



## ACCI CHIEF EXECUTIVE PETER ANDERSON ON ABC RADIO'S "THE WORLD TODAY" PROGRAM - 9 FEBRUARY 2010 - PAID PARENTAL LEAVE

### Bidding War over Paid Parental Leave

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**ELEANOR HALL:** Advocates of parental leave have welcomed the Federal Opposition's plans for paid maternity leave saying that Australia still lags behind the international community.

But the Federal Government has criticised the Coalition's plan to extend the leave to six months. It says Tony Abbott must provide more detail and explain how the system would be funded.

Lindy Kerin has our report.

**LINDY KERIN:** Paid parental leave is back on the political agenda. The Coalition says it will give parents a better deal of six months paid leave if it's elected at the next election.

That's welcome news for Marie Coleman from the National Foundation for Australian Women.

**MARIE COLEMAN:** We're obviously extremely interested. We campaigned long and hard over the last three years to get paid maternity leave back onto the political agenda, because at that time neither the Labor Party nor Liberal Party were particularly interested.

**LINDY KERIN:** The Government policy which comes into effect next year will give primary carers who earn less than \$150,000 a year 18 weeks' paid leave.

In her submission to the Productivity Commission's inquiry into paid parental leave Marie Coleman argued for a minimum of six months paid leave.

**MARIE COLEMAN:** To be fair to the Government their argument was that if they put theirs up for 18 weeks and people added in some of their existing leave entitlements that would take them to six months. That is pretty much what the Productivity Commission recommended.

We think six months is highly desirable whichever way you get to it. Indeed the scientific data on child development and the need for parental bonding and so forth would suggest that 12 months would be ideal, but I don't think we're anywhere near getting a 12 month scheme accepted by Australian employers or for that matter by the taxpayer.

Um, how it's funded is extremely important, and given that many people who work in larger organisations, such as banks or public servants and so forth, already have some forms of paid maternity leave, not all of them as long as we'd like, the biggest areas of gaps in terms of any access to paid maternity leave are in things like retail and hospitality, which is where women are clustered, often in part-time or casual work, and a lot of those employers are relatively small employers.

**LINDY KERIN:** The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry says paternity leave schemes can be expensive. The chief executive Peter Anderson says the Coalition needs ensure that small businesses aren't adversely affected.

**PETER ANDERSON:** What we don't want is a bidding war in this policy area. We need to make policy that is both sensible and moderate in economic and social terms and business, above all, needs to not incur the direct or indirect costs that could act to ultimately become blockages in the way of women's participation in the workforce.

**LINDY KERIN:** Australia is one of only two OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries that don't have a paid parental leave system up and running.

Professor Barbara Pocock from the Centre for Work and Life at the University of South Australia says the Coalition's plan would bring Australia more into line with its international counterparts.

**BARBARA POCOCK:** There are many countries around the world now that offer 12 months leave for parents to share or for, to make sure that both mothers and fathers get time with a newborn so it is a welcome discussion.

**LINDY KERIN:** Professor Pocock says she's also keen to see more details on how the Coalition would fund its scheme.

**BARBARA POCOCK:** Well, the current arrangement proposed by the Labor Party is for a government funded or taxpayer funded minimum wage payment. There is certainly plenty of scope to look at extending exactly that arrangement.

I think the key thing many employers and men and women will be interested in, is it simple, is it fair and does it share the cost between everyone who benefits and I think there's a general consensus in Australia that making employers pay alone is not a workable system. Making women and men pay alone is not workable either.

**LINDY KERIN:** Australians have been discussing the issue of paid parental leave for decades but professor Pocock says for some voters this will be a key election issue.

**BARBARA POCOCK:** For anyone who's having a baby, this is a really, really important issue and most Australian mothers for example would like to have at least six months away from their job when they have a baby so I think there is plenty of interest in this issue and I think it will matter to some parts of the electorate.

**ELEANOR HALL:** That is professor Barbara Pocock from the University of South Australia speaking to Lindy Kerin.