

**The following is the original statement proposed by BPW Australia to the Productivity Commission:**

*BPW Australia believes that paid maternity leave should be available to all working women, regardless of their circumstance and has been calling for its implementation.*

*BPW Australia believes that the Australian Government should*

- 1. implement a national government funded Paid Maternity Leave scheme that*
  - meets the minimum standards established by the OECD nations*
  - is indexed to maintain its value over time*
  - ensures that women take adequate time off work for the sake of their health and that of their baby.*
- 2. remove the Australian government's reservation against paid maternity leave in the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women.*

In the original submission to the Productivity Commission BPW Australia advised there were many differing opinions of our members on the method of implementation and administration but that all agreed it should be fully government funded and made available to all working women.

BPW Australia was heartened by the Commissioner's acceptance of the objectives that a paid maternity leave scheme should

- a. Facilitate maternal and child health development
- b. Facilitate workforce participation
- c. Support the notion that taking time away from the paid workforce to care for an infant is part of life and work for many people

It is important that the Commissioners also accepted that at least six months of parental care is in the best interests for both mothers and babies, and that the proposed scheme should promote workforce attachment.

BPW Australia, while supporting many of the recommendations within the draft report offers the following comments:

1. We appreciate that the 18 week payment at federal adult minimum wage will provide assistance to the many women employed on contract or on a casual/part time basis who do not earn the minimum wage. We do question the necessity of proportional reduction in payment to juniors and ask for clarification in this regard. BPW Australia supports all working women and does not believe that juniors incur fewer costs in child rearing. Similarly there is some suggestion that most women earning above the adult minimum wage are already offered some form of paid maternity leave but this is not the case. Paid Maternity Leave remains very inconsistent in both duration and remuneration across all sectors.
2. BPW Australia appreciates the Commission's recognition that six months parental care is in the best interests of mothers and babies but queries their suggestion that mothers would have up to four weeks additional entitlements available to supplement the 18 weeks paid maternity leave offered. It is not unlikely that many women are paid flat rates accruing no paid leave. Evidence shows that up to 30% of women return to work before their babies are six months old.

3. We support the introduction of two weeks paid paternity leave on a use it or lose it basis. Enabling participation of partners at this early stage of birth allows for bonding with the child as well as increased support for the mother. Introduction of such leave stimulates employer and employee notions that time off when children are born is not only offered but supported and promoted. BPW Australia suggests that this will facilitate the gradual decline of gender based stereotypes that have seen the caring and nurturing role being placed exclusively on the female.
4. We support the inclusive nature of the leave as it applies to those working a minimum of 10 hours or more for twelve months or more. We are concerned however that some women work in areas where they only work during school periods. This necessitates long absences over school holidays but should not disqualify them for the suggested paid maternity leave.
5. A fully funded government scheme would place no financial or administrative burden on the employer. While we believe that maternity leave offers substantial benefits to both employers and employees we also appreciate that small business has limited resources and already suffers from complex and lengthy business requirements and reporting. We suggest that a fully government funded scheme would attract broader support from small business.
6. BPW Australia questions the starting date of the proposed maternity leave; many existing paid maternity leave schemes in Australia and internationally can commence up to six weeks before confinement. BPW would support some flexibility in commencement date rather than the proposed date of birth.
7. BPW fully supports the recommendation to re-evaluate the scheme at both two years and five years.

In conclusion BPW Australia believes that paid maternity leave is long overdue in Australia and calls for the scheme to be introduced in the next Federal budget. It is not just about women and work – it is about Australian parents and children and our future as a society. Research across the globe shows that paid maternity leave brings increased productivity across the workforce offering benefits to both employer and employees. Women are continuing to join, stay in, and rejoin the workforce in ever increasing numbers and their full participation should not be hindered by their decision to bear children. Their lifelong economic security demands equal opportunity and full participation in the workforce.

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