

6<sup>th</sup> June 2008

Re Australian Government Productivity Commission inquiry into Paid maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave.

Dear Commisioners,

I am writing in my capacity as a 'stay home dad' to my two boys, now aged 10 and 4 years old. I also co-ordinate the Northern Dads Playgroup in the northern suburbs of Melbourne (a playgroup for stay home dads and their children which meets each Friday), and as such I'm aware that men staying home either full or part-time is becoming more common, but is still a very long way from being the norm.

I an writing in particular about how any paid parental leave scheme might apply to fathers, and am interested to ensure that there is equity between both mothers and fathers. Although overwhelmingly I'm sure statistics would show it is mothers who are the initial carers of babies in the first few months after birth, this is not always the case, and sometimes it is the father who takes this role, and subsequently would benefit from any 'paternity' pay. I feel it is very important that any scheme is explicitly made available to both mothers and fathers, not just mothers primarily, to allow for the emerging possibilities of families where the father is at home from day one.

In our case our second son was adopted by us at the age of 5 months, and I became 'primary carer' for him from the beginning. My partner continued working full-time, although she was able to take 2 weeks (unpaid) parental leave at the time of the adoption placement. I feel strongly that any 'maternity pay' scheme should be available to fathers in my position and that the language which any legislation uses should be inclusive of fathers in the primary carer role, rather than exclusive ( as the term maternity pay would be). To have paid leave available to me at this time would have been extremely supportive. As it was we relied on my partners wage alone.

In terms of the details of any such scheme, my view is that 3 months full time pay or 6 months part time pay is a bare minimum requirement. In my situation, when I became 'stay home dad' I took 12 months Unpaid Paternity Leave from my job at the time (under the provisions of the SACS Award). It was great to have the guarantee of my job back at the end of the year, however of course there was no paid element at all. Also I had decided during the course of the year that I could only return part-time and as this was not possible in that particular job I ended up resigning from the position. I'm sure this is a common experience and therefore provision for return to work on a part-time basis should be a part of the scheme for those who wish to use it.

The ability to share any parental leave to allow for 'co-parenting' would be beneficial also, and allow for the various types of family in society that sit outside the traditional model of 'woman as primary carer, man as primary breadwinner'.

I would be very keen for the scheme to allow for the possibility of the father having a significant proportion of time within the first year of life as the primary carer. We are often told how Australian men lag behind other western nations in terms of looking after kids and the home. Fathers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are far more active with their kids

than 50 years ago it would seem, however most reports I'm aware of seem to indicate that the responsibility for the care of children and the home still resides predominantly with women. One factor of course is that there is only now emerging a culture that is accepting of 'men at home'; many seem to feel in Australia that 'mother is best', at least in the first year of life. However I believe strongly that men *given the opportunity* have the same capacity for caring and nurturing their young babies and children as women do. I also believe that both men and their children benefit enormously from having the experience of being primary carer for any length of time, and from the responsibilities of looking after children and 'running the household'. At present there are little financial and employment safeguards for men to allow this to happen, but a universal paid parental leave scheme, open to both women and men, would be one step further along this path.

Your sincerely

Dan Barron