

Women Lawyers Express Disappointment at Calls to Shelve Parental Leave Scheme

The Women Lawyers Association of NSW (WLANSW) is gravely disappointed and disturbed by reports the Federal Government may back down on its promise to introduce national Paid Parental Leave/Maternity Leave.

In September 2008 the Productivity Commission released a draft report recommending the Commonwealth fund a 20-week parental leave scheme in which working parents receive up to \$12,000 following the birth of a child. According to the commission, the proposal would cost the Commonwealth an extra \$450 million a year.

According to former WLANSW President and Chair of the WLA NSW Policy, Law Reform and Media Issues Subcommittee, Lee-May Saw, citing the current state of the economy as a justification for shelving the scheme is irrefutably inconsistent with the Government's current position on national policy.

"It is our firm view that this is a key example of the Government putting banks before families," Ms Saw stated.

On November 11 2008, the WLANSW, in conjunction with women lawyers associations around Australia, wrote to Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Opposition Leader Malcolm Turnbull urging the Government to follow through on its promise to introduce the scheme.

Later that month the WLANSW adopted the Australian Women Lawyers second submission to the Productivity Commission's *Paid Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave Inquiry*.

Recommendations outlined in the submission include:

- Redefine "paternity leave" to "supporting parent leave", to take into consideration same-sex couples.
- Paid parental leave should be shared or transferred. This will take into consideration women professionals commanding higher salaries than their partners, who wish to return to work while their partner is the primary caregiver;
- The scheme should provide a nationally consistent model for adoption leave; and
- That the Commission carefully considers whether the "global financial crisis" should delay the introduction of the scheme.

"Australia continues to be one of the only two OECD countries without a scheme of government-funded paid parental leave," the submission stated. "This is an embarrassing position for Australia to be in."

The Commission is scheduled to deliver its final report to the government in February 2009.

For more information on the Productivity Commission's Draft Report please visit:
<http://www.pc.gov.au/projects/inquiry/parentalsupport/draft/media-release>