

## **Parental leave inquiry**

### **Personal responses and views**

To aid readability, some minor formatting and editing has been undertaken.

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Children are our future and they need to be raised by parents who have the time and resources to do a good job. Paid maternity leave allows women to actively raise their children to be societal contributors.

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Having never had access to paid maternity leave, I chose a career (ie. money/survival) over having children. This is a harsh and unnecessary choice that women shouldn't have to make.

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Paid maternity/parental leave is a human right, in the same way we believe it our right to have access to clean water and food. Every country has realised that women, as well as men, need to work for a very large number of reasons, each legitimate and unquestionable. However, in the developed 'rich' world, only countries such as Australia and the US appear to think that the decision by women to either work or have children is a 'choice', in the same way we choose whether to drive a sedan or a sports car. It is not.

I am astounded by the regressive approach to this issue which Australia has taken for far too long, following in the footsteps of the most inequitable country in the world, the US.

I can only hope that the Rudd government, which has already addressed several areas of inequity inherited from previous governments, not least of which the Howard government, can demonstrate to Australia and the world that this country can proudly align itself with other nations that take human rights, family/community values, and the respect for the dignity of the workforce seriously. This can only be demonstrated through action, not rhetoric alone.

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Paid maternity leave makes good economic sense. There are plenty of women like myself who are in their 30s who do consider the financial impact of having children. It is fair and reasonable to compensate women for their time off from

work, their reduced chance of promotion and the limitations on their career opportunities. Apart from this, the benefits to children of having a decent period of full-time care cannot be quantified. Let's get fair.

I was told I could email you my opinion on paid maternity leave, I believe this is ridiculous, what are employees going to do ? employ someone train them etc then sack them on mum's return? also how is a small business suppose to come up with the \$ to pay an extra person who isn't even there? I never got it when I was struggling 7 years ago? and I wouldn't have expected a handout from anyone, I managed. If you can't afford to have unpaid time off, then don't have children, what's going to happen when you babies sick ? who pays then? the employee? and employers who are taking on there work load?

### **SUGGESTIONS:**

Why not introduce an insurance of some sort that young girls over 21 can start paying into? they can put money away for maternity leave etc. as little as \$1 a day? and perhaps claim this back on tax?

or

Why not look at reducing the baby bonus and using that? We have so many single mums who are having babies out of wedlock just to get the baby bonus, and when the \$ run out! who suffers the kids, look how many are in foster families! this isn't a credit to us its destroying little ones futures before it even begins!

We have so many other problems to think about with health, education, roads etc lets just say NO WAY!

I hope to have a baby in the next few years, but if I am unable to get paid maternity leave and my partner is unable to get parental leave I don't know how I will cope. I may have to delay having a child until I am more financially secure, but by that time I will probably no longer be fertile. Even if I did conceive, without parental leave for my partner I would worry about the effect that being the sole carer for a newborn would have on my mental health.

It would be great if the inquiry could consider the Swedish model for paid parental leave. I was surprised to find that the amount of money paid is related to the amount earned before going on leave. Their system is applied in the reverse of what might be expected- if you earned a lot (and therefore have paid a lot of tax) you receive a higher benefit than if you have not had a high salary

or worked at all. This system encourages women to work for a certain length of time and aim for a certain salary before falling pregnant. Quite the opposite to what you would expect in a strong socialist country like Sweden. Very clever though.

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My wife has just fallen pregnant and will not receive paid maternity leave because she hasn't worked at her organisation long enough to qualify for the measly 6 weeks paid maternity leave that they offer. I will also not receive any paid time off to be with my wife and first child even though I work for the government.

Please listen to the Australian people and create socially-minded policy to support the population growth the baby-bonus was designed to precipitate.

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If we want the right people having children then we need to offer working families incentives. It seems that people on welfare don't mind having lots of babies however, working mothers like myself, need to weigh up our career objectives, our financial situation and the impact that having another baby is going to have on our family. These are big decisions that many intelligent, educated hard working women have to make before having a child. Yet it is these women who should be producing the next generation for Australia also.

We want the future generations to be self sufficient, educated, motivated individuals and we need to stop the welfare cycle. Paid maternity leave will assist with this goal which will then have an impact on reducing the reliance on welfare - so it will actually save money in the long term.

When I fell pregnant with my second child, I was working as an accountant for a small business. I was sacked which put huge strain on our family situation as they didn't want to keep my job open for 12 months. I then was diagnosed with post natal depression to the extent that i was hospitalised for 6 months. This is a lot more expensive than providing paid maternity leave. I then accessed the mental health system for another year until I could return to work. Unfortunately my husband then suffered from depression which is common in such situations. He was not as lucky as me - he tried to commit suicide and is now severely brain damaged in full time care. I have been left to look after 2 beautiful children on my own. I am now working full time again. It certainly would have helped me and my family to the extent that the stress wouldn't have been so severe and my depression may have been avoided.

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As Australia is a very rich country in comparison to say Cuba it seems a bit silly that we do not have paid maternity leave available to all mothers. I am not thinking of a measly 12 weeks. In my opinion that is not sufficient time for a new mother to even establish herself in her role as carer for a new little human life. Six months of paid maternity leave would be a reasonable amount.

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I believe it is about time that Australia caught up with the rest of the fair western world by making paid maternity leave available to all women in the country. It seems wholly unfair that it is left up to the employer to decide on their position regarding paid maternity leave - it should be available to all, not just the elite few. The only way of ensuring this happens is by bringing in legislation for a minimal level of paid maternity leave, giving all new mums access to it. In addition, being a newish mum myself, I didn't have the opportunity to spend even three months with my new baby (single mother). I think that all children would benefit hugely from having the first 12 months of life living in the close and continuous care of their mother, rather than having to go to child care because families cannot afford to survive otherwise. It is generally proven through research that very young children in full time day care do not excel as well as those in full time parental care. Finally, the country seems unable to find a good childcare solution to meet the huge demands of young families, leading to huge waiting lists and high costs of childcare. Paid maternity leave would enable more mums to stay at home that want to, relieving the childcare pressure on those that simply cannot afford to stay at home. Please consider reviewing this important piece of legislation - our children are our future, let's give them the best start they can get.

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My husband and I are eagerly awaiting the birth of our first child in September of this year however, unfortunately this excitement has been clouded by financial worries due to the loss of my wage during maternity leave. My husband and I earn a similar income and to be without my income for the duration of my maternity leave means that I have had to reduce the amount of leave I am taking.

I am an allied health professional and while colleges in the public sector receive paid maternity leave those of us employed in private practice don't. As a result my husband and I have not only had to carefully plan the lead up to falling pregnant but we have had to be very mindful of spending during my pregnancy so that we can afford the mortgage, bills, petrol and everyday expenses when I am not working.

I always thought I would be in a financial position to take a year off work when I had my children but as a result of interest rate rises and the increase in petrol

and food prices we can not afford for me to not be working for this length of time. I am planning on taking 6 months off work with the intention to return part time after that.

My returning to work will largely depend on our financial position and returning to work while a necessity is only possible as our parents are able to help us with minding the baby, if we had to factor in the price of child care we would be struggling or in fact going backwards.

Having paid maternity leave in any form would assist in young families being able to provide not only financially but also emotionally for their children. Having a parent at home (either mum or dad) in the first months (ideally the first year) is vital to a child's development. We don't want other people raising our children, we want a hand in moulding them into the people they will be.

Many of our friends are the same position, we have all worked hard, saved our money and made sacrifices all in order to purchase our homes and provide for our families. I know that for some of them having paid maternity leave allowed them to start their families sooner and they have the piece of mind that they know what money they have coming in each week to support their family while one is on maternity leave. For my husband and I not having paid maternity leave means that we have had to put off our family longer, consider seriously the cost of purchasing our home, take the time think about how we will cover our expenses while I am off work and reduce the amount of leave I am having so we are not financially stretched and therefore stressed!

I think this inquiry is long overdue and I urge you to consider seriously what young families are going through when deciding to start a family. Having compulsory paid maternity leave would help many young families start off on the right foot.

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I write to express my concerns regarding the lack of paid maternity and paternity leave for Australian parents.

I had a baby six months ago and I returned to work today on a part-time basis. I am a research fellow and I was awarded four weeks paid maternity leave during my absence.

The pay I received, although small, greatly alleviated the financial stress of having a baby and that in turn allowed me to care better for my child during this time. This pay was also an incentive for me to choose my employer in the first place (I was offered another job but declined because I would not be paid

maternity leave) and also allowed me to retain the skills and training I have received (I have a PhD in biological sciences).

As much as I love my job, I believe raising my child to be my number one priority. Extensive research in Australia and overseas has demonstrated the importance of loving and stimulating babies in these first months of their lives. Many of my female friends have been forced to return to work earlier than they believed was beneficial for their children because of financial reasons. I have fortunate that my access to maternity leave allowed me to choose when to return to work, rather than been forced to return too early due to financial reasons. Paid maternity leave is an essential part of allowing mothers (and families) to raise happy, healthy children.

I urge you to pay maternity leave to Australian working women.

I fully support the introduction of paid parental leave. The bonding of a baby to it's parents leads to better adjusted citizens in the long run. Please take the financial strain of new families to let the enjoy this time together without the stress of making ends meet.

The fact that we lag behind most developed countries in the world on this issue is a real shame.

I support the provision of paid maternity, paternity and parental leave. I can speak from personal experience in saying that the availability of paid maternity leave influenced my decision to have a child and also allowed me to fully breast-feed that child.

Paid maternity leave should be available to all women in the paid workforce, available for full-time, *casual, part time and self employed women*. It should comprise of at least 14 weeks paid by the Federal Government (till accepted by the society and business) at the level of the minimum wage their income should be topped up by employer contribution negotiated by unions, lawyer or individual mothers.

Paid parental leave for everyone would be a great thing.

Paid maternity leave is critical. The mother needs to be able to focus on her health and the baby's (and other siblings) in the early months without worrying about her financial security. It's a critical investment in the future of our community.

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Given that the Australian Government wants to encourage people to have children and increase the population, and also wants to encourage people to be gainfully employed and contribute productively to society rather than rely on government benefits, it makes sense to offer all working women paid maternity leave in order to provide financial support for women to take leave in order to care for a newborn baby - not just those women in white collar public sector jobs or corporate giants. It is an issue of fairness - is Australia not the land of the fair-go?

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I am a prospective adoptive parent, and as a part of the application process my husband and I had to document how we would finance one of us to spend 12 months at home with a child.

I am federal public servant, and sadly I am not eligible for more than one month's paid leave. My husband is not eligible for any parental leave. Mind you, one month's leave is better than none - it will almost cover the time we would be out of the country if we were to adopt internationally.

So my first comment is that I find it unacceptable that I am not entitled to the same amount of leave if I adopt a child compared to if I give birth. Secondly, if it is deemed important enough that it can be demanded that either my husband or myself stay at home with the child, surely then it is important enough to fund people staying home?

I think that it is generally a good thing for children to be cared by their parents: but there are worse things (poor parental care, poverty).

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Support to retain women in the workforce is essential especially if we are to have a workforce that will be big enough in the future. Paid maternity leave will help retain women. It will also assist them to maintain their career – good for them, great for Australia, and essential for our future.

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I always thought that Australia was a more progressive country than this and I had for quite some time within this belief assumed that we already had paid maternity leave as a right. The fact that we don't is disgraceful and goes straight in the face of our ideals as a family oriented society and a society which gives equal rights to women, mothers and parents alike. It is time that the past discrepancies were left behind and we face up to the fact that we are the hardest working OECD nation and deserve the entitlements which should go along with this. I am not a mother myself but I would hope that when I will be that my right and responsibility to bear children will be supported by the nation which I have supported in my every working day. Anything less would be an insult and an injustice.

My husband and I are thinking about having children. I know the government are encouraging couples to start a family; and it would help working mums if we could get paid maternity leave. I have heard they were thinking about making us part pay for it and employers pay balance, I would be happy with anything to be honest. Having a child is going to be challenging enough without financial worries. Those of us working should get support so we can have some time out when baby is first born.

I type this with difficulty, one handed, as I nurse my 2 week old daughter with my other arm. I recently embarked on 12 months' unpaid leave from my paid job in order to give my child the loving attention of her mother in her earliest months.

I have arranged leave, rather than quitting my job and allowing someone else to take it over, because as well as valuing my children and my relationships with them, I also value my ability to earn money for our family and to contribute to my personal development and to my society through my paid role. However, where I work, providing support for those living in poverty, there is no paid leave for new parents.

I have applied for the baby bonus payment (it is yet to actually arrive), which represents about 9 weeks' pay equivalent. Given that I started leave at 35 weeks pregnant (my first child was born at 37 weeks) and my daughter waited until 41 weeks to be born, this gives me about 2 more weeks of income cover before embarking on the balance of the 12 months dependent on my partner's wage and whatever Family Tax Benefit we might attract. At this point, I would still be 2 weeks short of the 6 week post-partum recovery check-up, and certainly not yet fully recovered from the caesarean section that was necessary to safely deliver my baby.



Current guidelines recommend that babies be raised exclusively on breastmilk to the age of 6 months, with solids added from that point, and breastfeeding continued for as long as possible. And yet, our current financial support scheme, by my estimate, wouldn't get most women to their post-partum check-up. If we're serious about wanting and needing women to both produce (healthy, well-supported) children and to work, earn and spend, we must address this. Australia stands out amongst similar countries because of its lack of paid parental leave. Let us fix this, now, by providing financial support for mothers in particular, and parents of babies generally, to provide that one-on-one physical and emotional care to our nation's children.

I have not yet thought deeply about the details of an Australian paid maternity leave scheme, except to feel that some level of support should be available to working and non-working women, and that the ACTU's 14 weeks is rather short, and that 6 months would be a more appropriate minimum. I believe we should study the European social democracies such as Sweden and Finland for models. I do believe that Australia risks its riches by practising excessive frugality in this area (and in health care, and education, and in environmental sustainability - but these for another inquiry). We need proper support for parents of new babies, and we need it now.

This is a father's point of view. Our children are 28 and 23. When my wife was pregnant with our first child, paid maternity leave did not exist in the State Government Department we both worked for (it does now). As a result of this, my wife was basically forced to resign from the workforce. As a further consequence of no paid maternity leave, I worked a second job at the weekend to help balance the family budget. As a government employee, I was required to obtain permission to engage in my secondary employment, which had to be in a industry unrelated to one in which I was principally employed.

I am a health professional working in the area of maternal and child health in Victoria. I am also a mother of 5 children, an Australian Breastfeeding Association support counsellor, and an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant. In these various roles, I meet many women who are struggling with their roles as mothers, and their BF skills, and often they have the added burden of needing to go back to work from 3 months to 12 months after the birth of their babies. These women are feeling let down by a society that does not seem to value its mothers, nor make a commitment to breastfeeding. Lots more funded childcare places for under 2 year old children is not the answer. Mums need to have the choice of being able to stay at home and continue to breastfeed for as long as they and the baby want. They have a right to do this. The health outcomes for children who are breastfed are far superior to the

health outcomes for artificially fed children in many areas ( less gastroenteritis, less upper respiratory tract infections, less prematurity complications, less ear infections, less obesity, less juvenile onset diabetes, less SIDS..... the list goes on ) . These reductions in health expenditure are just one spin-off of increased breastfeeding rates, there are many social and emotional benefits too. If women choose to go back to work, then workplaces need to be Breastfeeding Friendly Workplaces ( see ABA website [www.breastfeedingfriendly.com.au](http://www.breastfeedingfriendly.com.au)). Please consider the evidence : babies need breastmilk, and women need to be able to spend the time to breastfeed their babies for as long as is mutually needed. The World Health organisation recommends 'breastfeeding for 2 years and beyond' . Where is the legislation to support this ?

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It is largely assumed that there will be a male breadwinner or wider family members around to support you as you approach birthing and for several months afterwards. However I am the breadwinner in my home, and I am female. I have no choice but to find money to keep a roof over our heads, food in our mouths and clothes on our backs. On top of medical bills I am not sure how I am going to do this. Either I do not have a child at all, or I return to work as soon as my body permits, leaving my infant without a supply of breast milk or early parental bonding. I have put off the decision for 10 years already, waiting for a better time financially, but it has never arrived. So either the government helps provide some paid maternity leave now or they pay for my pension in old age as I will have no children to care for me!

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I fully support a government-funded paid maternity scheme in Australia to bring us in line with all other OECD countries bar the USA. My first child was born 19 years ago and I was a temporary employee in a NSW State government department. Despite working continuously for 2.5 years my contract was ended on the day I left prior to giving birth. My request for paid maternity leave (then 9 weeks) was rejected as my contract had been terminated due to the birth. However, with the help of the union I was paid for the 9 weeks but my job was still terminated.

For my second child in 1992, I was again on a temporary state government contract (for around 2 years). As I was getting on well with my boss, she extended my contract until 5 months post birth so I was able to get paid maternity leave. However, I had to return to work within the 5 months or be terminated. I did return to work but was reluctant to do so as I then had 2 young children and had difficulty finding care for my second child. I would have much preferred to have had up to 12 months leave without losing my 'temporary' job. I can say that if I have had these difficulties as a state

government employee it must be far worse for most women. I find it hard to believe that things haven't improved in the past 20 years.

There are very few permanent jobs available even in state government, so one is extremely vulnerable to the whims of one's current boss. They are also looking at ways to save money so by terminating your contract prior to the birth (they just need to give a month's notice) they believe they can avoid paying for maternity leave. My husband runs his own company so was not in a position to take any paternity leave. I see this as a matter of urgency and am disappointed at the further delays imposed by the Rudd government.

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I am motivated to write this in support of paid maternity leave. As the father of three girls, I believe it is vitally important for the health & well-being of both mother and child as the first 6 months is a bonding experience as well as the baby receiving valuable antibodies from the mother's breast milk.

About myself I am 58 years old and have been married for 34 years and have three girls aged 32, 26 & 18. Whilst paid maternity leave was NOT available to my wife at the time, I believe it would have benefited all concerned and in the future would assist my children. At the time that my daughters were born, the cost of living was so much less expensive than it is today. Presently there is no way a young married couple could afford to lose the wife's salary for ANY amount of time much less the 6 months I have outlined above.

I believe it behoves Australia to commence the above A.S.A.P. we could afford 6 months to start with (increasing to 1 year later on). The fact that Australia & America are the ONLY two developed countries NOT to have it is an embarrassment to ALL Australians. I believe it could be partly funded by the abolition of the Baby-Bonus.

The reason it should be funded by the Government and NOT business is the fact that this could cause job losses as employers would simply NOT employ women of child-bearing age, if they thought they would have to pay for it later, and would just employ men further eroding the gender employment gap.

We already pay taxes and I believe most Australians would agree it was the right and proper thing to do and support it totally.

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Make no mistake about this, the lack of consideration for working mothers is chronic, systemic sexual discrimination. Not only is paid maternity leave overdue so is the right to have your job back, the right to superannuation while

on leave, work based child care to enable parents to confidently attend and perform their duties while school aged children are on school holidays and an equitable approach to mothers' positions in the pecking order of promotion such as 'fast track' training program on return to full time work when childbearing days are over.

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As a casual, I was not entitled to maternity leave at all, though in the industry I was working in, it still isn't paid to full or part time employees. I had to return to work when my baby was 8 weeks old, in order to hold my position. After my first, I decided raising my children to become useful members of society was the most important thing I could do (I didn't have a 'career'). I will study after my youngest starts school, so I don't have to return to a similar job.

Having to return to work made life more difficult, particularly as I worked 8pm to midnight or later, and affected my relationship with my baby. I would have much preferred to remain her main carer all the time.

My husband isn't entitled to paternity leave, after my babies were born, he took normal holiday leave.

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Paid maternity leave is something that really helps families in those early months of a child's life. It not only helps with the family finances, but it gives mothers the space they need to make decisions in the best interests of their extremely young children. One of the most important decisions is how long they intend to breastfeed their babies - the longer mothers commit to this, the better the health of our children in the long term, which is also good for the public purse.

I have enjoyed the benefit of paid maternity leave (8 weeks) at different employers for the birth of each of my two children. I was also able to take this leave at half pay, "spinning out the money" for as long as possible. Without access to this paid leave I have no doubt that my family would have suffered and I would have made rash decisions about my daughters' child care arrangements.

Maternity leave - and paternity leave for that matter - is a fundamental right for 'working families' who elected this new Government. Thank goodness the ACTU is leading the charge on this issue. Please, make maternity leave a reality in this country, and do it soon. Working women have no time for mucking around.

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My eldest daughter is now 48 yrs old. Those were the days when it was barely acceptable to go out in public, or to participate in community activities, whilst pregnant.! Heaven forbid if one was to wander around unaccompanied after the 7th month of pregnancy. Who knows what evil vices the unborn babe would inherit ! Thank goodness these opinions have changed dramatically over time. It would seem that where some Government and corporate thinking is concerned, enlightened progress has certainly been elusive, if not obliterated, on women's value in the workforce.

Of course it makes perfect sense to allow women to have PAID MATERNITY LEAVE !!!! What false economy to train and then totally dismiss experienced employees who have been valuable additions to the Employer and the workplace, and replace them with new, inexperienced employees ..!! The money paid to retain good employees for 6 - 12 months would far outweigh the cost of training a new replacement. Get into the 21st century for heaven's sake. Recognise the worth of these women, and PAY Maternity Leave ... the results will be astonishingly worthwhile.

I think it's appalling that women do not have access to paid parental leave as they do in many other countries. I think its really ironic that women are expected to bear and produce the children of our nation but are not given adequate support to do so. Imagine that some women think of not having children because of the cost to them! That's terrible. I hope to see a more civilised program in place that shows support to women taking time off from work to have children. I also think it should be automatically available to women, not based on how long they have been working or whether or not they are employed fulltime given that many women work in casual jobs.

With every step forward, female workers take 2 steps back. When I had my kids 11 months apart {my doing}, I was forced back to work when they were 6 weeks old, and with the 2nd baby I went into labour the afternoon I left work. 2 babies 11 months apart, and back to work with them 12 1/2 months apart. I had no choice, as we needed both wages. I doubt that this has changed much 41 years later. WE NEED TO FIGHT FOR OUR SISTERS.

I think it is very important that mother spends time caring and looking after new born baby. It is important for the child and for the mother as well as it is natural as the mother can provide the best care possible in those first few years of development. No kindergarten teacher/carer can replace mother and her love

and care. In other developed countries maternity leave is up to 2 years and after that you go back to work part time for another year or two. Children that young learn to belong, love and to care. I only have one child and I can not afford to have another one as I know it will be hard to find a job afterwards as no-one wants to employ you when you have baby at home. They say that you will have to many of work days as babies get sick all the time. That is not fair, as we should be able to care for our children and not to be punished.

How about equal maternity leave for mothers who adopt! This issue has to be the biggest miscarriage of justice there is!

If men gave birth there would be paid maternity leave amongst other benefits for all male workers. It is women who give birth and yet, there is only Paid Maternity Leave for those lucky enough to work in Industries where they are considered to be essential to the workplace. Why not paid maternity leave for all women?

Paid maternity leave is something that should be paid by the Commonwealth Government as women of child bearing age are not evenly distributed between all workplaces. It should be restricted to 2 pregnancies per woman on environmental grounds. The large family allowance should be scrapped for the same reason. I support replacing the baby bonus with paid maternity leave. There should be no financial incentive for women to have children when the planet is so overpopulated. I also support means testing of maternity leave - no paid maternity leave for women whose spouses earn more than \$150,000

As a worker on a single income who has been in the workforce for 35 years and who has struggled to get together enough money to purchase a house that I will not be able to finalise payments on in my working life, I am **TOTALLY AGAINST PAID MATERNITY LEAVE!** I am increasingly concerned that my taxes continue to support a framework that encourages people to lean on a system that must support their life choices and encourages a mentality of looking to others for support rather than learning to live within their own means. Everyone I have discussed this scheme with, including working mothers, feel that increasingly Australians find themselves working more and more for others and are not seeing the benefit and reward for their own hard work.

By the end of my working life, I will have been paying taxes for a minimum of 45 years and my government is telling me that there may not be enough money to pay pensions in the future due to the aging of the working population yet an enormous portion of group tax is supporting the current welfare system. Is there not something wrong with a system that may not be in a position to pay pensions to hard working Australians but who continues to pay the dole to people who refuse to look for work and continues to pay for treatment for people who make appalling life choices and end up with serious health issues?

Let's start making people accountable for their own life choices. Stop expecting those of us who work long and hard to pick up the tab for the poor choices others make.

If you can't afford to take time off to have a child and be a proper mother, you obviously can't afford to keep that child in the basics that every child deserves.

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Paid maternity leave makes good economic sense. There are plenty of women like myself who are in their 30s who do consider the financial impact of having children. It is fair and reasonable to compensate women for their time off from work, their reduced chance of promotion and the limitations on their career opportunities. Apart from this, the benefits to children of having a decent period of full-time care cannot be quantified. Let's get fair.

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I hope to have a baby in the next few years, but if I am unable to get paid maternity leave and my partner is unable to get parental leave I don't know how I will cope. I may have to delay having a child until I am more financially secure, but by that time I will probably no longer be fertile. Even if I did conceive, without parental leave for my partner I would worry about the effect that being the sole carer for a newborn would have on my mental health.

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I believe it is about time that Australia caught up with the rest of > the fair western world by making paid maternity leave available to all women in the country. It seems wholly unfair that it is left up to the employer to decide on their position regarding paid maternity leave - it should be available to all, not just the elite few. The only way of ensuring this happens is by bringing in legislation for a minimal level of paid maternity leave, giving all new mums access to it. In addition, being a newish mum myself, I didn't have the opportunity to spend even three months with my new baby (single mother). I think that all children would benefit hugely from having the first 12 months of life living in the close and continuous care of their mother, rather than having

to go to child care because families cannot afford to survive otherwise. It is generally proven through research that very young children in full time day care do not excel as well as those in full time parental care. Finally, the country seems unable to find a good childcare solution to meet the huge demands of young families, leading to huge waiting lists and high costs of childcare. Paid maternity leave would enable more mums to stay at home that want to, relieving the childcare pressure on those that simply cannot afford to stay at home. Please consider reviewing this important piece of legislation - our children are our future, let's give them the best start they can get.

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I think that it is disgraceful that the lowest paid women (in retail and hospitality and the casual workforce) do not have paid maternity leave - **THEY ARE THE ONES WHO MOST NEED IT!!**

These women would not have the money to look after themselves the way well paid women can - **SO THEY NEED THE COMMUNITY'S HELP!!**

If we as a nation are to do something about the very low birth-rate, we have to make it easier for women and families to have babies. It's not the whole answer, but not having paid maternity leave certainly doesn't help.

If we as a country are to humanely care for our babies, we need to give their mothers a real choice about staying at home to love them and care for them.

We as a country can not claim to be fair-dinkum about the welfare of our youngest citizens, if we do not give their mother's the opportunity to look after them! Babies need their mothers and deserve to have them.

The future babies of those babies need those babies to have been properly loved and cared for by their mothers! It is in the arms of our parents that we learn how to love and how to parent.

Humans are primarily social creatures - not economic units. Thus, our primary roles in society are in relation to the family members and friends that we love and look out for. Despite its importance for society, economic activity isn't what life is all about. Economic activity exists to support people and by extension their families, particularly their babies and children - paid maternity leave should be a given for all including the lowest paid.

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I had my babies in 2001 and 2004. I was grateful that I received paid maternity leave for 3 months mainly due to the sector I work in but I know of a lot of women in casual work and low paid positions who have not.



Personally I cannot understand the argument that it is unaffordable, how will businesses pay? How have businesses overseas paid is my question. Now I think that that argument is just a narrow minded view "we haven't had to do it why should we now?".

Life is expensive, people have to have 2 incomes now days unless one person is on a huge wage, which for me was not the case. The income I brought home and (still do now) is vital to the running of our household, my husband does not earn the 'average wage' of \$52K.

Personally I am tired of Australian government and businesses approach to this issue... it is out of date and has been talked about back and forth for too long...  
**TIME FOR ACTION**

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I strongly support the introduction of a paid maternity leave scheme in Australia of at least 14 weeks but ideally 26 weeks, on a non-means tested basis. The basis for this is that, generally speaking:

1. it has a significant benefits for mothers and children (and families and society generally); and
2. it lessens the adverse effects of having children on women's careers.

However, I am concerned that if a scheme is adopted pursuant to which the Government pays the minimum wage level and employers are compulsorily required to "top up" the payment to an individual's usual wage, it may, in addition to placing onerous and likely unsustainable burdens on employers, lead to discrimination against women by employers, particularly women in professional and managerial (and generally higher income earning) positions. This would only exacerbate the existing lack of women in these positions. I also do not believe it would be effective to introduce a scheme where the government pays women minimum wage level and individuals negotiate a "top up" with their respective employer.

I strongly support a scheme whereby maternity leave is funded by three means – the Government, taxpayers and compulsory employer contributions based on the aggregate salary payable by the relevant employer, regardless of the number of women they employ. The amount payable to women should be at their usual remuneration, perhaps up to a certain limit. This proposal reflects the considerable benefits to society paid maternity leave brings and the significant contribution women make to society.

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Paid maternity leave should be a cultural priority. In a nation as wealthy as ours, with an ageing population, there is no excuse for not making paid maternity leave an integral part of the economic system.

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Early childhood and infancy are times when there is a strong need for maternity presence and care.

Research has shown that mothers and fathers provide different styles of care and that both are vitally important to healthy and happy infancy and early childhood.

Mothering in early childhood and infancy has traditionally and naturally involved breastfeeding at least into the second year of life. Research continues to reveal the benefits of breastfeeding across a broad range of measures.

Family and parental choice to structure paid work around the provision of full-time parental or family care for their children ought to be encouraged and supported.

A growing body of research being conducted in the U.S. and the U.K. are highlighting the failure of institutionalised childcare to come close to the quality of early childhood development achieved with ordinary loving family carers in the home environment.

The family and community must not be viewed primarily as economic resources available for maximising GDP or other economic indicators. Economic planning and public policy ought to facilitate healthy and happy family life.

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As a mother of a 5 month old baby, I feel as though mothers are being pressured to return to the workforce. Being a mother is the most important job and contributes to society by producing healthy and confident children.

Although paid maternity leave is a step in the right direction, the labour government has ignored the fact that women want to stay home with their children. They have not given women the option. If the Family Tax Benefit Part B was increased, women could be financially able to be with their children. Although childcare centres provide a valuable service to the community they could never replace the 24-hour care and attention that a mother can give.

In conclusion I think the government should increase the FBT Part B instead of paid maternity leave and give mothers the choice to be with their children.

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I am a mother of two and am also a qualified podiatrist. I choose to stay at home to raise my children and I love it. I don't want anyone else, i.e., childcare centres, day-care centres or any other group to mind and raise my children. A mother is the best person to raise their children from age 0 to 5. Women should not be pressured to return to work. Under this scheme it puts undue pressure on women who might decide to quit full-time employment once being with their child for a year. Women should be encouraged to stay with their children for at least 3 years. Also women should be awarded to stay at home with their children, hence FTB should be increased — not decreased, and there should be less award for parents whose children go to childcare as this is not ideal for the child's development. We need to promote the role of mothers in our society and it is your job to make this difference.

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I am writing as a mother of two addressing the paid maternity leave issue. I worked in the healthcare industry for eight years and, after my second child, needed to stay home with my babies. Being a stay-at-home mother is a 24-hour a day job and is a valuable contribution to society. We need to have a choice to stay at home with our children and while the paid maternity leave scheme sounds plausible, it does not address issues of mothers 'wanting' to stay at home, nor does it support this. The FBT Part B needs to be increased so mothers have the choice and support to stay at home and raise our children. It is the most important job of all — raising moral and honest people for a better society. I hope that you consider my view.

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I am a new mother and very worried about two issues currently at play; one is the impact of a means tested baby bonus; and the other is the absence of paid maternity leave.

I was reading in The Australian newspaper today about a woman who is the main breadwinner in her family and is about to embark on her second maternity leave. She raised some interesting points about both the baby bonus and maternity leave that I believe you should consider in your review.

In our experience we found that if you go through the private system there are significant out of pocket expenses with obstetrics costs and even just getting set up for a baby. The baby bonus provides a huge relief from that.

We also had a dreadful time with our newborn who became unwell on the day he and I were released from hospital and as a result he was readmitted. This involved a series of trips through hospital emergency rooms (one of which had a \$275 non-claimable entry fee, followed by a \$250 excess from our private health) where the level of care can only be likened to experimentation. It was horrific, not to mention costly. We again were significantly out of pocket.

There are also things like general or ongoing medical costs to consider. I am yet to find a doctor with experience in babies who bulk bills or even charges the schedule fee and as you would be aware babies are not born with robust immune systems and spend much of their first years battling illnesses so you are usually in the vicinity of \$20 out of pocket per visit.

Some other things to consider when reviewing baby bonuses or the necessity of paid maternity leave; our child was a breech baby and was therefore delivered via a c-section (another \$500) and due to his position in the womb there were concerns about the stability of his hips which resulted in two ultrasounds (\$200 each) plus one ultrasound to check his kidneys where a problem was detected at 20 weeks of gestation (another \$200). Fortunately for us there were no ongoing problems with his hips or his kidneys, but we did have to pay \$160 for each paediatrician consultation throughout the process. These were the paediatricians assigned to us in the hospital and frankly as a new parent you have no idea what else to do. While Medicare does cover a percentage of these costs it was usually less than 50%.

To add some context to this ... I am also presently the main breadwinner in the family. I did not qualify for paid maternity leave with my company, so my five months of leave was unpaid.

Due to financial pressures I had thought I might have to return to work after three months, however I felt my baby was too small and was not comfortable with putting such a small child into child care so we managed to squeeze our finances to enable me to take an extra two months off. While the baby bonus had been spent on medical fees and didn't factor into this, we would have been in a lot of debt without it and even five months of maternity leave would have been impossible.

Finally, there is the impact of a number of successive interest rate rises on household budgets. Our mortgage continued to rise whilst I was on maternity leave and while we had been very careful with our debt management pre-baby; we had a 20% deposit and paid off more of our mortgage each month than the minimum required to ensure we were ahead. My husband's income however did not cover the cost of the mortgage and food bills so things were extremely tight and some things could not be paid on time. This is likely to continue for the foreseeable future as we attempt to catch up.

I appreciate having the opportunity to air these experiences and hope that when you consider the value of the baby bonus to all families and paid maternity leave, you will take into account what happens when the woman as the main breadwinner loses her income during maternity leave, the impact of inflation on household budgets (I am yet to see a negative inflation rate), and how people make ends meet while caring for their children without paid maternity leave.

...

Recently I have become a mum. I was lucky enough to be on paid maternity leave for a short while, but I do feel it is unfair that now I either not have any income, or I have to put my very young child into child care and someone else would look after her. I chose to stay with my daughter, because I believe that is where my place is right now. People may ask why should we be paid for being mothers? It's simple: we have one of the most important jobs for this society, we are bringing up our future generations. And that means we need to be rewarded with appropriate means to be able to do a good job. It is about time our society started valuing motherhood (and fatherhood) for what it really is and rewarded it appropriately.

...

I wanted to write a short letter expressing my support for a universal paid maternity leave system, as well as an extension to the amount of time allowed for unpaid maternity leave. I also wish to voice my support for some form of paid paternity leave. I am currently taking maternity leave from my job following the birth of our first child in October last year. I am lucky enough to have been able to access a combination of paid and unpaid maternity leave, with flexibilities in the way I can access my accrued long service leave (which I will not be fully entitled to for another 3 years) as well as my accrued annual leave. In our EBA I am entitled to 14 weeks paid maternity leave, I can access my accrued long service leave as well as any annual leave, I am able to access all of these entitlements at half pay. I am also able to take 12 months maternity leave (however this includes any paid leave, so it is 12 months away from work in total). So that I am able to spend as much time with my daughter as possible I have opted to take my maternity leave and other entitlements at half pay, as the time I am able to spend with my daughter is so precious to me. The access we have had to an income (even though it was half of what had been used to) has meant that we are still able to enjoy ourselves together as a family: the pressures of a mortgage, interest rates, rising household bills, petrol etc. still make it difficult for us at the best of times, however we would not be able to cope if we didn't have my income still coming in. As it is, we will be selling our current home before my income stops to downsize our mortgage so instead of moving into a bigger house along with a family we have to significantly downsize, just so I will be able to spend the rest of the year with our daughter. If I wasn't able to access paid maternity leave we would have had to sell this

house much earlier on in the piece, and I would have had no choice but to return to work much earlier: we would have only been able to afford a couple of months (if that) on my husband's wages alone. The access I have had to paid maternity leave has allowed me to be able to stay at home with our daughter so much longer; to me this is the most important thing I could have done for the both of us.

I fervently believe that the time I have been able to spend with my daughter has had endless social benefits for her, as well as other benefits such as allowing me to continue breastfeeding: a major population health benefit both now and into her future. This time has allowed me to regain my health after sickness following the birth of our daughter, as well as the most important time in our lives: we have had the chance to truly bond as mother and daughter. I believe the time we have been able to spend together will have lasting effects on her future confidence and learning — all of the literature you are provided with as a new mum emphasises how important having a stable carer in the first year of life is and the lasting effects this will have on the child.

I believe that it is a mother's right to be able to be with her child for as long as she chooses; however this is simply not the case for most of the women I have met ... Most of the women in my Mother's Group have had no choice but to go back to work as they have now been trying to live on a single income for more than 8 months simply impossible if you have a mortgage and bills to pay. Two of the women in my Mother's Group simply could not face putting their precious babies into childcare so they have made a family decision that they would rather their husbands and partners work away on the mines on horrible shifts rather than be separated from their babies.

I am due to return to work in September but would rather not go back until next year as I believe my little girl will be able to handle childcare better then. Unfortunately this is not an option; we cannot afford another year on a single income so we are faced with no other choice but for me return to work. If we could afford it I would love to be able to stay at home with her for at least another year, however when I asked my employer about this I was told there is no entitlement to two years maternity leave which I think is appalling. Why does my employer have the right to dictate to me, or any other in the workplace how we should live our family life? I strongly believe that women should be given the option of two years unpaid leave.

As far as paternity leave is concerned, I would whole heartedly support a system whereby father's were entitled to some paid leave from work, the first few weeks is so important when you have a new family and the time spent together is time you can't get back. My husband had some annual leave he was able to use after our daughter was born, but he could only take 2 weeks off (the rest of it was used throughout the year on doctors appointments, ultrasounds, I was sick in hospital he had to use some also); however we both would have

loved for him to be able to spend some more time with myself and [my daughter].

I hope my comments have helped you in some way; this is life as it is for us. We are a family earning a reasonable amount — before I left work I was earning \$88,000 and my husband earn \$50,000. We have a 7 month old daughter.

...

To preserve our unique way of life for our unborn generations to enjoy, we need to ensure that all women in the workforce have the right to paid maternity leave, regardless of the industry in which they work. This should be a fundamental right and not a 'privilege' for the fortunate few. Let's grow up as a nation and value the role of caring for children. We can fix this.

...

This plea for at least three months paid maternity leave comes from a very tired Nanna. I have stepped in on every occasion for my daughter and daughter in law after they have given birth, and I'm currently looking after child number six! I have many friends my age, who are doing the same thing, because the pressure for the woman to get back to work, is so great, with the current financial climate. This early return to work can be quite detrimental to the health of the woman, and can cause serious instability in the home. They feel they have no choice in the matter, and that in turn has the flow on affect to the aged grandparents, who after all have done their stint already. Please consider this proposal for the future good of healthy family life.

...

I do support paid maternity leave for all Australian's women workers, even if my tax has to be increased to allow this to happen.

...

Please assist these ladies. They haven't made the decision to have child by themselves, they do need support. I mean support "please help them". They are human beings like the ones who are getting paid.

...

I work for myself and fell pregnant in the early months of the start of the business. I was having to see clients when I was almost at full term as I could not afford to take any form of leave from my job. After having my baby I then had to return to work 4 weeks later to keep up with basic living. At times my

husband had to take time off his job to look after the baby while I saw clients. Thankfully he has a fairly flexible job. The stress that this caused to both myself and my baby could have been so easily alleviated if there was paid maternity leave from the government. Even the base wage amount would have at least bought the necessities.

...

I believe in paid maternity leave for young mothers with babies. It is getting harder for mothers to leave the workforce for too long, and a baby needs its mother for at least the first 12 months while breastfeeding and nurturing takes place. A government funded scheme is necessary as the cost of living is extremely high, housing is barely affordable as house prices are even worse than when I bought my 1st house 33 years ago. I have a daughter expecting her first baby in July and they have a mortgage on a small house and they are on low incomes. She is working several jobs to make ends meet. I feel for her and wonder how they will manage.

...

It's time for Australia to join the rest of the progressive nations in recognising paid maternity leave as a right at work. The modern global economy's demands on mothers as workers needs the balance of paid leave to enable them to start their families, which are the bedrock of our society and, thus, economy. It should be a condition of employment for all working mothers.

...

I think that it is disgraceful that the lowest paid women (in retail and hospitality and the casual workforce) do not have paid maternity leave — they are the ones who most need it! These women would not have the money to look after themselves the way well paid women can — so they need the community's help! If we as a nation are to do something about the very low birth-rate, we have to make it easier for women and families to have babies. Not having paid maternity leave certainly doesn't help.

...

I work in the outsourced payroll industry and see first hand how many employers deal with this issue. It is generally only large organisations that offer paid maternity leave to their staff. Employees without 12-18 months service or those who do not work for large companies do not generally have access to any paid maternity leave. It seems unfair that we have a workcover scheme for when people are injured and cannot work and the dole for those who don't have jobs, but nothing for women who are considered medically unfit to work for a minimum of 12-14 weeks when they have a child.



Women should be entitled to at least 12-14 weeks paid at minimum wage funded by the government. Employers should then be expected to either fully fund a payment up to the worker's standard wage or to a capped amount. Superannuation should definitely be payable as a lack of superannuation due to time spent out of the workforce raising children is an important issue for women.

...

Many years ago I worked in Norway and was amazed at the rights women had back then in Scandinavian countries. Their dignity, their contribution to their community and country were recognised and financially supported. Motherhood took on a whole new meaning and gave children and new mothers essential time to form strong bonds and deeply rooted foundations. I, too, had this as a working woman and believe it is every woman's right.

...

My children are 25 (twins) and 26 and my wife had access to the equivalent to 3/4 of her pay averaged on the previous 26 weeks pay via the social welfare system. Her employer choose to support her and paid her full wage and she paid the social welfare back to them — all legal. this was in Ireland. but it was 26 years ago when Ireland was considered a poor European country. Isn't it time Australia caught up. Perhaps that is why Ireland has a younger population — compare the statistics for % of population under 25 in both countries? I brought 2 daughters to this country — help them to help their new country of choice grow and hold its held high when it comes to women's rights. Give them the same right their mother had 26 years ago.

...

I believe that paid maternity leave is essential for all Australian families and I strongly support paid maternity, paternity and parental leave. I am a white collar worker and I am currently in my early 30's, one of the reasons I have held off having children with my husband is from the lack of financial and moral support offered from both employers and the previous Howard Government. Life is difficult enough as it is with a mortgage, I would like to offer my children the best start to life and I believe the only way to do that for them is to be there with my husband and not dump them in a child care facility as early as possible so I can get back to work to pay the mortgage.

...

I believe that all women are entitled to maternity leave and I would really like to know why it is not considered an important aspect to the community?

...

Paid maternity leave is an essential right for all working women and yet time and again over the years of working I have seen many women having to use their sick or holiday leave when their baby was due as the only means of having an income during that period. This did not allow any paid leave for caring for the child. They were faced with returning to work with a new born or not working and going onto Centrelink or relying on their partner's income. It was a real disgrace that they could only have unpaid leave. So stop this inequity and forcing many women out of an income and bring in paid maternity leave.

...

I write in support of the ACTU's recommended model for paid maternity leave for all Australian women. It is time that Australia as a nation acknowledged the importance of financial support for parents and their dual roles as parents and workers. If we want our workforce to continue to be productive, and to provide for our ageing population, we must support a woman's decision to have a child, while not being penalised too harshly in a financial sense. The ACTU model seems to me to be workable and fair. Please consider it seriously.

...

When my son was born over thirty years ago, as a state school teacher, I had access to six months unpaid maternity leave. I was obliged to go on leave three months before his birth and was required to return three months after. I could not access long service leave or use sick leave to augment my leave. As my husband was on the minimum wage, the loss of my income made for a very stressful time in the midst of the joy I experienced at the birth of my son. If I had had paid maternity leave, even fourteen weeks would have made the financial burden a little lighter.

While I was on leave I was able to breastfeed but on my return to work my son was bottle fed. The benefits of breastfeeding for the child's health and well-being are well documented. Once he was in childcare, he experienced ear infections and other illnesses which he would have been shielded from had I been at home with him.

Even though my maternity leave was unpaid, I was fortunate that I had the first three months with my son. Women in lowpaid jobs don't even have that benefit.

Without paid maternity leave many women would have to resign from their jobs. Given that so many young couples have huge mortgages, that often

means they are forced to defer having a family or may only have one child because that's all they can afford to support.

Australia and the United States are the only two countries in the OECD who don't provide paid maternity leave. Research shows that women who receive paid maternity leave are more likely to return to work. Doesn't that help the economy? Given the skill shortage, Australia needs all the help it can get.

...

I am a mother of three, now aged 22, 18 & 15. I have never received paid maternity leave, in fact I was not offered any type of maternity leave until I had my youngest child (this was unpaid). During the times I was pregnant, I worked in private industries under a clerical/admin award. After each pregnancy, I was employed mainly in the hospitality industry, as I needed to return to work about 4-6 weeks after the birth of each child, for obvious financial reasons, but could not afford childcare so I opted to work nights and weekends when my partner would be at home. It was extremely difficult to juggle caring for small babies and working but I really had no choice. It also meant that my partner and I were like ships passing in the night for many years.

I also believe that not having the option of maternity leave was extremely detrimental to my career, as I was constantly changing jobs and always going sideways career wise to earn an income while suiting the needs of a young family. It is only in the last few years that I have had permanent employment, giving me the benefits of sick & holiday leave, something I really appreciate after years of being a casual employee. At 46, I am finally making my mark in the workplace.

If all women had access to paid maternity leave, productivity and stability in the workplace would increase significantly, and also give women the opportunity to move through the ranks at a much steadier pace. Paid maternity leave would allow parents to enjoy the first important months of their child's life, which goes all too quickly.

...

I undertook the care of my two stepsons when they were six and four years old, therefore I had no maternity, much less, paid leave. So it is without any axe to grind that I am totally committed to the support of adequate paid maternity leave. Babies are a precious commodity vital to our future and those who bear and nurture them deserve socio-economic support.

...

Paid maternity leave is vital for the well being of babies, woman and all families

...

Women should be entitled to paid maternity leave. These children deserve to have their mother care for them in the first 6 months of their lives. As a mothercraft nurse I care for these children and see what the parents are missing out on. This is a vital time for these children.

...

My opinion is not based on my profession or education experiences, but rather on my priorities as a young woman who hopes to have a family of her own some day.

I am a 24 year old woman. I graduated from my law school with honours. I also have a degree in Psychology and I am currently completing a post-graduate diploma in IR and HR whilst working full-time as a solicitor in my third year.

My career choices and aspirations are largely shaped by my long-term goal of being a mother. In developing a strategy to achieve this goal, these are the questions that I ask myself:

- how can I accumulate enough wealth to ensure that I sustain myself and my family when am unable to work myself;
- how can I find a job that provides paid maternity leave;
- what sacrifices will I have to make to my career goals and aspirations in order to obtain such a job;
- can I find a job with a level of work intensity that provides a liveable balance between work and family;
- how can I ensure that my children get the best opportunities in life without surrendering my own.

These are the questions that career driven women must ask themselves if they want to have a family. We must be realistic and make sacrifices, because, for most women, the goal of having a successful career is not compatible with having a successful family.

The reality is that these are choices that men rarely have to make when planning and pursuing their professional careers. Offering paid maternity leave will help create a cultural shift by placing value on the unpaid work that women do as mothers.

...

Not having this is ridiculous for a developed country in the 21st century. There are all kinds of good reasons for having it but not having it just makes us look stupid. It makes us look dumb. Clever rest of the developed world and silly Australia.

...

Paid maternity leave should be a given in this day and age.

...

I'm a woman finishing a PhD at the age of 31. I am terrified of the demands on me to have a family, yet simultaneously fight for a full-time job. I don't even think I can afford to have a family, ever. Right now I need to compete with all the men who are also highly educated. If I ever want equality in the workforce, I will need to be working constantly through my 30s. How do babies fit into this picture? If paid maternity leave was a standard and expected aspect of full-time work, then perhaps I could consider pregnancy. But, right now, especially with high housing, food and fuel costs, I fear I will never have the freedom to have children.

...

Even in a larger company we do not have paid maternity leave — it is long overdue as raising children, citizens of the world in a safe, financially secure environment is paramount. Lucky for me I was able to return to work after unpaid maternity leave for which I was grateful, however, I also needed to return to work because as a single mother I was unable to afford to buy nappies in the time off from work. Pay us to do our job!

...

I was one of the lucky women. I did receive 12 weeks' paid maternity leave back in the early eighties. I am shocked to read the present day statistics and see how Australia has not rectified this inequality and indeed has gone backwards in its treatment of women. The comparisons with paid leave in other countries is yet another reason for us to feel ashamed. It is hard enough for young people today to cope with the constantly rising costs of study, transport and accommodation, let alone if they aspire to own a home. Fourteen weeks paid maternity leave is the right of every woman. My story unlike other stories had a good ending because after my leave, I did go back to my job for a further twenty plus years of a highly productive and most satisfying career as a teacher and parent. Surely this is the story Australia wants for all their women workers.

Paid maternity leave for all women is long overdue and I wholeheartedly recommend the commission to act positively on our behalf.

...

It is an utter outrage that we do not yet have a state funded system of paid maternity leave. Isn't it enough that women on average earn 1/3 less than men and that women are most likely to end up with the children when a relationship breaks down? Not to mention that under the welfare to work legislation single mothers are subject to an uncaring welfare system that provides them with a meagre income and expects them to jump through hoops to gain employment which is often casualised and low paid and place their children in childcare.

Women with children also make up a substantial number of those presenting at homelessness services (see the latest SAAP NDCA reports). And then there is Duncan Ironmonger's work that shows that women do the majority of unpaid work. And then there's the interrupted career paths women experience from having time off to have a baby.

Women are often faced with difficult choices about returning to work — weighing up the costs of childcare, against their income and more importantly between giving themselves a much needed break from childrearing and being able to spend the time they want and need to with their children. Decisions about when to stop breast feeding shouldn't be made based on when you'll run out of money — they should be based on what is best for mother and child!

Talk about doing it tough! Its time society started valuing women's essential contribution to society and the economy! I'm sick of living in a culture where women are forced into poverty and dependence on men — who aren't always dependable — in order to bring children into this world. It's disgusting, sexist and wrong. Paid maternity leave isn't outrageous! It shouldn't be left to employers to do — especially given the gendered nature of participation in the labour market. Other countries manage it — there are no more excuses! Get it done! And take us all one step closer to a women and child friendly society.

...

At 29, I am still a casual worker in my chosen profession — university lecturing. Both I and my partner know that our current desire to have children must be delayed for at least five years, so that I can be in reliable work with maternity leave. This will put me at the upper limits of safe age for conception, limiting the number and health of children that we may have. If Australia wants to address our ageing population, then paid maternity leave, parental leave and adequate childcare systems must be put in place now!

...

It is a shame that in countries like Central America, the working women get the maternity leaves paid and in Australia not. El Salvador in spite of their corrupted Government women got this right.

...

I am a 26 year old woman who has just entered the professional workforce after completing my academic studies. My partner and I do not currently have children, but fear that when the time comes to begin a family we simply will not have enough income to make ends meet, let alone give our children any extras such as family holidays.

This situation would see me forced back into part-time work within the first year of a child, a situation that is no-win as this will mean we will be paying childcare costs at best case slightly less than what the part-time income generates.

Regardless of this economic cost, I would not want to be separated from our child within the first year. Academic Anne Manne in her insightful Quarterly Essay (Issue 29 Love & Money: The Family and the Free Market) highlights studies where children that enter childcare from an early age show irreversible signs of separation anxiety. Childcare is not a choice I would wish to take, therefore 12 month paid maternity leave is a better option — not the assumption that all professional women cannot wait to get back to work.

Please consider this submission and many other points Anne Manne puts forward far more eloquently in the most recent issue of Quarterly Essay.

...

I am a teacher and received paid maternity leave in the 1990s. This enabled me to take care of myself and my children without a big financial burden. Parents with small children generally have financial concerns if they choose not to work and to take care of their children at home. The special time around the birth is not a time for families to feel financial pressures. Instead they need to be able to focus on the life of a new child and on creating a stable family environment.

I am appalled to think that women and families do still not have an automatic right to paid maternity leave. To have strong families, mothers and environments for small children and babies is vital to healthy communities and paid maternity leave is a step towards ensuring this.

Please ensure that the voices of women and families are considered. At present, working life seems to take so much time — far more than a 40 hour week — and the imbalance against work necessary to provide for a family needs to be

addressed. Paid maternity leave should be a right and life/work balances should be a national priority.

In conclusion, I would like to add that my partner was unable to take leave and that my return to work at the same workplace was also very important for stability and support .

...

I am lucky enough to be employed ... and have a 14 week fully paid/28 week half pay entitlement. Whilst it was a struggle to survive on half pay, that 7 months meant that I could fully breast feed my son for 6 months — a practice highly favoured in public health circles.

I also would have had no chance of getting childcare in less time — I signed up for childcare when I was only 10 weeks pregnant and couldn't get a place for him until he was 8 months old (I ended up having to take an extra month of rec leave to manage the problem.)

Without paid maternity leave, I would not have been able to manage. I consider my son is much better off — both in terms of the health benefits associated with breast feeding and in the care that he received from me when he was so young and vulnerable.

...

When I had my only child in 1989, I was lucky to be a lecturer. Because I thought my job required it, and because I had the support of my mother in caring for my new-born son, I took only six weeks' leave and returned to work. I was able to do this too because as a lecturer my working times were flexible: it was up to me when I was in the office, although actual teaching times (about eight hours a week) were fixed. Still, the first year after my son's birth were very demanding, and the whole family — my husband, mother and myself were under a lot of stress. I hated having to leave my son to go to work, even though I was lucky in being able to spend quite a lot of time at home with him, while I prepared my classes and generally kept up with the demands of the job at home. I don't think we could have survived without the advantages of my kind of work and much help from my husband and mother.

I was surprised and dismayed to learn that, unlike the women in most other OECD countries, many Australian women don't have paid maternity leave as a legal right — I always understood that the university made such leave available because it was legally obliged to. I now realise that other employers are not legally obliged to give paid maternity leave to their staff.



I don't see therefore how women in the retail and hospitality industries can retain their jobs during the first years after they become mothers. This must place them at a great disadvantage in their ongoing careers, and also at a financial disadvantage. Earning your own money, rather than being kept by a partner is basic to adult self respect.

I therefore urge that a statutory paid maternity leave scheme be put in place, to cover casual women employees, and the two-thirds of Australian women who have no paid maternity leave.

...

While it is necessary that intelligent women be encouraged to have children, it is not a case of children at any cost. Responsible parenting is the important issue here. Keep in mind that small businesses are financially unable to offer what is being asked for. Payment would have to be provided by the government.

...

I am an Australian Citizen pregnant with my second child. My first child was born in the UK where I was supported with statutory state-funded maternity pay, topped up by my employer who provided four months fully paid leave. In total I took six months paid leave.

It made an enormous difference to our family that we didn't have to worry about money while I was home looking after our baby. I was able to exclusively breastfeed, which is so important for the health and well-being of babies.

Things are very different now that we are back in Australia. I am self-employed and will have no income during the last stages of my pregnancy and until the baby is ready to go into child care.

This makes me feel that my skills in the work place and my importance as a mother in raising a baby are not valued. I am currently working as a consultant in the community sector but am considering lower paid, less skilled work in order to maintain time with my baby. This is a loss to me but also to the economy surely?

My sister, who works in a factory in SA is putting off having a baby as she simply cannot afford it. The baby bonus in no way makes up for lost income for mothers who elect to stay at home.

It would be an enormous step forward if the Commission was to recommend paid maternity leave for all.

...

My children are 25, 26 and 27 years old. I left 6 weeks prior to delivery and returned to work 6 weeks after the 2nd and 3rd child was born and two months after the first child was born in which time I did training for a job I was transferring to. I had to express milk in a change room on those days to ease the pain of milk coming in. There were no fridges available to put the milk in so it was wasted. With my second and third babies I worked evening shift and if it was particularly busy in the emergency department I would be late getting home to breastfeed them. They were all poor sleepers up to the age of 2 and I was exhausted caring for three babies/toddlers under three and working irregular hours and always longer than my allotted shift. My maternity leave was paid but was limited and meant that I really needed to return to work quickly to help make ends meet. For such an important issue why don't we have paid maternity/paternity leave for all workers by now?

...

I am a mother of two, and back in the workforce. I did not have access to paid maternity leave when I had my first child and I still do not have it. It is important to me to breastfeed my children for as long as I can (12 months is ideal, I breastfed each for at least 6 months) and this is not possible if you have to return to work immediately. This is such an important way to ensure equality, to fight the obesity epidemic and to encourage more productivity from women in the workforce.

...

When I had my second child (1978) I was working for the NSW government which at that time allowed a period of full-time, unpaid maternity leave. I was the principal wage-earner in the family although my husband also worked full-time. Not only was this financially difficult, but my supervisor put considerable pressure on me to return to work after 3 months. Paid maternity leave would have allowed me a reasonable period of time to devote to family life without worrying about how we were going to pay our bills on less than half our normal income but I would have been better placed to tell my supervisor to get lost.

...

With Australia and the USA the only 2 OECD countries without paid maternity leave, it's long overdue. I respect women who may choose not to have children, but this is about supporting children (the workers and taxpayers of the future) and facilitating breastfeeding which is so important to baby's short and long-term health.

...

I have no children of my own. However I work in education and I believe it is a vital building block in a child's development to have parental love and care in the early stages of life. Australian families should be provided with as many incentives to produce healthy families. We are an ageing population — we need more young ones to support the nation. As a baby boomer I particularly want to know that there will be plenty of young workers around to support the infrastructure necessary to maintain my standard of living.

...

I am a childless professional woman. I support paid maternity leave. For that matter, I support paid paternity leave as well — I would dearly like to see new children have the benefit of having both parents (of whatever gender and combination of such) present for those vital first days. When I am old and frail, I want those who care for me to have been raised in a family positive environment — my desire for paid maternity leave is selfish. I know that it will benefit me, personally, in the long term.

I support paid maternity leave — women who go without it gather less superannuation, which directly discriminates against them once they are aged. Poverty amongst the aged is a burden on society, let alone a desperate circumstance for purely moral and ethical reasons. I want to live in a world where my child-having friends are cared for once they, too, are elderly.

I support government funded maternity leave — my taxes already pay for treatment for the poor and sick, because that helps the society I live in function more equitably. I do not want to live in a society where someone has the choice between losing their job or caring for their child. The happier people are around me, the better off I am. I do not want to see employers discriminated against, so I believe this should come from taxation. I am willing to pay in order to live in what is, essentially, a first world utopia for someone of my class — and I would pay to extend that utopia to others. The sacrifices previous Australians have made for me mean that I, a woman in my thirties, have good teeth, can see, can work, can receive prompt medical treatment, can enjoy entertainment. I am quite prepared to make similar sacrifices for others.

As a woman, I benefit indirectly from the gains of other women. I do not need to have children myself to want to support this — I only need to live in a country that has it. I ask that paternity leave also be considered, to help inhibit discrimination against women, and to ensure that the role of male parents, be they single, in a family, straight or queer, also be respected.

...

I had access to paid maternity leave and this meant that I could stay in my profession much easier. My profession is very competitive to enter, and once you are in, you really need to stay involved to maintain your skills. I think that the last thing families need at the time of birth is to be thrown into financial instability, and women in professions need to be able to maintain their professional equipment and workplace connections, all which would be severely challenged with no income. It is extraordinary to think that a woman giving birth in Australia can be on no pay, but a man can be at home on sick leave with a hangover. This should just be a normal condition of employing human beings, and I'm not quite convinced that the Government needs to support employers, or that women should have to pay into some kind of insurance fund to fund maternity leave. I had 12 weeks leave, which was manageable as my location and location of childcare made it possible to work and continue breastfeeding for long after the maternity leave finished. Access to quality childcare is just as important a policy area. There are other factors on return to work after maternity leave to do with breastfeeding and work conditions — ie if there are work-based travel requirements, they should be compatible and practical with the needs of early parenthood. As for the timing of the return to work — why don't we give more consideration to child development in this area? Staying home for 2 years, then going back to work is a big change for a toddler to cope with. As a 4 year old I remember being really traumatised when my mother went to part-time work for half a day, after being home with her full-time. We chose to go to a daycare centre with our children being 4 - 6 months old, so they became as accustomed to the centre as home. There were never traumas of separation, and I never had any qualms about leaving them as they had such a good time there and were well looked after. We bonded with other families, and recently at our oldest child's 21st, there were several Daycare families there, and the young women had met while in nappies! What has this to do with Maternity Leave — well, I guess that I support women returning to work within 8 months after giving birth, in the best interests of the continuity of life for their child. I am also aware of women in rural areas like my cousin, who would like to return to work but there is no childcare available, so maybe the leave needs to be extended in that situation or greater thought given to that area. From a biological perspective, I understand that paid maternity leave contributes to fewer maternal and infant deaths. Certainly with more than one child, we had ongoing commitments to maintain a place in daycare for the first child, which we could not have done without paid maternity leave, also. We had no help with our first 2 children and daycare cost more than the mortgage (at the time when it was at 17.5 %!) but our kids were more precious than the house, and we were content with the childhood they had, combining home with day care. I applaud the decisions to support childcare relief for working families, and strongly encourage 12 weeks (or slightly more, but not much more) paid maternity leave for all women. There should also be the ability of women who have twins or more to have

longer maternity leaves also. I think that this needs to be in with superannuation, sick leave, LSL, as a basic provision, and not fall under welfare or insurance policy areas. It is part of civilised employment policies, and is in the best interests of society as a whole.

...

I am fortunate to have the benefit of paid maternity leave at my work for 14 weeks. However, to allow my baby to have the full benefit of breastfeeding for 6 months as recommended by the World Health Organisation I had to take off 28 weeks at half pay which put a lot of financial strain on my family. Breastfeeding in the first six months of a child's life is important for the health and development of our babies and the Australian Government should be promoting this by offering women 6 months paid maternity leave. The paid maternity leave for 6 months would also help to assist with the strain on the child care sector as women would not be required to return to work after only having a short time off of work.

...

When my now two year old son was born, I was working for a community legal centre and was eligible (only just) for nine weeks paid maternity leave. I say 'only just' as I had only been with the organisation for just on 12 months when I started my maternity leave — ten days before he was born. I had intended to take 9 months off work but as my husband was made redundant two months after the birth of our son, I was fortunate to be able to make arrangements to work from home from the time he was 4 months old as financial stress started to take its toll. I then returned to the office when my son was only 7 months old and put him in childcare close to the office. This was definitely not what I wanted to do and I was filled with guilt about having to make that decision. Having to commute to Sydney each day with my son in the car, made the situation worse and if I had a choice I would not have done it, but financial concerns were burgeoning. I would have preferred to have more time at home with my son as the early years are so formative and I feel that it is very important for their sense of security and bonding to be with their mother or father. It is very unnatural for them not to be with their mother at this early time in their lives. Prior to my son's birth (he is my only child), I believed that it was possible to have both a career and a child and be successful at both. Now I am a mother and I have tried to be 'superwoman', I now no longer believe that. After a mental breakdown I decided not to pursue the career path I was heading down and have now taken a much easier and less stressful job so that I can focus more on my child.

...

Children need their mothers to care for them for the early part of their lives in order to give them the best possible start in life. My experience tells me that something like six months would be the ideal but at least less start with several weeks. Why do we, a wealthy country, have so little concern about the country's future potential and lack insight into the trauma that women experience right after a momentous happening such as child birth by having to leave their child to be cared for by others? As a teacher in the UK I was lucky enough to have maternity leave as a right in 1969. Surely if it was possible in 1969 why isn't it happening here now? Are our children less important? Are our working mothers less necessary to the economy? Are we a poor country that has not the where-with-all to fund maternity leave? Don't we want to have the best well adjusted children for the future potential of Australia? Maternity leave is not some sort of holiday for a section of the population but a psychological boost for the nation's health.

...

I am one of the lucky women in a professional position, as an academic at a University. I took my paid maternity leave (14 weeks) with both of my two children (27 months and 8 months) and returned to work, at 80% after my first child then full time after my second. My husband went part time for 6 months after our first child was born to stay with her while I was at work. He had no access to any paid leave at all after they were born, despite working in the NSW public sector. I actually worked a good portion of my maternity leave anyway, both times, when they were asleep or with my husband. My first child was not in care at all until she was 12 months old, but we had to put the second one in care much earlier, as my husband felt he could not go part-time again due to negative attitudes he encountered when he did the first time. We couldn't have managed without my paid maternity leave. Mine is the main income and the more flexible job, so much more compatible with raising children. We couldn't risk a negative impact on my position, and had to pay to keep our older child's care position while I was on leave, regardless of whether I actually put her in care anyway. The best thing I have access to on top of paid maternity leave is a maternity leave grant of equivalent to approx. 12 weeks salary, which I can use to pay for care or other approved things to assist my return to work. This has made an early return to work much more affordable — I doubt we could have done it without this; I would have needed to take more leave (part of me wishes I had!!). I do not know how families without access to paid maternity leave manage. I could entirely understand why many would simply choose to leave their jobs, and risk whether or not they could find anything later, when their skills are likely outdated or they are overtaken by others coming up behind them. the reality is that the country needs babies to be born, and raising them is not easy! Parents take on at least 18 years (and probably more now) of financial responsibility for raising and educating children, who will one day work and pay taxes to support our aging population. Our economy cannot afford not to have paid maternity leave. Why

make it even harder for women to financially manage having a child, let alone all the time, emotion and strength invested in raising happy, healthy children? Fathers should also get at least a week paid leave after a child is born, to encourage early involvement and bonding, and to care for older children during a period of significant disruption to their lives. The one reservation that I have is that I wouldn't want to see employers refusing to put women into appropriate positions in fear they may end up having to provide them with paid leave. I would not want to see an increased casualisation of the workforce in particular.

...

It is a matter of parity of conditions. Women already have a hard deal in terms of being the primary carer even though they hold jobs. /this has an impact on their benefits for the rest of their lives. At least let's address this basic right.

...

The cost of working women on maternity leave should be shared by the whole country. We cannot expect small businesses to carry this cost in the same way as large businesses. If we care about the next generation and their care within the family, all women must have access to paid maternity leave.

...

I'm 30 years old and would love to start a family in the next couple of years but at present, without paid maternity leave, having a child any time soon is financially impossible for us. Working in a male dominated industry as a stevedore worker, something like paid maternity leave is not a priority for majority of the workforce. I have been disadvantaged in my workplace for being a female since I started at 17, 12 years ago, and unpaid maternity leave is just another unfair issue women have to deal with. Its time for change.

...

This is an important item for people. I have a friend who has it but his wife doesn't this is unfair that a mother doesn't have time at an early age with her children

...

The organisation that I work for gives women paid maternity leave. Chatting to women who have had babies and taken the paid maternity leave I have learnt how important the time off work was to them and how great the assistance of having paid maternity leave was to them. Give Australian working women a fair go and the ability to be Australian working mothers.

...

I come from the dark ages. I left work for the birth of my oldest child in 1960 when as a young mother in what was then an outer suburb, there was no reliable child care and no as right maternity leave. paid or unpaid, for persons employed in the private sector. This meant that my return to the work force was almost impossible until my children were of school age and I undertook expensive retraining. I believe that these limitations on the position of women in the workforce are very long overdue for removal.

...

I strongly disagree with the idea of government funded maternity leave. In this day and age, having a baby is totally a life style choice, a choice that should be made after giving thorough and all due thought to the consequences of having a baby. Bringing children into this world is not a given right as most people may think, but a privilege that should not be taken lightly. If people wish to bring children into this world as their privilege says they can, I believe that they must be able to take care of these same children by themselves and not think that they can rely on government (taxpayer) sponsorship.

Of course there will always be the under privileged that get caught out or circumstances may change for others who do require assistance but the government is already helping these people out through various tax payer funded schemes.

The government (taxpayers) of this country already carry a huge burden without contributing further to it by people who think it is their right to have children and then think that they should receive taxpayer assistance.

If employees can arrange with their employers through various agreements or awards for maternity leave as part of their entitlements, then I fully agree with this and believe that this is the only way to go. It maybe needed that the government forms legislation to ensure that employers and companies take this on board.

Therefore I urge that a lot of thought be given before everyone gives in to warm fuzzy feelings and that the Productivity Commission does not recommend that the government (tax payers) fund any paid maternity leave scheme.

...

I have two children aged 4 and 7. I was in the extremely fortunate position of having access to paid maternity leave. I am incredibly grateful to my employer for this benefit and I have consciously worked hard to demonstrate my appreciation for this paid leave. My partner observed that we would not have



been able to have children without this financial support. He is a casual employee with no access to parental leave and my income is our primary income.

My experience is as one of "lucky ones" however, I want to urge the Productivity Commission to consider my story in light of the following:

- We would not have been able to afford the loss of my income to have children had this leave not been available, therefore we probably would have delayed having children until our circumstances changed or such paid leave was provided,
- I returned to work five months after the birth of both children. I felt compelled to repay my sense of gratitude to my employer for the assistance they had provided me by working hard thus contributing productively to the Australian economy,
- My employer also provided a private room in which to express breast milk. This enabled me to breastfeed both of my children until they were 15 months old,
- My employer also provided access to flexible hours. I am currently working four full days. Many others in my workplace work a range of hours to accommodate their caring commitments. My assessment is that this understanding by our employer is repaid in loyalty and commitment.

I see enormous benefit to Australian society by providing access to a universal system of paid maternity leave because it will:

1. Assist couples in having children
2. Encourage workforce participation
3. Allow time for Mums to establish a bond with their newborn and to breastfeed.

...

I have not yet had any children of my own due to the fact that I would not be able to afford it and I do not want to put my baby into childcare from such a young age. I like so many other women would love to spend at least the first year of our children's lives at home with them, they are only babies once and you don't want to miss out on any new things they do. I think all employers should offer a minimum of 3 months paid maternity leave with the option of 6 months at half pay, and one year unpaid maternity leave. If the government are wanting more women to have children then they need to help us financially...

...

It is shameful that for most Australian women paid maternity leave is still only a dream. It is strange to consider that 23 years ago when I was having my babies a mere handful of women had access to paid mat leave, and that has really not changed significantly.

I have no problem with women who have less than 12 month service not being eligible — I do think that if you expect special benefits from employers, they in turn are entitled to expect loyalty from their staff. Certainly casual employees who have been 12 months or more with the same employer should also be eligible to reap these benefits.

Paid maternity leave would also go a long way towards increasing the number of births in this country without the baby bonus handout that most voters feel just encourages young unwed girls to have babies without thought for the future in order to receive a nice cash payout. Paying maternity leave gives contributing members of society choices that they currently don't have, and would be far more morally sensible than the simple cash bonus to increase the population. Furthermore, it gives employers more opportunity to retain their trained and skilled staff if the payments are tied to a minimum period of return to work.

I wish these schemes had been available to me.

...

As a teacher in South Australia with no paid maternity leave, I was forced to use up all of my long service leave. Men I know went off on holidays. Unfair.

...

Come on. Are these the dark ages? Girlfriends in the U.K fell over backwards when I told them we don't have across the board paid maternity leave in Australia. It's beyond a joke. I am currently 35 and childless. I would like to have a baby but am afraid that if I stop work:

- 1: I can't afford to support my self and my child
- 2: There's no guarantee I'll get my old job back.

Please implement a paid maternity scheme. It's time. It's past time actually.

...

Any society that doesn't honour and support its newborn children and do everything possible to provide a secure and strong start to that infant's life is doomed to encounter deep and intractable social problems in the later life of that child.

Please establish legislation and adequate financial backup to provide universal paid maternity leave for mothers with newborn infants so that quality time at home before work commitments impose on that early critical nurturing period is assured.

Breastfeeding is recommended by the World Health Organisation as the optimum feeding regime for the first six months of that infant's life. In order to gain the maximum health and well-being of both mother and child, a clever diet needs to be set up even in these early months. Paid maternity leave would facilitate this WHO recommendation. In light of the endemic health issues of obesity and diabetes currently plaguing Australia, breastfeeding should be a government priority. Herein lies another sound reason for securing paid maternity leave.

...

Let's support parents so they can get on with the job of supporting their kids to become whole, healthy and strong, for Australia's future. A one-time hand out is appreciated, but it doesn't get many new families very far. What is even more valuable is time. Paid maternity leave ensures families have the time to be present for the precious first months of their babies' lives. Paid maternity leave can also help alleviate the child care crisis. More spaces will be available when more parents can afford to stay home instead of putting their kids in care so they can afford to live.

...

Without a Federal Government funded paid maternity scheme my partner and I will find it very difficult to manage when she takes time off work to have children. Time is running out for us, we have tried IVF three times unsuccessfully. She works for a privately owned building company that has no maternity leave scheme whatsoever. So if she is to take time off it will be unpaid as we have used all our annual leave on IVF appointments and treatments. I am a 29 year old 2nd year apprentice who only earns \$320 per week. We made the hard decision for me to start a trade so I can start my own business which will hopefully give us more financial freedom so she can take time off work to have children. But we are running out of time, we are both worried that by the time a scheme is up and running, that's if one is created, we will have lost our opportunity to have kids due to our infertility problem. I beg the Labor government to please give full consideration to setting up a scheme that will give people support and more importantly for all Australians, allow this great nation to grow and give EVERYONE the opportunity to have children.

...

At least 12 weeks paid maternity leave is a woman's/family's basic right that will benefit individuals, families and society in general. It is the government's responsibility to ensure that all Australian women have this right and not to leave it to employers and employees to negotiate. Women with weak bargaining powers need to be protected by statutory paid maternity leave.

...

I am not a mother. I've never been pregnant. But in this day and age, where we are begging people to join our workforce in Australia and we are begging migrants to come and help keep our economy going by working, why are we still not ensuring that some of the most productive members of our own community (our women) are supported whilst away with a baby to ensure that they return to work, without experiencing hardship and the cumulative effects of this hardship eg depression etc (which add even larger costs to the system). I don't get it!

...

1. The idea that Australia lags behind smaller economies in providing appropriate levels of paid maternity is unacceptable to the Australian People and the female half of the workforce and their partners.
2. Men are parents too and should be considered equally in an egalitarian society.
3. I can only hang my head that we rank with the USA on paucity of this provision. it isn't an acceptable outcome in the 21st Century and needs to be changed for all of the reasons discussed in other submission, not least of all because it provides an ultimate saving for business.

...

I strongly believe that paid maternity/paternity should be available as a choice for all women/parents, whether they are in a casual, permanent, full-time, or part-time positions of employment. Cost of living, mortgages etc have increased so much that most households rely on 2 incomes, therefore when a baby comes along if there is no paid maternity/paternity leave available women/parents are returning to work before they are really ready and before their baby is really ready to be left in care. There has been a lot of research recently about the increase of incidents of behavioural disorders, anxiety disorders etc. one theory is that children being placed in day care situations at young vulnerable age are missing out on a calm, stable environment in those crucial, early developmental stages and instead of having time (that paid maternity/paternity leave would allow) bonding with mum/dad they are being rushed out the door early every morning to an uncertain environment that may or may not suit them. Our government should recognise the importance of

promoting the importance of hands-on parenting from birth by supporting a funded paid maternity/paternity scheme for all employees.

...

It took me 5 years to have my first baby and I had no paid maternity leave .I had a second baby 2 years later and had no paid maternity leave. Within those four years of child rearing and going back to work full time after 22 months of unpaid leave, my husband had 16 operations for an illness which has stabilised in the last two years. And he had no paid paternal leave either. So had I been on paid maternity leave, I might have been able to pay the 16 anaesthetists bills and the 16 pathology tests and 16 prescription medication, without worrying how I was going to do it. So if you are going to pay maternity leave, make sure there is no means test and you give those first mums a whole year paid leave and the experienced mummies who have a child under two as well as their second baby on the way, two years paid leave!!!!

...

In this day and age it should be mandatory that families are entitled to paid maternity leave. If I had this option I would not have had to return back to work when my son was only 3 months — a critical time of mother to child bonding. We had carefully planned the pregnancy so that we would be financially stable, however my husband became retrenched and we had no other option but for me to return to work to support our family.

...

While I am pleased to hear of the remodelling of the baby bonus in yesterday's budget, it still bothers me to think that as an advanced economy we are still so far behind our peers when it comes to support for new parents.

I would like to see a real payment to assist new parents — one that makes it affordable for the mother or the father to take time off work for a few months without putting their job at risk. While supplementation is good, a payment that is truly a living wage would serve much better at a time when a new life places such high demands on the family unit and the household budget.

Maybe if we start getting it right in the beginning, the foundation to a more stable and supportive life for young ones will be stronger, which could cost our community far less in the long run.

...

Adequate maternity leave is essential to any affluent and enlightened society and long overdue in Australia.

...

Paid maternity leave in today's world is a must. If we want families to live and survive, then both parents must work. Giving a little respite to working mothers before, during and after the birth of a child is an essential part of this work regime. We as a nation can afford it, and if we don't invest in the proper infrastructure for our future generations through such programs we are denying the very best opportunities for them.

We should have paid maternity leave for all now.

...

I am totally against this, besides the fact that I have never received any government support for my children and both were sick and required medical and surgical interventions, we have always paid for health insurance, always worked and paid tax and often had to make do with very little, it was our choice to have children whatever the challenges. It seems to be that the people who don't pull their weight in our society keep being rewarded. Yes this would benefit some people who deserve a break but on the whole it would add further burden to the average person trying to get ahead and save for retirement. Children are important to our society however we need people to have children for the right reason, not for just another way of getting money. I agree to paid maternity leave which I didn't get but not at the expense of the entire population and as for both parents receiving paid leave wouldn't it be nice but like everyone else plan your holidays and take it then. There has to be a better way. Don't do it!

...

Early investment in the wellbeing of our future citizens is just plain good economics. 'Prevention is better than cure'. Young children with supported, confident mothers, who are able to care for them properly leads to confident, effective adults. The first year of life is critical. Babies need the main important other with them 24/7, and a woman's body takes a year to recover from the major task of childbirth. From a mother of 5.

...

There are too many women who are being forced back to work because they can't afford to stay away from work. This means that mothers are pulled away from their babies at an early age, they are unable to spend that quality time; the babies have to be put into childcare and mums have to go back to work. Child care is also not cheap, so effectively, if a mother chooses to take maternity leave at half pay, spend the time at home with her baby before she is forced to

go back to work, more money is saved all round. It makes sense to bring back paid maternity and for employers to have to pay it.

...

I work for the public service (in the public hospital system), and as such I am lucky enough to have an award which gives me 10 weeks paid maternity leave. This is still not very long in the scheme of things. My husband and I are currently trying to have a baby. We have had to wait much longer to start a family than we would have liked because I have had to wait until I qualified for long-service leave so I would have sufficient paid leave to afford to get pregnant. As I earn more than my husband, we can not afford our mortgage if I do not have at least some income coming in during the 12 months I would like to have off work. I think this is a common problem for more families now, as many women are earning more than their spouse and so feel great pressure to return to work much more quickly than they would like. Unless they are given at least some entitlement to paid maternity leave more mothers will need to return to work while their children are still small infants.

...

Paid maternity leave from NSW DET in the 70s and 80s meant I could return to work when I wanted to, that I did not have to be concerned about income in the first vital weeks after the babies were born and that I had a guaranteed right of return to my job.

I would have thought by now that other parents in other occupations would long have had at least the basic minimalist rights that State and Commonwealth public servants had over 30 years ago to parental leave. Not so.

It seems that the pursuit of profit is far more important to many businesses than promoting the working conditions of the majority of their employees who are either parents or who are contemplating becoming parents.

30 years after my own kids were born, we should not still have to be having this conversation, but as is often the case with issues seen as "women's issues" eternal vigilance and the constant re-invention of the wheel are necessities.

So let's have a list of employers who demonstrate "best practice" in terms of their treatment of employees who are parents and carers, so that we as consumers can make informed choices as to who gets our business.

...

I support 14 weeks paid maternity leave because I believe that, given current demographic trends, women having babies is not just for their (& fathers) benefit but for the benefit of all Australians.

I also believe paid maternity leave should be introduced at the same time as means testing the baby bonus occurs.

...

It's a shame on Australia that paid maternity leave isn't the norm. It marginalises women even further. That we once had paid maternity leave and lost it, is even more of a shame. High time we had decent paid maternity leave. Babies need their mothers, and they need them to be well, not stressed about whether they can afford to be mothers. Having a nurturing parent is a necessity for a baby; it should not be considered a luxury!

...

I was fortunate, to a degree, when I had my children during the 70's & 80's, that I was able to take 12 months leave when each of my babies was born. However, only 12 weeks of this was paid by my employer — the remainder being leave without pay. My husband & I both had good salaries and we were fortunate to be able to afford this. There was no way that I could have returned to work under 12 months — I do feel for those women who must do so. After all, the body has been through 9 months of pregnancy followed by childbirth and of course once you leave hospital there are the late night feeds etc.

I realise that things aren't quite as demanding now due to the availability of disposable nappies and easier-to-wash baby clothing, something which in my day seemed to take so much time, and I am pleased to frequently see young women walking their babies out in the sunshine — a luxury and something which I feel is extremely beneficial to both mother & baby.

Once the return to work occurs there is that regimented lifestyle which goes hand-in-hand with working families. I hope this has been of some help to you in making your decision on paid maternity leave — something which I was extremely fortunate to be able to afford and I believe should be the right of all women regardless of socio economic status.

...

I am 32 and have a fulltime job where I don't have access to paid maternity leave. I am on an individual contract and certainly did not feel empowered to raise and press for paid maternity leave as an individual before even starting with an organisation. In addition to this, with individual contracts it is difficult to establish what other perceptions are regarding conditions and being able to jointly present a request such as paid maternity leave. There just aren't the consultative arrangements in place to address basic standards within



businesses, that really should be organisation wide and not different for different people, depending on their negotiations skills.

I would argue that without legislating and also setting in clauses to prevent claims from those who have already had children, businesses would find it difficult to implement such a scheme off their own back for fear of the impact and other compensation payments that might arise, due to this change, from people who did not have access to these arrangements when they had children.

Whilst a positive aspect of progress as a society is that I currently earn more money than my partner — the negative is that if we were to have children, as the key breadwinner of the family, I would seriously have to consider getting back to work ASAP and relying on annual and sick leave to spend as much time with my new born at a critical stage of bonding.

I am currently at a point where starting a family is a real consideration. Having said this a key determining factor in having children is not ‘are we ready to have a child?’ rather, ‘Can we afford to have a child?’.

...

When my wife and I decided to have children we had to decide whether to have children or not the reason being we needed to have the two wages to survive but there was no paid maternity leave to assist with the loss of income. However we decided to have children and try and deal with the loss of income. This made surviving on one income very difficult. While not relevant to paid maternity leave my wife had to stay home to mind the children and this lasted for around 18 years. We have never recovered from having to survive on one income and still do not own our own home. So if parents were to get paid maternity leave for 14 weeks it would go a long way to assisting parents of today and the future with the need to have 2 wages to survive in today’s world

...

I had worked as a store manager for two years when I got pregnant. I stopped working when I was 8 months pregnant as doing heavy lifting, moving boxes and unpacking merchandise for the shop, cleaning and standing on my feet for hours was too much. I asked about paid maternity leave and all I got was the promise that I would be given ‘a’ job if I returned within 12 months.

...

For the birth of my first child, I became voluntarily unemployed for a period of 18 months to be with my daughter. This greatly affected my career and savings; I did it because of my commitment to good parenting outcomes. It’s well established in developmental literature that early childhood is paramount to the

overall development of people. Staying home with my child, including her in daily activities, stimulating her interest and facilitating her relationships with others has clearly paid off in emotional and interactive terms.

I am about to have my second child, and I cannot afford to stay at home at all, and my wife will be at home for only a few months before having to return to work. This is lunacy. What exactly is it that we would be producing in a scant few years that is more important than a person?

...

It would be great if when my fiancé and I start having children, we wouldn't have to be forced out of our home because we'll be relying on one income. Paid maternity leave would lift a huge weight off our shoulders.

...

We're worried about an aging populations and yet we don't have paid maternity leave. No wonder so many women are choosing not to have children.

I strongly believe that we should also have forced paternity leave as they do in Norway. This would ensure that women are not discriminated against for the possibility that they might take maternity leave. It should be equal and fair. Having two parents around would also be better for early childhood development.

...

In The Netherlands where I was born do they have paid maternity leave and also some paid paternity leave as long as I can remember certainly more than 52 years so it is HIGH time that Australia grows up.

...

Australia and the United States are the only two OECD countries that do not offer paid maternity leave. This needs to be changed. Paid maternity should be a compulsory part of award pay and conditions. We are a first world country.

...

Paid maternity shouldn't be a luxury, it should be a given. It's a disgrace that Australia has no proper government controlled paid maternity leave. If you want intelligent, hard-working women to have children you're going to have to help them in real ways. Enabling women to have unpaid leave and cheaper access to childcare is a cop out — women need to have paid leave so that they are able to care for their own children for the first year of their lives at least.

...

I believe that Australia's lack of a paid maternity leave scheme leaves us behind and makes us less competitive internationally.

We need to find a way to ensure that the brilliant women who work in Australia don't leave the workforce permanently or don't re-enter the workforce at a lower position than they merit because they have taken maternity leave.

A paid maternity leave scheme would allow women to continue to provide for their families while caring for them. In this sense a paid maternity leave scheme is not solely an economically beneficial endeavour, but also ensures that Australian families are strong into the future.

...

We need more children for future productivity, so, let's get behind families to make the process work easier. Bring in maternity leave, child care, income supplements whatever and invest in our future.

...

It certainly would make things easier. When I had my first child, I had to resign!!

...

As a teacher in Melbourne's Western Suburbs I see that many families struggle with small children at home and no access to maternity leave. I contrast this to the family friendly environment that came from 12 months entitlement to maternity leave from my experience living for 12 years in Sweden. Parents can also claim paid leave, annually renewed for care of sick children. I also taught in Swedish schools. The family welfare support structures help create calmer school environments. A far higher number of Swedish women participate in the workforce and equality is on a totally different level than here. The effects of paid maternity leave are positive permeate the whole society. They even extend their policies to paternity leave so that men can share and understand the burden of childrearing and have the opportunity to better develop relationships with their children.

...

I would like to support the push for paid maternity leave for new parents. I was a single mother for much of my life (even though married to an alcoholic) and the care of my children was entirely up to me. If I had had, paid maternity leave

(as I have worked most of my life) this would have meant a more secure world for my children. Instead I had to leave jobs, depend on my husband who failed each time, and then get another job some time after my children were toddlers.

Its time Australia stopped following the example of the US, and just started being kinder and more sensible to its people. Maternity leave is an investment in our kids and our future as a nation. You know it makes sense, just do it!

...

I am originally from Fiji and have been a trade unionist for 34 years. Fiji had paid maternity leave of 84 working days for each confinement up to three in the early seventies. Fiji was and still is a third world country and I find it extremely difficult to know that Australia is so behind in industrial relations and social arena. Even your labour laws are draconian from a worker's point of view. I see Australian workers and their families falling behind year after year because they are not getting pay rises to keep up with escalating costs of ordinary living around them. The trade union movement needs to organise national protests against all these inequalities/shortcomings. Paid maternity leave should be provided by law.

...

My wife and I never had the option to get paid maternity leave, but we decided that one of us would stay home for the sake of raising our children in a secure, stable, loving environment. For some of the time that our three children were little we actually were so lucky to be able to have a share job, so we could share both privileges, of being with our children some days of the week, and of generating income on other days.

Back then it was still possible to survive on one income, something that has become a lot harder nowadays even when renting. However, also then we had to make a choice between doing what we believed was best for our children or following the 'Australian dream' of owning our own house. We decided in favour of our children. Paid maternity leave would have levelled up the opportunity for us to buy our own house as well as being at home for the children in those crucial early years and would have enabled us to have an investment for our retirement. It would in the long run have saved the welfare system a fair bit of money.

Our society has been socially significantly impoverished since the days that our children were little. All the more reason that we need to help children grow up in resilient ways, all the more reason for them to have the opportunity to have significant bonding times with mum and dad, not just during the weekends if they are lucky.

Our children are now teenagers, so my request to the commission regarding introducing paid maternity leave as found in most OECD countries is not for ourselves, but for those parents who follow after us, who are working hard to build a new generation of the Australia of our future.

...

Working women having a baby are contributing twice to the ongoing wealth of this nation. They bring our future in the form of populating the country and are working to produce part of our national production efforts. Whilst we should be supporting every mother those whom are working should not be disadvantaged by having a baby. Historically employers give very little unless they are legislatively required to do so. It is a shame that in Australia today 2/3rds of Australian working women have no paid maternity leave.

I support the position which would see:

A mother not in the paid workforce receive the government-funded maternity leave scheme of 14 weeks paid at federal minimum wage rates plus 9% superannuation.

This is a total payment of about \$569.11 gross per week or \$7,970.00 per annum including super. This amount is greater than the \$5,000 baby bonus but is however subject to income tax.

and Working women would be entitled to 14 weeks paid maternity leave on full ordinary time earnings with employers required to provide the top up amount.

For example, a working mother earning \$800.00 per week would be entitled to the \$569.00 per week government contribution (including super) plus an employer contribution of \$239.00, a total of \$808.00 per week.

...

I, personally, don't agree with longer paid maternity leave. My wife and I took the decision for her to leave the workforce and raise our children. She was very happy with this arrangement.

I think these agendas are driven by the people who consider children to be another box to be ticked and then dump their children into the child-minding "kennels".

Let's return to the days when children were looked after and raised with their parents morals/standards etc. not those of a child-care employee. This might result in fewer precocious feral kids in our society.

The community needs to look to more equitable "income-splitting" style of support for those parents who want to kick the trend outlined above.

The argument that women need to work for financial reasons is, I suspect, mostly specious. Most women I see in the workforce are there to maintain an extravagant lifestyle, new FWDs, boats etc., not from necessity.

...

We had four children who are mostly grown up and independent. Our youngest is at high school in year 11. For most of my working life, my wife, a registered nurse, did not do paid work. We scrambled through on a teachers salary and made it. We had a wood fuel stove in a fibro house. I consider that we were very fortunate, as I don't think I could repeat the exercise if I were starting out today. My wife at home was able to be fully involved in home making with our young ones. My wife is now doing part time nursing as I was forced to resign from the NSW DET school system through the efforts of a very unpleasant high school principal. I do some part time work in the private sector.

I'm sure that the commercial sector of our economy is very pleased to have both mothers and fathers working to provide their children with a family house [mortgage] and fair standard of living. Productivity is up at the expense of families. When visiting Sydney, seeing office workers in high rise office space at 7.00pm and 8.00pm at night is an astounding sight. Families must suffer. Commerce and industry seem to have won the 'game'. Men and women are working long hours to be absent parents who pay for expensive and scarce child care. Something is wrong. People should not be born to be modern forms of 'serfs' to the demands of commerce and industry.

I agree that the costs of child care could and should, come from government funds. Workplaces who insist that their key people work back late should then be asked to pay a levy to government for the provision of child care. This could start as a nominal amount, so as to lessen the uproar, and then be ramped up over time.

If our citizens don't have babies at the so called replacement level, [2.2] per couple, then Australia will need to place a huge emphasis on immigration, or instead become a geriatric village of almost continental proportions. In a modern, well resourced, middle order nation such as ours, there needs to be a better way.

...

I did not receive maternity leave as I fell pregnant soon after starting a new job. Because I had not been at the agency for over twelve months I received no

maternity leave and my employers did not have to keep my position open. My employee interviewed and hired another worker for my position before I had even left. My employer didn't even raise the subject with me but at the time I was heavily pregnant and felt embarrassed about the whole thing. Later when I had my baby I wondered if I would have felt better if I'd had that assurance of returning to a position that I had done before. I must admit the thought of interviewing for jobs again was difficult and I wondered if I would have the confidence. In the end I began a different position three years after the birth of my child. The main reason I returned to work was financial. It had been difficult on my partner's income alone and with the increases in interest rates things were getting even harder. I miss my daughter who is in day care three days a week and my older son is in after school care. Now that I have returned to work and both my children are in care we are all a lot more exhausted at the end of the week. Paid maternity leave may have meant that I could stay at home longer or at least lessen the pressure to return to work. Losing my income when I had children and feeling that I had lost my economic independence and equality with my partner contributed to my decision to not have anymore children. I think these years; having children, negotiating care for them and managing paid work will be the hardest years of my life.