

# Women in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

striking the balance: women, men, work and family 2005

with

**Pru Goward, Sex Discrimination Commissioner**

**Feminism is 'The view, articulated in the 19th century, that women are inherently equal to men and deserve equal rights and opportunities.'**

Australia's economic growth is increasingly dependent on female workforce participation. **WHY?**

By the middle of the century, the proportion of people over 65 will be twice the numbers of today, and will make up a quarter of our total population.

Taxpayers of the future could be paying double to keep our elderly in the same standard of living as today.

The Productivity Commission estimates that health expenditure will grow to 11.5 percent of GDP (two times what it is now) - because older people take a great toll on health services.

43% of Australian women aged 30-40 do *paid* work compared with 64% of Americans and 81% of Swedes. The lower workforce participation is undoubtedly related to their share of unpaid work. Women do more unpaid work than men and less paid work. Time use statistics show that 70% of unpaid household work is done by women.

The primary source of female economic disadvantage is child rearing. And there is no national maternity leave scheme.

With baby boomers moving into old age, and with governments keen to keep the pressure on the public purse to a minimum, the children of baby boomers will be expected to care more, not less, for their parents.

Ironically, at the same time that these women will be looking to contribute to super and get together a bit of a nest egg after a working life marked by years either out of the workforce caring for their children or in part time work, their parents get to the age when they need them.

Meeting the need to increase women's workforce participation as well as current and future needs for care is a challenge that we need to confront head on for equality, economic, and social reasons.

The Spanish have passed a law requiring men to do more housework as part of the marriage contract to bring about change.

Maybe we should pass a law too? (*Our question, not Pru's!*)

**“... My view ... is that it doesn't matter who does what, so long as both men and women have the same options to choose from and the outcomes are fair.”**

*Pru Goward became Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner in July 2001. She is an economist by training and broadcaster by practice, having spent 19 years with ABC TV and Radio as a current affairs journalist, political reporter and commentator. In 1997 Pru became Executive Director of the Office of the Status of Women in the Department of PM and Cabinet. In 2004 she was nominated by The Australian as one of the forty most influential Australians. In 2001 she was awarded a Centenary Medal for her services to journalism and women's rights.*

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## A GLANCE AT WORKING RIGHTS FOR WOMEN

- ∞ 1873 First Victorian Factory Act passed, setting out minimum hours and conditions for women and juveniles, but with no provisions for policing these conditions.
- ∞ 1883 Public Service Act (Victoria) sets out regulations preventing women's promotion.
- ∞ 1907 Harvester Decision is first national wage decision based on the needs of the employee rather than the needs of the employer. Mr. Justice Higgins sets 7 shillings per day as a fair and reasonable basic wage to enable a man to support himself, a wife and three children.
- ∞ 1919 MR. Justice Higgins, required to set a female minimum wage for clothing workers, sets it as approximately 57% of the male wage.
- ∞ 1925 Business and Professional Women's Club founded and asserts the right of women to work. Also makes submissions to the Arbitration Commission on Equal Pay.
- ∞ 1941 ACTU Congress adopts Equal Pay Principle.
- ∞ 1950 Union of Australian Women founded in Victoria, promoting women's rights, equal pay, economic justice and peace.
- ∞ 1956 Victoria passes legislation granting permanency to women teachers; married women retain positions, seniority and rights but are excluded from superannuation.
- ∞ 1957 Confinement leave, without pay, up to 18 months gained by the Victorian teaching service.
- ∞ 1963 The Women's Bureau created in (now) Dept. Education Trade and Youth Affairs. Abolished by John Howard in 1996.
- ∞ 1966 Lifting of the marriage bar in the Australian Public Service, giving married women access to permanent positions.
- ∞ 1968 Victorian women teachers achieve equal pay.
- ∞ 1969 Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission introduces equal pay for equal work except for work which is 'essentially or normally performed by females'. (Formally adopted 1972)
- ∞ 1972 (Whitlam Government reforms) Federal Child Care Act provides Federal involvement in funding childcare; Maternity Leave Act 1973; Office for the Status of Women in the Dept of PM and Cabinet established (moved by Howard in 2004).
- ∞ 1975 /1977 Working Women's Centre founded in Melbourne; Women in Industry and Community Health established in Victoria
- ∞ 1979 Unions achieve Maternity Leave in the private sector. ACTU Maternity Leave test case results in provision being inserted in most awards, guaranteeing continuity of employment. (Howard's IR reforms in 2005 risk dismantling this.)
- ∞ 1983 National wage case attempts to lift wages in traditionally female work areas. Rejected by Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission. In 1985, this body rejects the comparable worth concept.
- ∞ 1989 Unions convince the Australian Industrial Relations Commission to make Maternity Leave standard in all awards.
- ∞ 1997 (and 2005) Major changes to industrial relations, aged care, childcare and child support laws – which all impact on women.

*(Joan Kirner and Moira Rayner, The Women's Power Handbook)*

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