

Lisa Jeffery  
NSW  
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Ms Roberta Bausch  
Productivity Commission Inquiry into Paid Parental Leave  
Via email: [parentalsupport@pc.gov.au](mailto:parentalsupport@pc.gov.au)

Dear Ms Bausch,

I am aware that I have missed the deadline for feedback on the draft report but I hope that you are accepting late submissions. I was a contributor to the inquiry and wish to add my feedback on the draft report if possible.

I applaud many of the features of the draft scheme and appeal to the government to view the introduction of the paid parental leave scheme as urgent and an item that could fit into the economic stimulus package. Parental leave must not be delayed due to the economic crisis, in fact it is needed now more than ever and I urge the government in the strongest possible way to include funding for the scheme in the 2009 budget and ensure it is introduced as swiftly as possible.

I welcome the recognition of parental leave as a societal norm and that parents require time off and financial support when babies are born in order to build strong and interconnected families and communities. I welcome the recognition of the myriad reasons that breastfeeding is important for the health and wellbeing of babies and the savings to the health system that can be generated by implementing a system which allows more women to breastfeed their babies for longer. I welcome the recognition that partners (fathers or other) require paid leave to involve themselves more fully in the parenting of a young baby. I welcome the process whereby parental leave is paid through the employer rather than through the government as this emphasises the relationship between employer and employee. I welcome the inclusion of paid superannuation in the scheme. I welcome the inclusion of provisions for women who are not currently in the workforce, by retaining the current "baby bonus" type scheme.

In response to the draft report I believe there are some important matters that have not been included in the proposal. My own experiences and background were more thoroughly set out in my initial submission to the Inquiry. In many cases the ideas I am setting out below relate to my own employment conditions and experiences of taking maternity leave (which I have done twice). In particular my colleagues and I have secured favourable maternity leave and superannuation contributions through enterprise bargaining over the years when perhaps we could have secured higher base level pay rises. To see these entitlements not protected by the draft scheme is disappointing and alarming. For the purpose of brevity I have referred to the leave-taker as a woman in my points below but intend these points to apply to the primary caregiver.

1. In my initial submission I stated my preference for a 12 month paid scheme with an option to take at half pay to allow for 2 years at half pay, as many parenting experts are stating that children do not have optimal outcomes and are not psychologically ready for daycare-type environments until over the age of two years. The draft report emphasises the importance of a baby receiving one-to-one care from the primary caregiver for six months, reasons including but not limited to the increased likelihood of successful breastfeeding to meet WHO recommendations and pursuant savings to the health system from higher rates of exclusive breastfeeding. **However the scheme**

**only provides 18 weeks of paid leave. This should be extended to a minimum of 26 weeks.**

2. The draft scheme does not allow women to take leave at half pay. However this is important because the household expenses are easier to manage at half pay rather than a period of full pay then no income at all, especially when the family was used to having two full-time wages prior to baby's arrival. **The scheme should include an option to take the paid leave at half pay.**
3. There is no obligation upon employers to retain any current parental leave provisions. This is in spite of the fact that through enterprise bargaining processes in the past, employees may have given up the opportunity to have larger pay rises or other benefits in order to secure parental leave provisions. **Therefore the new system should protect any current parental leave provisions to allow employees to take them in conjunction with the mandatory scheme. Taking employer-provided parental leave should not jeopardise a woman's ability to use the government scheme so the 6 month deadline for the taking of leave should be lengthened in such cases.**
4. The draft scheme does not require employers to "top up" a woman's wage and will pay only the minimum wage rather than average weekly earnings. The proposed scheme will mean many women are substantially worse off whilst on maternity leave and their super will only be paid on 9% of the minimum wage. Some employees, again through enterprise bargaining processes, have secured higher than 9% super perhaps foregoing other benefits to attain this super. **The scheme should compel employers to "top up" the woman's wage to her pre-pregnancy earnings and pay the rate of super which applied before her maternity leave. Furthermore the amount contributed by the government should not be based on the minimum wage but on average weekly earnings.**
5. The "keeping in touch" provisions are a good idea but I am concerned that women could feel compelled to attend their workplace and participate in such activities. **The draft scheme's return to work and "keeping in touch" provisions must be the woman's choice and agreement. A woman should be paid for any time that she participates in such activities, not at the minimum wage level but at her pre-pregnancy wage for the hours or days worked.**
6. The draft scheme doesn't seem to allow women to take paid leave prior to the birth. **The terminology should be adjusted so that women can begin their paid leave prior to the birth if they wish.**
7. The draft scheme does not treat parental leave like other forms of leave, in the sense that annual leave, long service leave etc do not accrue during this time. **In order for parental leave to achieve the social recognition for which the Inquiry aims, other forms of leave should accrue during parental leave.**

Thankyou for your attention to my initial submission and this feedback document. I welcome the government's efforts to develop a paid parental leave scheme and look forward to the introduction of a scheme in the near future. Again I emphasise that paid parental leave is too important to be delayed due to the economic crisis and in fact could be part of a stimulus package.

Yours Sincerely,

Lisa Jeffery