

While I support the concept of paid maternity and paternity leave it must be remembered that the concept of paid maternity leave does not assist those mothers who are either not working at the time the baby is born (either because they have chosen to stay at home and look after another child or they are out of work at the time of the birth) or those mothers that are self-employed (because they do not get maternity leave - if they are not working they do not earn any money).

Consequently the concept of paid maternity leave should not be considered a replacement for other means of assistance to new mothers such as the baby bonus.

The concept of paid maternity leave can be used as a supplement to the baby bonus (or vice versa) with a new mother being given the option of either taking paid maternity leave or the baby bonus but not both.

This would ensure that no new mothers are disadvantaged by their working circumstances.

I also support the means testing of the baby bonus but the income figure should not be set at the maximum of \$50-60,000 attributed to the Prime Minister. I don't think in the current environment of increased interest rates, petrol prices and grocery prices that \$50-60,000 is the 'high end of town' that the Prime Minister wishes to target. Any means testing of the baby bonus should also take into account the number of dependant children in the family and the income limit should be increased depending on the number of dependant children similar to the concept used for other family benefits. The income limits for the existing Family Tax Benefit A would be more appropriate as the income limits for the Baby Bonus - and it will make it easier to administer because there would be a consistent means test.

However care needs to be taken with the timing of the introduction of a means test on the baby bonus - it should not take effect until 1 July 2009 or 1 April 2009 at the earliest (ie at least 9 months from the hand don of the budget) so that women who have made a decision to have a baby now (based on the support provided by the baby bonus) are not disadvantaged.

Regards,
Robert Brown