



WOMEN@WORK

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PAID PARENTAL LEAVE A RORT OR A RIGHT?

Prime Minister Tony Abbott recently announced drastic changes to the Commonwealth Paid Parental Leave Scheme (PPL), just months after ditching his election promise of six months' paid time off.

For those who read the fine print of the Coalition's pre-election policies, the parties did hint at ending "double dipping" for public servants – but not for private-sector employees.

However, this was to occur with the implementation of Abbott's "signature" PPL scheme of 26 weeks on full pay.

Australia's first national PPL scheme was introduced to Parliament by the Gillard Government and came into effect on 1 January 2011.

Both the Coalition and the Greens voted in support of the scheme, with Tony Abbott stating it did not go far enough, instead promising an upgrade to a minimum 26-week scheme on full pay if the Coalition won the following election.

The Greens supported a 26-week scheme and argued superannuation should be added.

Until February this year, Tony Abbott continued to champion the concept of a minimum six months PPL, stating in 2010 that women should have "26 weeks, which everyone knows is the minimum that should be spent at home by mothers with newborns".

However, this month Mr Abbott, the self-appointed Minister for Women, said of

parents who use both schemes to obtain 26 weeks' leave, "It is not right, it should not happen and it will not happen under this government."

Under fire in Parliamentary Question Time about his back-flipping on this election promise, he blamed unions for creating a situation whereby women could access both schemes.

Also under fire from Labor and the Greens were Tony Abbott's colleagues: Assistant Treasurer Josh Frydenberg and Finance Minister Mathias Cormann.

Both men are members of the six-member Expenditure Review Committee that recommended the changes.

When asked if their wives had recently accessed both the employer and Commonwealth schemes, Frydenberg conceded, "We accessed both schemes, as my wife is entitled to."

Cormann, who welcomed a child in 2013, refused to answer the question, stating it was personal, although his family "worked within the system at the time".

There are no women on the Expenditure Review Committee.

The change of tune has left diversity advocates baffled.

There was also no talk in the budget of improving workplace flexibility for working mums or older workers wishing to transition to retirement through part-time work.

TOP UP OR DOUBLE DIP?

The current Commonwealth PPL scheme

affords 18 weeks of paid leave at the federal minimum award rate.

This scheme was always designed to supplement existing employer-funded schemes to ensure a minimum leave period of 26 weeks — the minimum amount recommended by the World Health Organisation to enable breast-feeding and for the health and emotional wellbeing of both mothers and babies.

It also acts as a safety net for women without employer-funded maternity leave, including casual and self-employed workers.

The explanatory memorandum to the Paid Parental Leave Bill 2010 states, “Parental leave pay will complement parents’ entitlements to unpaid leave such as unpaid parental leave... it can be received before, after, or at the same time as existing entitlements such as employer-provided paid leave such as recreation, annual and employer-provided maternity leave.”

Clearly, the Commonwealth PPL scheme is a ‘top up’, not a ‘double dip’, and the Abbott Government voted in support of this in 2010.

The use of the scheme as a ‘top up’ to ensure at least 26 weeks of paid parental leave was also in line with the recommendations of the Productivity Commission; you can read that report **HERE**

(<http://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/parental-support/report/parental-support.pdf>)

The employer-funded paid maternity leave in awards was won by unions after a long fight.

Denying employees with maternity leave clauses in awards from accessing a taxpayer scheme to supplement this despite being previously agreed is morally bankrupt.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Mr Abbott’s proposal is yet to pass the Senate, so now is the time for action.

Please sign both the following petitions and forward to friends and colleagues.

<http://www.unionsnsw.org.au/reverseppcuts>

<http://www.fairagenda.org/ppl>

TELL YOUR STORY

We are seeking stories from PSA members who have combined both schemes after the birth of their child for possible use in the media. The individuals concerned would have to be comfortable with providing quotes for a newspaper article, or even speaking directly with a journalist. Ideally, we would like to hear from a relatively new mum (or dad) to talk about how combining leave provided them with more time off than they would have normally taken and why this was important to them.

If you would like to share your story, please send a brief summary and a contact number via email to the PSA Gender and Equity Analyst at: jsingleton@psa.asn.au by close of business Friday 22 May 2015.

JOIN THE PSA

MEMBERSHIP.PSA.ASN.AU/JOIN

Authorised by Murray Engleheart, Acting Assistant General Secretary
Public Service Association of NSW, 160 Clarence Street Sydney



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