



AEU Submission to the Australia 2020 Summit

Strengthening communities, supporting families and social inclusion'

The AEU sees the achievement of universal paid maternity leave in Australia as imperative.

This *Australia 2020 Summit* topic 'strengthening communities, supporting families and social inclusion' asks how families can be practically supported to combine work, raising children and caring for ageing parents. Industrial entitlements are essential in supporting families and particularly regarding paid maternity leave, because maintaining workforce attachment provides vital income stability.

The Government commitment to the Productivity Commission's current evaluation of national paid maternity leave options is commended. However this won't be finalised until February 2009, whereas the opportunity best exists now to implement a scheme linking to new basic entitlements created by the National Industrial Relations system, as a guarantee for working parents.

Any Australian paid maternity leave scheme should be based on ILO standards (in Convention 183 Maternity Protection, 2000), which provide for 14 weeks paid maternity leave. The ILO standard stipulates PML should:

- ensure a suitable standard of living (article 6, no.2);
- be "based on previous earnings, the amount of such benefits shall not be less than two-thirds of the woman's previous earnings" or an average resulting from calculations based on the woman's previous earnings (article 6, no.3);

- have its qualifying conditions (for paid leave) being satisfied by a large majority of women (article 6, n.5); and
- provide paid leave through compulsory social insurance or public funds, or in a manner determined by national law and practice (which may allow, by agreement, employers directly contributing to the cost) (article 6, n.8).

Australia should favour the provision of a minimum of 14 weeks maternity leave paid by the Government to all mothers, which includes compulsory superannuation continuing during the leave. However, in accordance with ILO considerations above, paid leave for working mothers should be based on previous earnings and therefore national PML models should also compel employers (whether through NES or Awards and Collective Agreements) to contribute, as a top up to a woman's replacement wages, and any additional period of paid leave so determined by the bargaining process.

Short of significant investment to reduce the cost and improve availability/quality of childcare, other essential assistance to working families is also industrially provided whether via bargaining or national employment standards. In a modern economy facing the challenge of an ageing population, its time workplaces become as flexible as working women have been forced to be. With the broadest access by employees to the following range of entitlements, the retention of parents in the workforce and culture change toward the equitable distribution of care amongst Australian men and women should be assured:

- leave options that acknowledge the diversity of family structures (including maternity leave, paternity leave, parenting leave, adoption leave, foster parent leave, carers' leave, cultural/ceremonial leave)
- the right to temporarily adjust hours and/or flexible start and finish times
- the right to move between part-time and full-time employment
- lactation breaks, including workplace policies on breastfeeding
- job share opportunities even in promoted positions