

## Summary of consultation meeting

### Association of Industrial Relations Academics of Australia and New Zealand (AIRAANZ)

12 February 2016

with Senator Jenny McAllister.

The 30<sup>th</sup> annual AIRAANZ conference was held in Sydney 10-12 February 2016. <http://www.aomevents.com/AIRAANZ16> Inquiry members were invited to attend a meeting with conference attendees, all of whom are researchers with a specialisation in relation to employment, work, wages, labour markets and care regimes. Chair Jenny McAllister attended. Twenty five academics attended the meeting which was chaired by Associate Professor Rae Cooper from the University of Sydney Business School. The session was a roundtable discussion of the matters being addressed by the inquiry and the issues paper of the Inquiry. What follows is a concise summary of these discussions.

**Valuation of women's work and remedy for pay inequity through tribunals:** AIRAANZ members noted that there have been attempts through provisions in national legislation and industrial cases address pay inequity between men and women. Unfortunately there has been a tendency to rely upon direct comparisons between men's and women's work to establish gender-based discrimination. These approaches have meant that they have not been effective in tackling gender based pay inequality in a systematic fashion. This (male comparator) logic has been reinforced in the recent Childcare Equal Remuneration Decision, 2015. The Members see merit in providing more explicit guidance for the tribunals to move away from male comparators in their deliberations and to rely instead upon more complex analysis of work value. Initiatives and cases in the states – notably in Queensland and NSW – have offered more promised in terms of adopting a work value approach.

**Right to request:** Members are strongly supportive of strengthening the 'right to request' flexible working provisions in the Fair Work Act to provide for an enforceable right to part time employment. Members noted that, as shown in Human Right Commission, data that a significant number of women face discrimination upon return to work from care breaks. The worrying phenomenon of women being forced to choose between working in jobs at their skill level or flexibility to assist in the management of care of family members might in part be addressed by this measure. There are obvious implications for pay, workforce participation and productivity. Members also emphasised the need for policy makers to consider the right of employees to transition not only into part time employment but also from reduced hours back into longer full time hours working. Non full-time employment

**Job quality:** Women's working lives cannot be considered in isolation from a discussion of job quality. Many women work in labour intensive, precarious, low paid jobs. This has a significant impact on both quality of working life, lifelong earnings but also the capacity of employees to maintain employment into older age.

**Work and care interconnections:** Members argued that labour markets and the activities of individuals within them cannot be fully understood without understanding care regimes and their gendered nature. Women still take the overwhelming burden of care, especially of small children and older family members, and this has not changed significantly despite changes in participation of women in the labour force in the past generation. Non- standard work and career breaks which are typical for Australian women are hazardous for lifelong earnings. Members noted that our conceptualisations of what constitutes 'care' need to be broadened to account for care outside of

nuclear family units (for example women's need to care for friends, elderly ex-partners, or relatives in extended families), this vital care work should be acknowledged in government and organisational policies.

**Employment policies and interconnections with other policies:** It was noted by several members that the very low rate of the aged care pension women much more greatly than it does men, not only do women have less retirement savings but they live longer. The rate of the aged pension needs to be increased in order to avoid amplifying the gender disparity in older aged Australians. The design of policies – for example the NDIS – need to be examined to understand their gendered impact. Members' research suggests that the impact of NDIS on paid care workers will exacerbate the insecurity and low pay of workers in the sector.

On behalf of the meeting of members

A/Prof Rae Cooper

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