

Dear Sir/Madam,

When I moved back to Australia with my husband and a kid in tow, I was completely floored by the outlandishly expensive childcare fees for overcrowded, policy-stifled childcare centres. How could any sane couple valuing their career, financial stability, and wellbeing of their kids decide to have children in this country? In our case, we now have three under-fives which would cost us \$45000 if we had them all in childcare (that's after the \$7500 rebate)! It turned out to be a nearly equally expensive and much more child-friendly option to have my husband stop work and look after the kids, but this means we are financially just hanging on and I doubt that my husband will find it easy to return to work. So I was astounded to hear that the productivity commission recommended a worsening of the conditions in cost, quality, and accessibility - these are already abysmal! Regarding quality - what bureaucrat dreamed up the idea that under-threes require as less focused care than over-threes? Small children do have specific needs that only properly qualified staff can provide. And the idea of relaxing the child:carer ratio is awful since the ratios are already way too high. I always hated seeing my daughter in that big throng of kids with a clearly overstretched carer just hanging on. Regarding access issues by stricter requirements on work/study - the fiendishly expensive costs of childcare are already excluding swathes of people (mostly women) from work until their careers are wrecked. Making childcare access even harder for disadvantaged people does nothing to improve the welfare of either the parents or children. And regarding an increase of the burden for high-earning families - I'm not one to fight for middle-class welfare, but when childcare costs make up nearly  $\frac{3}{4}$  or one of our considerable incomes, there's something wrong with the system.

Having children is not a private choice in a societal vacuum. We parents, as today's taxpayers, make up a huge portion of the workforce and they deserve a better deal than paying taxes *and* losing their incomes to bad quality childcare - or face the alternative of giving up a career. We are raising the generation that will one day need to support the country, and the commission clearly isn't committed to helping us - that's pretty much the message I'm getting.