work was not being done, how different would the current economic picture be? How would the (easily quantifiable) productive and participating population be affected? As Anne Manne (2008, p.462) points out, "The invisible hand of the market depends on the shadow economy of care." It should be noted too that the SAHM does not only contribute by caring for her young family. She is also available at home in varying capacities to contribute to the care of her older or sick relatives and assist with unpaid work in her children's school community, and philanthropic or benevolent organisations.

In 2003, the British trade and industry secretary, Patricia Hewitt, admitted, "We have got to move to a position where as a society and as a government we recognise and we value the unpaid work that people do within their families" (Manne 2008, p.76). Former Prime Minister, John Howard, was a strong advocate for the contribution made by unpaid parents. As Prime Minister he provided "...extra tax breaks given to single-income families in recognition of the entire income they sacrificed when a parent stayed at home full-time to look after a child" (Howard 2010, p.493).

Why women stay out of the paid workforce

Ann Summers in her 2013 book, *The Misogyny Factor*, questions the motivation of women who choose to remain in the home:

It seems extraordinary that in a country where women graduate in greater numbers than men (and, you'd think, would relish the personal fulfilment of having a satisfying job), in a country where double incomes are needed for most families simply to make the mortgage payments, that a minority of affluent women have come to exercise such influence over the zeitgeist. (2013, p.67)

So why are some women still deciding to not to return to the paid workforce?

The first point to note from Summers' lament above is that being in the paid workforce and "having a satisfying job" are not necessarily one and the same. The ABS report *Australian Social Trends, Nov 2013* found that only 15% of women that returned to work after maternity leave cited "maintaining self esteem" as the fundamental reason, with 26% (the highest band) reporting that it was "in order to keep their job or their employer had requested their return". 15% cited "financial considerations" as their primary motivation. (ABS 2013)

The other misnomer in Summers' observation is that women who choose to stay at home are necessarily affluent. It would be interesting to know exactly how many women who do stay at home are truly and objectively "affluent"?

Jane (SAHM of four)... "My husband is an energetic and hard-working provider and it has never been a struggle for us to live on one wage. This is partially due to the fact that we were both raised in single-income families where we were taught to live within our means and not to expect a luxurious life. We hope to raise our own children with the same sense of fiscal responsibility and reasonable work ethic."

Susan (SAHM of eight)... "We have always 'made do' on a single wage and lived accordingly. Hence we do not own our own home, travel overseas nor purchase new vehicles. Yet we cannot be thought deprived when, from a worldly viewpoint, we have a large screen TV, three computers, iphones, an ipod and laptops and our children attend independent schools. Sometimes things are tough. But at no point have we considered that

I should return to the workforce to finance our family.”

Latest figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics show that it is families with three or more children that are more likely to have one parent out of the labour force or working part-time. “The more dependent children present in a family, the less likely it is that both parents in a couple family will be employed” (DSS, Parents, the labour force and social security). More children means more managerial variables and logistical issues for the family.

Melissa Doyle (2007, p.232), former host of Channel 7's Sunrise program, has written *The working mother's survival guide*. She offers this sage advice to new and prospective mothers:

The reality is a baby will change your life, in many ways. It will no doubt curb your social life, your love life and impact on your career.

Don't think that you can just go back to the way things used to be. The goalposts have moved. Babies get sick, you will be exhausted, work will demand more than you can give, and most importantly you now have a little person who you want to shower with love and attention and time.

Whilst working parents struggle to coordinate the childcare and school drop-offs, often contending with work deadlines and peak hour traffic, the scenario for the SAHM of a large family is even more complex. If there are, say, five children it could mean a baby in the car, a preschool pick up and one or two primary school pick ups (their may be a separate boys' school and a girls' school) as well as possible older children returning home on public transport. If the mother with five children needs to get out of the car in public she needs to take every child with her, meaning that every task is complicated and elongated.

Comedian, Michael McIntyre, has a comedy routine on Youtube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4GO2xz0L9gQ>, *Trying to leave the house when you have kids*, drawing on the mayhem of trying to organise a tired wife and young children into the car in the early morning. It's hilarious but frighteningly accurate. (And he only has 2 children.) These are the simple realities that need to factored in when considering the issue of increased participation in the workforce by mothers.

Rosina (SAHM of 5)... “I attempted to return to the workforce in 2010 after my fourth child. After securing a job offer I was madly racing around trying to find childcare for my 4 children, none of which had started school yet.

I didn't want my son or daughter to leave their preschool and switch to long daycare as I thought this would be too disruptive. I needed to find a combination of long daycare for the 2 younger children, grandparents' help for the days when the older children were not at preschool, and a standby for drop-offs and pick-ups when my husband and I were not available or were detained or children were sick and needed to stay home. I wouldn't be earning enough to pay for a nanny to cover all my needs.

As I explored all my options, it became apparent that I wasn't going to be earning enough to make the venture profitable or comfortable - it would put us on a logistical and financial precipice. When I told my prospective employer that the job was not paying enough to make it viable, my prospective boss asked them to offer me more money, but the role (Executive Assistant) did not justify the amount of money I would need: at the time, approx \$80,000 to make it work.

I have since had a fifth child and am glad I at least know now that the furthestest hill is not the greenest. At least now I am available to all my children and my husband when they need me. I often wonder, if I was working, how I would cope with the anxiety of knowing that I would always be letting someone down - either my boss, my husband, or my children.”

With a greater number of children the variables become more numerous and the complexities multiply – more days off work due to more sick children, changes to one child's or parent's schedule affect more people. It becomes a lot more complex than simply dropping 2 children at school and picking them up from after school care; more uniforms to wash, more meals to prepare, more lunch boxes to pack, more groceries to buy, more care needs to be taken with budgeting because there's less disposable income and more planning required for all activities.

The most important issue though is the stability of the care for the child and the impact the care arrangement is having on the child/parent/family relationship.

The crucial factor seems to be the mother's satisfaction with the life she has chosen – if that's being at home with the kids, then they thrive, if it's going out to work and she's happy with that, they thrive also. It's not enough to consider the 'needs' of children; the needs of parents are important too because their sense of fulfilment rubs off on the well-being of the child” (Edgar 2008, p.38).

Whilst some of us have not been able to, or chosen not to, make the transition back to the workforce the reality is, there is growing discontent amongst those who have. Cosima Marriner writing in the Sydney Morning Herald in November 2013 on the topic of work/life balance and the shared demands of two parents in the workforce, observes, “Those working full-time are increasingly dissatisfied with their lot, with 27.5 per cent unhappy with their work/life balance, up from 16 per cent in 2008, according to the University of South Australia's Centre for Work + Life. Forty per cent of full-time female workers would prefer to be part-time.”

Bernadette (SAHM of 7) “I returned to work after the unexpected still birth of my first child at 36 weeks gestation and 3 months paid maternity leave because my husband wanted me to go back for the income. When I did not get pregnant after that I sought grief counselling and the doctor advised me to leave work immediately and have some fallow time to allow my mind and body to recover so that I would have the health and stability to sustain another pregnancy. After having my second child I saw the value of giving that child and made the decision not to return to the paid workforce in the short term. I am still at home raising and caring for my family today.”

Mature aged women in the workforce

“A woman's health status and caring responsibilities also influence her likelihood of participating in the labour force in later life” (Labor force participation of women over 45, PC, 2011). The ABS Childhood Education and Care Survey (June 2011) shows that of the 245,500 infants in care under the age of two, 62% were being looked after by a grandparent.

Almost one quarter of mature aged women working part time want to increase their hours of work. However, one half of women working full time want to work less hours. If all mature aged women were to work the hours they preferred, the net effect would be a fall in total hours worked of nearly 11 per cent (Labor force participation of women over 45, PC, 2011).

The rising trend of women leaving the workforce for “family reasons”

“A report by the marriage guidance group, the Relationships Forum, claims that Australia's high work intensity deprives men and women of time for fulfilling relationships. Some two million people lose at least six hours of family time to work on Sunday and at other unsocial hours. Over

half (58 %) said work interfered with their parenting” (Edgar 2008, p.40).

Since leaving her high profile position as host of Channel 7's Sunrise, Melissa Doyle, has stated that, "No longer am I tired and grumpy all the time. You deal with everything so much better when you're not completely exhausted” (Marriner 2013). Nicola Roxon, who, at the last election stepped down from her role in politics as health minister and attorney-general said, "It's good for me as much as for the rest of my family” (Marriner 2013).

In 2011 Anne-Marie Slaughter (p.86) resigned her role as director of policy planning at the State Department under Hilary Clinton admitting, “...juggling high-level government work with the needs of two teenage boys was not possible.”

Lucinda Schmidt, in her article, The Parent Trap, published in December 2013 in the Sydney Morning Herald, cites the work of Lyn Craig, a researcher at the University of NSW's Social Policy Research Centre, "The work/family balance is quite tricky for mothers of adolescents. They get to 11,12, 13 and they don't want to go to after-school care, but you don't necessarily want them home alone. It can be a bit of a crisis point.”

b) Optimising Children's Learning and Development

We believe that in-home care provided by parents is a best-practice model which benefits children and optimises their learning and development that paid childcare attempts to copy or recreate.

Traditional family is gold standard

Recently, Senator Cori Bernardi has come under attack in the Australian media for suggesting in his recent book, *The Conservative Revolution*, that public policy should be supportive of the traditional family.

In defence of Bernardi, Senator Eric Abetz, quoted in Andrew Bolt's (2014) column in the *Daily Telegraph*, had the following to say of the peer reviewed studies quoted in Bernardi's tome:

...studies which actually tell us time and time again that the gold standard for the nurturing of children is a married man and woman with their biological children.
Do some such family units fail? Of course they do.
Do some single mums and dads do a fantastic job? Of course they do.
Do some blended families work exceptionally well? Of course they do.
But that does not disprove the undeniable evidence that the gold standard and best practice model is the traditional family!

You cannot have the childcare conversation without hearing the terms 'gold standard' or 'best-case'. What's most notable is how these sought-after standards replicate the work environment of the SAHM.

Maxine McKew was responsible for early childhood education and child care as part of her portfolio while working as Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government in the Rudd administration of 2007. One of Australia's most pre-eminent childcare centres, Mia-Mia at Macquarie University, was located in her electorate of Bennelong. It is noted as such because of its distinct similarity to the family home. It does not resemble the typical childcare centre. As McKew (2012, p.136) puts it, "It's like being invited into a comfy cottage. Every detail is designed to eliminate any suggestion of institutional care."

The Mia-Mia centre embraces the Regio Emilia approach. This outlook, "puts the natural development of children at the centre of everything" (McKew 2012, p.136). Just like the SAHM the Regio Emilia philosophy works with the level of development of the child arranging activities in a child-centric manner always focusing on the child's needs.

It seems to me that the childcare sector is doing its best to try to replicate the mother and is finding the task, at best difficult and at worst impossible.

SAHM has better adult- child ratio

On average a SAHM, with older children in school, would only have 2 or 3 children at any time in the home during school hours. This takes into account time for pregnancy and recovery between babies. The best case ratios for childcare worker-to-child in a childcare centre reflect this reality, with The Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority have set the ratio standards at 1:4 for birth to 24 months, 1:5 for age 25-35 months, and 1:11 for age 36 months up to preschool/kinder. In this case the SAHM is capable of providing better one on one support with individualised care and attention to the child's mental and physical needs.

SAHM providing essential life-skills education

Jamie Oliver (2010) recently presented a Ted talk to a US audience, addressing the issues of childhood obesity. He played the audience a clip showing U.S. children who don't know the names of basic vegetables such as potato, beetroot, cauliflower. His greatest concern is the lack of education around basic life skills being provided in the home.

“Home – the biggest problem with the home is that used to be the heart of passing on food, food culture, what made our society. That ain't happening any more. And you know what, as we go to work and as life changes and as life always evolves we kind of have to look at it holistically, step back for a moment and readjust the balance. It ain't happening. Hasn't happened for 30 years ok” (Oliver, 2010).

This is not the case for us as stay at home mothers. We have made the sacrifices, given up the income, and recognise the importance of passing on essential life skills.

Rosina (SAHM of 5)... “My children know what vegetables are. We grow leeks and eggplants and tomatoes and herbs. My kids eat mushrooms and olives and cucumber and carrots. This is all because, by being a stay-at-home mum I can use the time during the day to grow a vegetable patch with them. This has the added bonus of saving us money. I can use the time during the grocery shopping to explain the vegetables to them. I can use the time at home to cook with them. As a result they have a lot of healthy food in the diet.”

Oliver's solution was that we need to start teaching children in schools about food. This sentiment was met with applause by the audience.

There is more and more classroom time in schools devoted to teaching basic survival skills, such as road safety, dog safety, sun protection. We know from OECD reports that Australian students are slipping behind in basic literacy and numeracy (ABC, 2013). We ask the government to aim to ensure that literacy and numeracy education in Australian schools is not being compromised in favour of life skills that are no longer, but could be, being passed on in the home.

SAHMs believe their children's education and moral formation are paramount and they want to have the greatest influence in their children's lives.

Marion (SAHM of 4 and home educator) “I didn't have kids for someone else to raise them.”

Bernadette (SAHM of 6) “We understand that our children need the 1:1 care and attention for their brain development during the 0-3 year period. We aim to give them the unconditional love and attention that enables this to happen. We do our best ensure that they are ready for school at the appropriate age, that they are ready for higher learning in a classroom environment. We also make the financial sacrifice to put them into shorter programs such as music, Chinese language, sport.”

Margaret (SAHM of 3) “We meet together on a weekly basis in the safety of a fellow mother's home for approximately 5 hours to enable our children to socialise with other children from our mother's group aged from 0-5. Here the children are learning social skills, sharing, negotiating, patience, kindness, experiencing different foods and home environments. Our homes are safe and childproof and we know they can freely explore and relax.”

2. The current and future need for child care in Australia:

There is a need to recognise that child care provided by SAHMs is valid working model utilising best-practice framework and standards as shown in the previous sections of this submission. The real need for child care outside the home is to help those mothers whose familial, financial and personal circumstances would best be addressed by returning to the paid workforce. "...there's not much evidence that having children in long day care in the early years helps their cognitive and social development either, unless it is quality care that substitutes for a deprived home environment" (Edgar 2008, p.38).

3. Whether there are any specific models of care that should be considered for trial or implementation in Australia, with consideration given to international models, such as the home based care model in New Zealand and models that specifically target vulnerable or at risk children and their families.

We already have a home based model in Australia – it's called a Stay at home parent. It's the gold standard as substantiated by the Mia-Mia childcare centre and the Emilio Reggio research outlined in the above sections of this document. We want the SAHM parent-led model recognised as a valid form of child care. We also would like the government to provide income-splitting taxation policies which remove the bias in our current taxation system against couple families that have one primary income earner and primary carer in the home.

4. Options for enhancing the choices available to Australian families as to how they receive child care support, so that this can occur in the manner most suitable to their individual family circumstances. Mechanisms to be considered include subsidies, rebates and tax deductions, to improve the accessibility, flexibility and affordability of child care for families facing diverse individual circumstances.

Current funding inequality

Angela Shanahan , in the Australian newspaper, March 2013, wrote an article entitled, *Give income support to families, not the childcare industry*. Her premise for this argument is the current inequality afforded to families who have one parent outside the paid workforce. "Aside from having only one salary and one tax-free threshold, they receive on average about half the subsidies of families where the mother works [in the paid workforce]" (Shanahan 2013). While the single man's income supports one person, the income of the 'single-income couple family' supports a community of people. John Howard (2010, p.492) asserted:

It is sound public policy to ensure that taxpayers who carry heavier family responsibilities than other taxpayers, at the same level of income, should receive some support through the taxation system for carrying those responsibilities. Is it really fair that a couple earning a combined income of \$80,000 a year should be treated in exactly the same fashion, through the taxation system, as a couple earning the same amount but supporting two or three children?

Ann Summers (2013, p.65) quotes statistics in her book, *The Misogyny Factor*, that show that increases in childcare funding have not resulted in reciprocal increases in the uptake of childcare services. Of particular note is the fact that there was only a 20% increase in the number of children using childcare even though the Australian government had more than tripled spending in this sector. "In the next four years, spending is projected to grow by 15.3 per cent, but the number of children in care by just 2 per cent."

Salary.com calculated an estimated cost of (US)\$113,586 to replace an unpaid full-time mother

after a survey of 6,000 mothers, taking into account the 10 most time consuming tasks.

Peter Costello added the Family Tax Benefit Part B to help support single income families at the request of John Howard. John Howard also introduced the baby bonus to address the perceived inequality caused by paid maternity leave that was available to Public Sector workers and a number of those working in private companies. It was non-means tested equitable lump sum payment. As John Howard (2010, p.487) said himself, “My government rebalanced the taxation system towards a greater recognition that it costs money to bear and raise children.”

Now that the maternity payment (baby bonus) will be discontinued on 1 March 2014 what is the government offering to women who have not returned to the paid workforce but are still contributing to GDP? These women deserve to be supported in their choices when raising Australia's most precious resource ,children, creating future “human capital” and productivity for this country.

It should be noted too that assistance for SAHM and women having children has been hijacked by a debate about “middle-class welfare”. This idea was promulgated by Clive Hamilton in his 2005 publication, *Affluenza, When too much is never enough*, and has since begun to appear on both sides of the debate whether it be right-wing economics, or left-wing feminism. John Howard called the term 'middle-class welfare' an “inaccurate and socially purblind description” (2010, p.487). His views on this issue are definitive:

The use of the term 'welfare' is dishonest, because the payments under attack are not true welfare or income-support payments; rather, they are measures to change individual behaviour in pursuit of good public policy or, in the case of Family Tax Benefits, recognise the cost of something society regards as vital – the bearing and raising of children. By contrast, the unemployment benefit is a true welfare payment, because it gives the recipient a basic level of financial support to keep him or her from poverty. (Howard 2010, p.492)

Income splitting for Single-Income Couple Families

We believe the solution to the current inequality and means testing across all government family-assistance is the eradication of the current complicated family-tax benefit system to be replaced by income splitting for all dependants.

The advantages of income splitting are:

- Enables women to stay at home and raise more children creating greater future productivity.
- More money in our pocket to put back into the economy.
- Less cost to the government in administration, including in the tax office and family assistance office.
- Allows the parents to decide how their money would best assist their family.
- Would allow the father more time with the family – no need for second part time job as is currently the case for many SAHMs.
- Economic recognition of the invaluable unpaid work of childcare in the home.
- Would help to drive the small business sector who provide specialised educational services for children, e.g. speech pathology, extra day at preschool, music education, sport, swimming lessons.

Rosina (SAHM of 5) “If we could benefit from income splitting, my husband would be able to give up his casual university tutoring work. It would take the pressure of our mortgage. People seem to think that women stay at home because their husbands are wealthy. I would bet that most women who saw our budget would say I could not afford to be a stay at home mother. But I believe my family currently needs me most in the home.”

Tax rebate for every child after the third child

We would like the government to consider a tax rebate for every child born after the third child to encourage to help stem the falling fertility rate that is causing the shortage in the labour force. This is particularly pertinent for women who have already made the decision to stay at home for their family.

“Surely it is in the national interest to encourage childbearing, to help with the cost of raising children and also to recognise the contribution made to society by those who care and provide for others out of their incomes?” (Howard 2010, p.493)

Summary of recommendations

We seek

- Statistical recognition – a category of employment “full-time SAH parent/carer” It should be mandatory for all companies, bureaus, agencies to include this category as an employment option on all forms.

The idea that parents providing care for their children in the home are unemployed or not contributing to the economy is downright dishonest and redundant.

Rosina (SAHM of 5)... “When I was completing the forms for our mortgage I had to fill in a box for occupation. I wrote full-time mother. I was astounded to note when our approved documents were returned to us that the bank had classed my occupation as “unemployed/welfare recipient.”

Susan (SAHM of 8)... “Perhaps one of the smallest things that would mean the world to me and other stay-at-home-mums, would be that in all the paperwork we complete for various agencies, ‘Stay At Home Mother’ become a recognised and valued category under employment/occupation descriptions. Perhaps in time this might lead to the recognition of our worth to Australian society and the cessation of the belittling of stay at home mothers as if our efforts are not recognised or valued. It is strange that early childcare workers, nannies and carers are praised for their occupation but stay at home mums are considered ‘unemployed’ simply because they do not receive a wage.”

- To be listed as a recognised category of childcare within Australia – we want to be seen as a valid method of childcare.
- To have our economic contribution acknowledged - included in economic scenarios and equations especially where productivity and workplace participation are paramount.
- Better research on SAHM and single income couple-families – for example, the financial status (perceived affluence) of couple families with only one parent in the paid workforce.
- Income Splitting – fairer tax consideration for families supporting greater number of

dependants.

- Tax rebate for every child born after the third.

5. The benefits and other impacts of regulatory changes in child care over the past decade, including the implementation of the National Quality Framework (NQF) in States and Territories, with specific consideration given to compliance costs, taking into account the Government's planned work with States and Territories to streamline the NQF.

In September this year, the best teacher at our local preschool retired prematurely. She said in all her time teaching in a preschool she hadn't changed her approach in the classroom over the years, but was constantly having to rewrite her programmes to fit with new government "frameworks", the latest being the "Being, Belonging and Becoming" program. She said the work for the documentation required was interfering with her ability to spend time with the children at the preschool and with her family at home. We were very disappointed to lose such a valuable asset from our local preschool, not because of her inability to do the fundamental work extremely well, but because of bureaucratic excess. She also lamented the fact that we would begin to see fewer mature, experienced early childcare teachers because of the employment costs and we could expect to see more younger, less experienced employees.

Conclusion

If we really want to increase productivity then it cannot be done without taking the future into consideration. It is important that the government take the lead on this issue just as the Howard/Costello administration did.

I do believe that, in reminding people of the importance of population replacement, our focus on fertility made childbearing more acceptable in circles where it might have gone out of favour. To hear it said, at a high level of Government, that having children was important not just for its own sake but for the health of our society was a significant countervailing view. The focus on the importance of children helped them to be more confident about doing so. (Costello 2008, p.319)

Encouraging women back into the workforce at a cost to our current fertility rate and future population demographics is short-sighted and places an unfair responsibility on our children in their adult years.

It is time to admit that the creation and stable nurturing and care of the future population is a necessary and integral element of the "productivity" scenario. The stay at home mother is the equivalent of the child care worker or nanny. They are doing the same work but in an even greater capacity.

It seems evident that some politicians understand our plight and the value of our work. As Kevin Andrews, current Minister for Social Services, points out in his latest book, *Maybe I do*, "The Great majorities of couples who innately know that happy and healthy children are their greatest contribution to the future of humanity can be supported in their choice." (Andrews 2012, p.353) We seek this recognition in the Australian government's future decisions and calculations regarding childcare.

Members of our group are willing to appear at the public hearings for this review.

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