

Received by email

#### SUBMISSION TO MATERNITY LEAVE INQUIRY:

Paid Maternity and/or Paternity Leave can and do have a quite significant, longterm impact on the harmonious growth and even the survival of intact families, particularly involving the mental, emotional and psychological development of babies and young children. This unavoidable, vital reality seems to be lost in the Terms of Reference (TORs) for this Inquiry.

If the Australian government is really serious in its aim "to support families in balancing work and family responsibilities" it needs to reassess and direct its focus more towards establishing the most effective and desirable environment for rearing emotionally, psychologically and mentally equipped, balanced children from infancy.

The "Scope of Inquiry" in the TORs dwells almost entirely on the economic and productivity aspects of providing paid maternity, paternity and parental leave while no clear meaning is given to the "social costs and benefits". Do these refer to the 'economy' or 'family and social relationships', either combined or in isolation?

For a down-to-earth assessment and understanding of this issue, the Inquiry could do no better than to refer to the solid, prolific and validated research of Steve Biddulph, the well-known Australian author whose authoritative writings give us an unmistakably clear record of the consistent, serious harm inflicted on children left in longterm childcare while their mums, either forced by economic necessity or voluntarily, go to work. Clearly the government's unrelenting policy of enticing mothers into the workforce does not, (in terms of the TORs 'Background' ) "promote the early development of children and support families in balancing work and family responsibilities".

A child's proper development, requires intimate bonding with the mother in the very early years and the most effective way to achieve this is for the mother to be at home full-time with her child until such time as he/she has reached an appropriate and desired growth stage in the bonding process. Sensibly and logically, therefore, all economic and productivity work-related policies of government must be geared towards this focus.

One practical provision is to allow INCOME-SPLITTING for tax purposes so that the sole income of one parent can offer economic relief to the family's frequently pressed financial circumstances, allowing the other parent to spend and experience reasonable comfort at home full-time building up the essential relationship so vital to both parents and their child(ren). This development provides long-term, positive results for both the family and for society since the family is "the basic group unit of society" (United Nations Charter).

Another practical provision would be to establish a HOME-MAKER'S ALLOWANCE that offers enough incentive for mothers to choose to stay at home to care full-time for infants and/or young child(ren). A survey of women showed the majority of mums would choose this path instead of going to work which in most cases is chosen under economic stress (as well as government enticement in its aim to obtain more taxes).

How much cheaper these steps would be for the government than the far greater outlay of millions of dollars on childcare and paid maternity, paternity and parental leave!

The time is overdue for priority to be given to one very basic need:- the preservation of unity, harmony and positive growth within families through practical and effective economic policy, not only for their own sakes, but also for ongoing growth and harmony within our society.

Peter Phillips

Vic