

May 11, 2009

Media Statement

WA Commissioner welcomes paid maternity leave

Equal Opportunity Commissioner Yvonne Henderson today welcomed the Federal Government's commitment to fund a paid maternity leave scheme saying it would give security and confidence to working mothers and was essential for keeping women in the workforce.

"Paid maternity leave has been long overdue in Australia, especially for low income working mothers, and it will provide women with real choices as to when they return to work after the birth of a child."

Commissioner Henderson said the scheme would also help the economy during the current economic downturn.

"Having a paid maternity leave scheme ensures mothers can keep spending and contributing to the economy while they are on leave knowing that they will have a job and income to return to.

"Whilst my submission to the Productivity Commission last year called for 26 weeks paid maternity leave, I welcome the Federal Government's 18-week scheme as an important investment in the social and economic wellbeing of families and the community.

"It is a pity however that the scheme does not support at least two weeks paid paternity leave for new fathers at the time of birth.

"It is also imperative that employers do not use this as an opportunity to opt out of their obligation to fund their own existing paid maternity leave schemes or any contributions they may make towards the Government's scheme.

"The Federal Government has recognised how important this scheme is for helping families as well as contributing towards the success and stability of business and the economy. I hope employers also realise a strong paid maternity leave makes good business sense."

Commissioner Henderson's submission to the Productivity Commission last year called for:

- 26 weeks paid maternity leave;
- Paid maternity leave be available to part-time and casual workers;
- Paid parental leave of at least two weeks be available to the partner of the mother at the time of birth;
- The Federal Government to provide a long term funding scheme for a universal period of paid parental leave at no less than the minimum wage; and
- No existing paid maternity leave entitlements be reduced with the introduction of a new scheme;
- A universal scheme that provides a sufficient length of time to promote breastfeeding and give women a real choice in relation to retaining their employment.

**FOR ADDITIONAL COMMENT: Commissioner Yvonne Henderson
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