

Submission to Productivity Commission

Paid Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave

Personal Feedback Paper

Current arrangements for parental leave

What paid maternity leave was I entitled to?

I was eligible for maternity leave of 12 months of which 14 weeks was paid at my full salary.

How much paid leave did I take?

I took all of my paid maternity leave.

How much time off total did I have after my baby was born did the amount of paid leave influence that decision?

I took 10 ½ months off after the birth of my son. I was able to access my paid maternity leave at half pay and was able to access 28 weeks maternity leave at half my pay.

In addition I also accessed my accrued long service leave at half pay so I was able to have an income for the full 12 months that I was on leave. I am fortunate that my employer allows access to long service leave after 5 years service otherwise I would not have been able to access this leave. Had I not been able to access this leave I would only have been able to take 28 weeks of total as we could not have afforded to stay in our house without the extra money.

We planned the timing (to the extent that you can) of our child so that I would have enough leave accrued for this to happen.

I don't believe that it is equitable that I have had to take all of my long service leave in order to have the benefits of 12 months off with my son, where those who are not primary caregivers retain their long service leave and can use this for rest and recreation. I now have to work without holidays for a period to accrue enough leave to be able to have my second child without needing to sell the family home.

How leave was arranged for self employed

n/a

Time off prior to child born? Did leave provisions influence decision?

I planned to have 5 weeks off prior to the birth of my son, but as he was overdue it was closer to 7 weeks. Yes, the leave provisions influenced that decision, without the leave provisions I had I would have been more likely to work as close to the baby being born as was practical. As it was I knew that I would have 12 months off so was comfortable taking that time off. As it

turned out I was incredibly tired during the last month so working would have been incredibly difficult.

How did access to paid/unpaid leave affect your decision on when to return to work?

I planned to return to work as soon as my paid leave ran out. If I had less long service leave and maternity leave I would have returned to work sooner.

The benefits of parental leave on wellbeing

How important was your time off work with your new baby for you and your baby's health? What aspects of the baby's and your care were most affected by the time you were able to spend at home with your new baby?

The time I had off work with my son was extremely important for both my health and his health. Physically I had a difficult birth and my physical recovery took 13 weeks. If you add that time to the time I had off before my son was born that was 20 weeks. I am only eligible for 14 weeks of paid maternity leave at my fulltime salary. In terms of my son's health the time I had off was extremely important in order to allow me to be able to breastfeed him successfully. If I had been working there is no way that I would have been able to continue breastfeeding him once I returned to work. It also allowed me to take my son for the recommended check ups as well as to ensure that he received his immunisations in a timely manner.

Psychologically the time I had at home allowed me to bond with my son and to establish a loving relationship. Psychologically the first 12 -16 weeks of my son's life was the most difficult as there is very little feedback that you get from all of the work you put in. From 4-6 months of age the psychological bond that I developed as a mother with my son was much more satisfying for me. It was at this stage that my son was able to communicate through laughter and facial expressions and being a mother became much more rewarding.

For women, did your partner take parental leave? If so, how long did they take? How important was this time at home for encouraging them to participate actively in the care of your new baby?

My husband took 1 week paternity leave when our son was born and 2 weeks annual leave.

The paid paternity leave at his workplace is incredibly difficult to access. In order to the non primary caregiver to access this leave (1 week paid) the mother has to have been in full time work. It is not available to the non primary caregiver if the mother works part time, casually, studies or is self employed.

This time that my husband had at home with us was incredibly important. It was important not just to encourage him to participate actively in the care of the new baby but also because I had had such a difficult birth it helped to have him around as I got over the worst of the recovery. It also helped

because he understood how difficult it was taking care of a newborn baby and had an appreciation for what I was doing at home, day in, day out.

If you returned to work, would you have liked to wait longer before returning to work? What do you think the benefits of a longer time at home would have been?

I have returned to work and I think that I had just the right amount of time off. I would, however have like to have been able to have that time at home using paid maternity leave alone, and not relying on my long service leave. Ideally 12 months paid maternity leave should be what the Government seriously considers. As a fall back, 28 weeks paid at full time salary with the option to allow women to access it for 56 weeks at half pay should be the minimum standard in a country like Australia.

The impacts of leave and return to work decisions on career prospects and family income

Did concerns about the effect of your parental leave on your work prospects (maintaining your skills, promotion eligibility etc) affect your decision about the length of leave you took?

Yes and no. Yes in that I returned to work after 12 months. I think that remaining out of the workforce for 3-5 years would make the transition back incredibly difficult but for 12 months I don't see that there was any impact.

What were your primary concerns your decision about returning to work?

We needed the extra income as there were 6 interest rate rises while I was on maternity leave. Had we not had the pressures of needing the extra income I would have preferred to return to work on a part time basis. There was never any serious consideration of not returning to paid work.

Would you have taken longer parental leave if your family could have afforded it? How much longer would you have liked?

I would probably like to take 12 months off (which I did). However I would like to have been able to take the 12 months off (at full or half pay) without having to use up all of my accrued long service leave. If I did not have that leave I would have only taken 28 weeks off as we couldn't have afforded to have no income.

Did your access to social security payments (like family benefits part B) affect your decision about taking parental leave or returning to work? If so, in what way?

No.

Did you return to the same employer when you resumed work? How did the maternity leave you were offered affect your decision to return to the same employer? What other features of your employer influenced your decision?

Yes. Yes the decision to return to my employer was influenced by my terms and conditions of employment. I get access to paid maternity leave of 14 weeks and I know that I want to have more children so changing employers would not make sense. My employer also has family friendly provisions and

they were prepared to be flexible with my return to work to allow me to work full time over 4 days that saves us money in childcare costs. My employer also has reasonably family friendly hours and I am not expected to work nights or weekends. I have also worked for the same employer for over 8 years and my employer allows me to access long service leave after 5 years. Returning to my employer allows me to continue to accrue long service leave which will assist when I have my next child. My employer allows me to add long service leave and annual leave onto my paid maternity leave which means I can afford to stay home with my next child for longer.

What do you think was the effect of your parental leave on your employer? Did they discuss the issues with you? Did this influence your decision on the length of leave taken, or the decision to leave employment?

My employer had to employ someone to do my job whilst I was on maternity leave as well as continue to pay me my entitlements. The only other thing discussed was their desire for me to return after my time off. It was easier to employ someone for 12 months than for a shorter period of time but honestly none of that influenced my decision about the length of time taken. My employers desire to have me return to work may have influenced my decision to come back but honestly it was more a financial decision.

The effects on businesses

As I am not an employer my submission doesn't cover this section.

Characteristics of paid parental leave

What are your views on the best arrangements for a paid parental leave scheme? What are the reasons why you would support such arrangements?

I think that the best arrangements for a paid parental leave scheme need to be looked at in 2 separate areas, firstly how much leave and for who, and secondly how is it paid for.

Firstly I believe that there should be a system that allows paid parental leave for 12 months. This should be available to the primary caregiver but the birth parent should access a minimum of 18 weeks paid leave, 2 prior to the birth (or due date) and 16 weeks afterwards. This allows for a complete recovery from the physical damage of giving birth and maximises the likelihood of successful breastfeeding.

The balance of the paid parental leave should be accessible to whichever parent chooses to be the primary caregiver. In addition the non primary caregiver should be able to access paid parental leave for 2 weeks simultaneously with the primary caregiver at the time of the birth.

I believe that this period should be at least 2 weeks because often the birth mother is hospitalised for 1-5 days and there should be a period of at least 1 full week where the family is able to make the adjustment to home life together. I do not believe that a single week would allow this to occur.

The scheme should allow for the option for a parent to choose to take leave at half the pay for double the amount of time. This should be available at the parent's request only and not at the behest of an employer.

This scheme should be universal and include all parents – those who work fulltime, part time, casually, as contractors, those who study and those who are stay at home parents.

Secondly the burden of the introduction of this scheme should be shared by business and the government. Government should be responsible for an agreed minimum amount no less than *average weekly earnings for all workers* (as opposed to women's average weekly earnings). In addition employers should take responsibility to "top up" this minimum to full wage replacement. The entitlement to this paid parental leave should not be determined by a minimum period of service with an individual employer but should be completely transferable.

I support this scheme because it provides a balance of responsibility between government and employers and will not be a large burden on employers who employ a large number of unskilled female workers.