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Submission to

**House of Representatives Standing Committee
on Family and Human Services**

Inquiry into Balancing Work and Family

**Minister for Consumer and Employment Protection
Government of Western Australia**

April 2005

Executive summary

- The Western Australian Minister for Consumer and Employment Protection's submission discusses issues in relation to the first two of the Inquiry's terms of reference; the disincentives to starting a family, and strategies for making it easier for parents to return to the paid workforce.
- The key employment related disincentives to starting a family are the loss of income, and the negative impact on employment security and career progression associated with a period away from the workforce.
- Employment security is particularly an issue for the 32% of Australian females who are employed as casuals, and for whom starting a family often means losing a job.
- In relation to loss of income, the Western Australian Government recognises the importance of paid leave for employees, and provides paid parental leave to all public sector workers.
- A lack of flexible working arrangements and a corporate culture that is not family friendly can be another major disincentive to starting a family, forcing employees to choose between work and family.
- In relation to the second of the Inquiry's terms of reference, this submission examines a number of strategies and initiatives that may assist in making it easier for parents to return to the workforce.
- One of the most significant types of assistance for employees in combining working and childrearing is flexible working arrangements and leave provisions. Ongoing awareness-raising of the benefits of family-friendly working arrangements is essential.
- The level of participation by men in family caring impacts on the ability of their partners to return to the paid workforce while children are young. As such, the availability and usage of flexible work arrangements by men must be encouraged and improved.
- Recent relevant initiatives of the WA Government include providing grants for the updating of awards, improving the work and family information available to the community, broadly supporting the ACTU position in the federal Family Provisions test case, and commissioning a review of the gender pay gap in Western Australia in 2004.
- A major issue of concern to the Western Australian Government is the Commonwealth Government's proposed changes to industrial relations, as these changes have the potential to undermine the protection of employees in relation to work and family entitlements.

Introduction

1. It is now widely accepted in Australia that all men and women have the right to both participate in child rearing and contribute to the paid workforce. This creates a need for Australian workplaces to support employees in maintaining an appropriate balance between work and family responsibilities.
2. Australia has an increasing number of women with children returning to, or remaining in, the workforce. In addition to parenting, many working people also have elder care responsibilities. Care of elderly and/or disabled relatives will become more prevalent as Australia's population ages, and elder care must be also considered a prime family responsibility.
3. Governments have a responsibility to ensure that Australians are supported in finding the appropriate work-life balance for their family, and this extends to support in the areas of employment, social arrangements and financial support.
4. The Inquiry into Balancing Work and Family being undertaken by the Standing Committee on Family and Human Services has the following terms of reference:
The Committee shall inquire into and report on how the Australian Government can better help families balance their work and family responsibilities. The Committee is particularly interested in:
 1. *the financial, career and social disincentives to starting families;*
 2. *making it easier for parents who so wish to return to the paid workforce;*
and
 3. *the impact of taxation and other matters on families in the choices they make in balancing work and family life.*
5. This submission outlines the responses and initiatives of the Western Australian Minister for Consumer and Employment Protection, and the Department of Consumer and Employment Protection (DOCEP) in relation to the Committee's Inquiry. In particular, the submission focuses on the first two of the terms of reference, in relation to disincentives to starting a family, and strategies for making it easier for parents to return to the paid workforce.

Statistical overview of work and family in Western Australia

6. This section provides background information on the state of work and family balance in Western Australia. In particular, the key findings in relation to work and family of DOCEP's *Work-life Balance Survey* undertaken in 2004 are presented to provide evidence of the importance of flexible working arrangements in supporting work and family balance.

Working Patterns of Western Australian families¹

Number of families	542,000
Number of families with children under 15	223,000
Percentage of families with children where at least one child is under 5	44%
Of the 223,000 families with children:	
Percentage that are couple families	78.3%
Percentage of couple families where both parents are employed	55%
Percentage that are lone parent families	21.7%
Percentage of lone parents that are employed	45.7%
Percentage of women with children aged 0-4 who are employed	44.6%
Part-time employment	
Percentage of working people employed part-time	30.2
Percentage of working women employed part-time	49.5%
Percentage of working men employed part-time	15.2%

A family is defined as "two or more persons, one of whom is aged 15 years and over, who are related by blood, marriage (registered or de facto), adoption, step or fostering; and who are usually resident in the same household."

Work-life Balance Survey 2004

7. In mid 2004, the *Survey of Work-life Balance in Western Australia*² was undertaken. The survey was conducted by the Centre for Labour Market Research at the University of Western Australia, on behalf of the Government of Western Australia.
8. The primary purpose of the Work-life Balance Survey was to gain an indication of the proportion of working Western Australians who face hardship in balancing work and home life, and determine whether other factors such as hours, working entitlements, award coverage and demographics influence how people are managing the balance.
9. The results provided an overview of how Western Australian workers are managing at combining lifestyle and family and working arrangements.
10. The general themes addressed by the survey instrument were:
 - a) intensification of work effort;
 - b) entitlements and workplace;
 - c) community, leisure and carer responsibilities; and
 - d) perceptions of work-life balance.

¹ Source: ABS Australian Social Trends 2004

² *Survey of Work-life Balance in Western Australia*, June 2004. R. Kelly and C. Mulvey, Centre for Labour Market Research The University of Western Australia. A report for the Department of Consumer and Employment Protection, Government of Western Australia.

11. Some of the key findings of the survey in relation to work and family balance were:
 - a) 60% of employees have access to some type of flexible work arrangements;
 - b) 34% have access to paid parental leave; and
 - c) 32% of people took time off for caring, including many with no dependent children.

12. Survey respondents were asked about their perceptions of work-life balance. Interestingly,
 - a) 24% of full-time employees said work-life balance had deteriorated over the past 2 years, and an equal 24% said that it had improved.
 - b) 14% of part-time employees said work-life balance had deteriorated over the past 2 years, and 31% said that it had improved.

13. The survey confirmed that from a work-life balance perspective, the most important types of workplace entitlements are those enabling flexible working arrangements. This holds true for all employees, not just those with dependent children.

14. The survey results also highlighted a number of important issues in relation to the balance between work and family life, and the impact of caring responsibilities. Dependent children and/or other caring responsibilities affect the hours and days worked for a significant proportion of working women. For some women in the survey it meant working shorter hours than they would like and/or having to work on a casual basis.

15. While many employees had access to some type of flexible working arrangements, there is still a significant need to increase employees' access to flexibility in the workplace. This highlights the fact that ongoing education of employers and the community on the importance of flexibility in work arrangements is essential.

The financial, career and social disincentives to starting families

16. There are many factors, whether perceived or real, that work as disincentives to Australians to start a family. This section discusses the key employment-related disincentives.

Financial disincentives - loss of income

17. One of the most significant impacts of childbearing on Australian families is the financial cost of starting a family. The bulk of the financial cost to the household comes from the loss of one income earner, when one parent stops work to care for a child. In the majority of households this parent is the mother.
18. The federal Government's family assistance payments, such as the Maternity Payment, and Family Tax Benefit A and B, provide some income support to most families during a period away from the workforce. However, these payments generally do not compensate fully for loss of income.
19. Women in professional, highly paid occupations may suffer an additional disincentive to leave the workforce to start a family due to the significant wage differential between working and non-working income. Women who earn a higher income than their partner may also be less inclined to withdraw from the workplace to start a family.
20. A key solution to the problem of lost income is the provision of paid parental leave. As an employer, the Western Australian Government recognises the benefit of providing paid parental leave to attract and retain a committed and motivated workforce. Currently in 2005, all public sector employers are eligible for seven weeks paid parental leave, and the Gallop Government is committed to increasing this to 14 weeks. Western Australia is also the only State where fathers working in the public sector are eligible for paid parental leave, where they are the primary care giver for their child.
21. In 2002 the Western Australian Government made a supporting paid parental leave submission in response to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's interim paper *Valuing Parenthood: Options for paid maternity leave*.³ The WA Government provided in principle support for a national 14-week maternity leave scheme paid at the level of the Federal Minimum Wage to be funded by the Federal Government.
22. The State Government's proposal recommended that paid maternity leave be available to full time and part time employees engaged for a minimum of 12 months, and casual employees engaged for a minimum of 12 months out of the previous 18 months. This position was consistent with the State's *Minimum Conditions of Employment Act 1993* provisions for unpaid parental leave for full time and part time employees after 12 months service.

³ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Valuing Parenthood: Options for paid maternity leave*, interim paper 2002, HREOC, Sydney 2002

23. The Western Australian Government remains supportive of a federally funded paid parental leave scheme.

Career disincentives

24. A major disincentive to starting a family is the negative impact on employment security and career progression that can arise from having an extended period of time away from the workforce.

Casual employment

25. For casual employees, starting a family often means losing a job. One in three Australian women are working on a casual basis with no guarantee of ongoing employment. In 2004 24% of male employees and 32% of female employees were casual⁴.
26. In Western Australia, *The Survey of Work-Life Balance in Western Australia*, undertaken by the Centre for Labour Market Research (CLMR) for DOCEP in 2004, reported that 23.1% of Western Australian employees were classified as casual, that is, had no paid annual or sick/carers leave entitlements as part of their employment conditions⁵.
27. Queensland and New South Wales provide an entitlement to a period of unpaid parental leave for long-term casual employees. Some eligible casual employees in the federal jurisdiction are entitled to unpaid parental leave by virtue of the May 2001 Parental Leave Test Case. However, only a small proportion of federal awards have been varied to incorporate this test case standard.
28. A number of State awards are currently in the process of being varied to incorporate parental leave for long-term casual employees, as part of the current award updating project being undertaken in Western Australia. The WA Government is actively supporting this award updating process to ensure awards better reflect the needs of industry and employees through the provision of cash grants to some parties.

Corporate culture

29. Working arrangements and corporate culture can also provide a major disincentive to starting a family. Women in particular who work in professions or organisations that are not family friendly have the dilemma of knowing that achieving a balance between work and family will be hard or some cases impossible. A lack of flexible working arrangements, and/or a culture that focuses on long hours and corporate loyalty above all else can lead to employees having to choose between work and family, rather than establish a balance between the two.
30. The importance of flexible working arrangements in supporting work and family balance is discussed in greater depth in relation to the second term of reference of the Inquiry.

⁴ ABS *Employee Earnings, Benefits and Trade Union Membership (6310.0)* March 2004.

⁵ Ross Kelly & Charles Mulvey (August 2004), the Centre for Labour Market Research for DOCEP, *Survey of Work-Life Balance in Western Australia*, section 4.3 p20-21.

Making it easier for parents who so wish to return to the paid workforce

31. Improving the ability of working men and women to balance their family and work lives is a critical issue for all Australian Governments. This section highlights a number of employment-related impediments to returning to work, and discusses strategies to support the ability of parents to return to the paid workforce. The initiatives and strategies of the Western Australian Government in relation to work and family balance are also outlined in this section, as is the submission of the States and Territories to the 2004 Family Provisions test case.
32. It is important to note that while increased workforce participation of parents with young children is an important social and economic goal, a significant percentage of parents, particularly women with young children, will always choose not to undertake paid work. Policy makers must ensure that strategies provide support for women in the unpaid domestic workforce as well as those in the paid workforce.

Casual employment

33. As discussed earlier, over one third of Australian women are employed on a casual basis. While some women may voluntarily choose casual employment as a way of managing the work and family balance, for many others, casual employment can create difficulties in returning to the paid workforce.
34. One major impediment to returning to work may be the absence of a job to which to return. Casual employees without access to parental leave will have been required to end their employment prior to their confinement, and may therefore need to go through the job search process to find employment.
35. This impediment is also not limited to casual employees. Permanent employees who have resigned after a period of parental leave rather than returning to work are also faced with the job search dilemma when they choose to return to the workforce.
36. The nature of casual employment can also create difficulties in managing work and family balance. For employees whose work is of a true casual nature, and requires irregular and uncertain hours, planning of family and other lifestyle activities can be problematic. For parents with young children, the inability to adequately organise structured childcare when working hours vary can be a significant issue.
37. Casual employees who are working regular and systematic hours may also have problems with work and family balance as a result of a lack of access to paid leave and other entitlements that support family care and emergency situations.

Family-friendly working arrangements

38. One of the most significant types of assistance that can be provided to working parents is the provision of family-friendly working arrangements. Family-friendly working arrangements are flexible arrangements in the areas of types of employment, hours of work, leave arrangements, facilities and supportive work practices which give employees greater flexibility in how they work in order to balance the demands of their work and family responsibilities.
39. Flexible work arrangements and leave provisions that support family obligations can make it easier for men and women to combine working and childrearing. Family-friendly working arrangements can encourage women to return to the paid workforce and also allow greater participation by men in family caring responsibilities.
40. Participation by men in family caring responsibilities is a major issue in relation to women returning to the paid workforce while their children are young. Fathers who work long hours, or have little or no access to family-friendly work arrangements are less available to assist their partners in managing the work and family balance. This leads to more of the caring responsibilities falling to the mother.
41. Men's access to family-friendly arrangements is often hampered by corporate culture and workplace norms, where provisions are available, but their use is unacceptable. Many men may feel cultural and career pressure not to take advantage of flexible arrangements available to them either through their award or agreement or workplace policy.
42. Men may also feel pressure to work longer hours to earn additional income, particularly when their partner is not working. The current Family Tax Benefit system supports men working longer hours, rather than both parents sharing the working hours required to meet the family's financial needs. The rate of payment for Family Tax Benefit Part B does not take into account the income of the main earner in the family, but rather it is the income of the lower income earner that affects how much Family Tax Benefit Part B will be paid to a family. Payments reduce once the lower income earner earns more than \$4000 a year⁶.
43. To make it easier for women to return to the paid workforce, the availability and usage of flexible work arrangements by men must be increased. This may require widespread cultural change, and a significant investment in education and awareness-raising of employers and employees.

Work and family initiatives of the Western Australian Government

44. The Western Australian Government holds the view that the industrial relations system must provide a strong safety net of minimum entitlements that support working parents and facilitate a return to the paid workforce. Additional entitlements and benefits can then be negotiated at the workplace level and flexible working arrangements implemented to support business operations and meet the needs of employees and their families.

⁶ *The What, Why and How of Family Assistance*, Australian Government Family Assistance Office, 2004.

45. In 2002 Western Australia introduced an entitlement to paid carers' leave for all full-time and part-time employees in the *Minimum Conditions of Employment Act 1993*. The minimum wage established under this Act was also significantly increased and the minimum casual loading increased from 15 to 20 percent to ensure that all working men and women are paid a fair and equitable wage for the work that they do.

Recent initiatives:

46. Recent initiatives of the Western Australian Government to support employees in maintaining work and family balance include:
- a) provision of grants to organisations updating State awards to remove discriminatory provisions and create flexible terms and conditions of employment that better meet industry and employee needs;
 - b) production of a major new publication entitled *Pregnancy and Parental Leave: a guide for employees and their partners* to assist pregnant employees and their partners understand their rights and obligations in relation to pregnancy, parental leave and returning to work after childbirth;
 - c) addition of a *Breastfeeding at Work* page to the Department of Consumer and Employment Protection website to provide information on employers' legal responsibilities in accommodating employees who wish to continue breastfeeding after a period of parental leave;
 - d) release of the *Creating Carer-friendly Workplaces* publication, to assist employers provide workplace support and flexible employment arrangements for the growing number of employees who have caring responsibilities for family members who are sick, elderly or have a disability; and
 - e) inclusion of improved options for flexible work arrangements in public sector agreements, such as an increase in the amount of additional leave available as purchased leave from 4 weeks to 8 weeks per year.
47. The Western Australian Government also made a submission, in conjunction with other State Governments, broadly supporting the federal Family Provisions test case for improved work and family entitlements. The State and Territories submission is discussed in a later section.
48. DOCEP is also currently participating in a trial Gender Analysis project being conducted in Western Australia. Gender Analysis is an innovative and systematic process that enables government to analyse policy proposals, preferably in the developmental phase, to obtain a better understanding of social processes to ensure that the policies, programs and legislation that are developed take account of the social and economic differences between men and women and address the needs of all people.
49. The long-term goal of the Gender Analysis Project is to encourage the mainstreaming of gender awareness and integrate a gender analysis process into policy making across government in Western Australia. This will align Western Australia with international best practice in gender mainstreaming,

and ensure the inclusion of a “gender lens” into every aspect of public policy formulation.

50. As part of the trial project, DOCEP is undertaking a gender analysis of the casualisation of the workforce, and assessing the gender impact of a range of possible reforms to reduce misuse of casual employment and inequality in entitlements for casual employees.

Future initiatives

51. DOCEP is considering a range of initiatives for the future to encourage work and family balance for Western Australian workers. These include:
- a) the creation of a new website on work life balance, which will contain extensive information on work and family and flexible working arrangements as well as covering mature age employment, working hours and pay equity issues;
 - b) the development of publications and promotional material for a campaign about Fathers in the Workplace to address the common misconception that “work and family” equals “working mothers” and promote family-friendly employment conditions for male employees;
 - c) the production of a *Work and Family Guide for Small to Medium Businesses*, which will focus on practical family-friendly employment practices that provide business benefits and ensure compliance with employment obligations. The *Work and Family Guide for Small to Medium Businesses* will be supported by a series of Award Profiles that provide industry and award specific information. These Award Profiles will feature guidance on how employers can implement family-friendly initiatives while still ensuring compliance with award provisions; and
 - d) research on work and family initiatives in other jurisdictions, research into the practical benefits for corporations and small business of implementing work and family practices and initiatives and research into the utilisation of flexible working arrangements within the Western Australian public sector.
52. In addition to these initiatives, DOCEP is planning a conference to be held in October 2005 on the theme of work-life balance. The Conference, which will attract participants from the private and public sector will focus on practical work and family issues and solutions, as well as discussing other key work-life issues such as Australia’s ageing workforce.

Review of the Gender Pay Gap in Western Australia

53. In addition to the strategies listed above, the Western Australian Government is also currently considering the recommendations of the *Review of the Gender Pay Gap in Western Australia*. This Review, conducted in 2004, made a number of recommendations in relation to work and family balance to support and encourage greater gender pay equity. The recommendations are currently being considered by the State Government.

54. The terms of reference for the Review covered research on the gender pay gap, the capacity of the State Wage Fixing Principles to close the gap, the effectiveness of voluntary strategies to address pay equity, the role of the *Minimum Conditions of Employment Act 1993*, and strategies for training.
55. The Report of the Review was completed in November 2004. In relation to work and family balance, the Review found that:
- “In summary, women want to continue to participate in the paid workforce after giving birth to children although most will seek a series of transitional arrangements to enable this. The model desired by the majority of two-parent families is dual earning where one of the two parents may move between full-time and part-time employment to accommodate caring arrangements. The institutions, however, that determine the organisation of work and employment still largely regard employees as ‘unencumbered’ by responsibility for caring and domestic work. Consequently, mothers bear the cost of responding to this conundrum in the process of moving between full-time and part-time work and organizing work hours that will enable them to combine parental and paid work responsibilities. Such action inevitably results in reduced earnings for women and thereby contributes to the gender pay gap.”⁷
56. The Report’s recommendations included a variety of legislative and non-legislative strategies that are relevant to supporting work and family balance and assisting women (and men) return to the paid workforce.
57. The Report recommended that the *Industrial Relations Act 1979* be amended to include as an additional object of the Act: “to promote employment and workplace practices that will enable employees to achieve a satisfactory balance between their paid work and family responsibilities.”⁸
58. The Report made a number of recommendations in relation to paid parental leave, including that the Western Australian Government set as a goal the introduction of paid parental leave within both the public and private sectors in WA in accordance with the ILO standard of 14 weeks, that the Government liaise closely with its federal and other state government counterparts in support of a nationwide strategy to introduce paid parental leave, and that the Government increase paid parental leave for public sector employees to the ILO standard of 14 weeks.⁹
59. This last recommendation will be implemented in the future, with the Western Australian Government providing a commitment in February 2005 to increasing paid parental leave for public sector employees from the current level of 7 weeks to 14 weeks.
60. The Review of the Gender Pay Gap also made a number of recommendations for legislative change to provide greater work and family entitlements for employees in Western Australia. The Report recommended the amended to the *Minimum Conditions of Employment Act 1993* to provide the following additional minimum employment conditions:¹⁰
- a) an entitlement to request an additional four weeks purchased leave per annum and to take a reduced salary – 48/52 – spread over the 52

⁷ Report of the Review of the Gender Pay Gap in Western Australia 2004 p 62

⁸ Report of the Review of the Gender Pay Gap in Western Australia 2004 p 62

⁹ Report of the Review of the Gender Pay Gap in Western Australia 2004 p 71

¹⁰ Report of the Review of the Gender Pay Gap in Western Australia 2004 p 71 -72

weeks of the year, with employers not refuse such requests unreasonably and give priority access to those employees with carer responsibilities;

- b) a right to request a change in their employment status to part-time within their substantive or an equivalent position for a stipulated period of time. Where that stipulated period of time does not exceed 12 months, this should also include the right for such an employee to revert to full-time status. Where the stipulated period of time extends beyond 12 months, the legislation should allow the employee to apply to revert to full-time status in their substantive or an equivalent position and that employers not refuse such requests unreasonably;
 - c) extend the entitlement to unpaid parental leave to long-term casual employees who have been engaged on a regular and systematic basis for at least 12 months with the employer and who have a reasonable expectation of on-going employment on that basis.
61. In relation to work and family in the Western Australian public sector the Report recommended¹¹:
- a) the provision of training for public sector supervisors and managers to increase knowledge and understanding of the following issues:
 - employee entitlements;
 - implications of managing part-time employees;
 - creation of part-time employment opportunities at all levels of the organisation; and
 - how to develop a public sector culture in which employees feel comfortable accessing family friendly entitlements
 - b) the recording of data on accessing paid parental leave, requests for conversion to part-time, purchased leave, utilization of personal leave; and
 - c) analysis of this data to assess utilization of these provisions.
62. Public consultation on the recommendations of the Gender Pay Gap Review was invited in early 2005, and the recommendations and submissions from interested parties are currently under consideration by the Government.

The federal Family Provisions test case

63. The Western Australian Government, in conjunction with the other States and Territories made a submission to the Australian Industrial Relations Commission Family Provisions test case in May 2004, advocating for a better recognition of work and family commitments in the industrial relations system.
64. The States and Territories Contentions were based on a 'right to request' concept that provides a viable middle ground between working arrangements that are subject to employer convenience and entitlements that provide automatic rights for employees. These proposals would give employees greater access to a range of additional unpaid leave and flexible working arrangements to meet family commitments, but take account of the ability of employers to accommodate these arrangements. The particular proposals made by the States and Territories were:

¹¹ Report of the Review of the Gender Pay Gap in Western Australia 2004 p 79

Unpaid parental leave:

- An employee right to request and an employer obligation to consider and not unreasonably refuse an additional 52 weeks unpaid parental leave in relation to the birth or adoption of a child.
- A right for both parents to take an unbroken period of up to 4 weeks unpaid simultaneous parental leave at the birth or placement of a child, plus an employee right to request and an employer obligation to consider and not unreasonably refuse an additional 4 weeks simultaneous unpaid parental leave.

Part-time work:

- An employee right to request and an employer obligation to consider and not unreasonably refuse, the employee working part-time in one or more periods from the birth or placement of the child (or if necessary or desirable during pregnancy) until the child reaches school age.

Flexible working arrangements:

- An employee right to request and an employer obligation to consider and not unreasonably refuse a variation in hours, times or the physical location of work to enable the employee to provide care and support for an immediate family or household member.

Additional (unpaid) leave entitlements:

- An employee right to request and an employer obligation to consider and not unreasonably refuse up to 6 weeks unpaid leave per annum or up to 6 weeks purchased leave per annum with pay averaged over a 52 week period in order to assist employees better balance work and family responsibilities.
- An employee right to request and an employer obligation to consider and not unreasonably refuse a reasonable period of unpaid leave immediately following a period of paid annual leave, in order to assist employees to better balance work and family responsibilities.
- An employee right to a reasonable period of unpaid emergency leave where an employee has not otherwise applied for and been granted paid leave:
 - to provide assistance when an immediate family or household member is sick, gives birth or is injured or assaulted;
 - to make arrangements for the provision of care for an immediate family or household member who is sick or injured;
 - following the death of an immediate family or household member;
 - where there has been a breakdown in usual care arrangements for an employee's immediate family or household member;
 - to deal with an unexpected incident which involves a child of the employee.
- Periods of unpaid child rearing leave up until a child is school age, by agreement between the employer and employee, rather than as an 'employee right to request'.

Other considerations:

- Employee requests being determined by the employer in light of the following factors:
 - the cost in accommodating the employee's request;

- the capacity to reorganise work arrangements to accommodate the employee's request;
 - the impact on the delivery of customer service;
 - the particular circumstances of the employee, especially the nature of his/her caring need; and
 - the impact on the employee and his/her dependents of the request not being granted.
- Use being made of the Dispute Resolution Procedure in the relevant award, where an employer and employee cannot reach agreement in relation to an employee request.

Maintaining work and family standards

65. A major issue of concern to the Western Australian Government is the Commonwealth Government's proposed changes to industrial relations, and the potential introduction of a national industrial relations system.
66. These changes have the potential to undermine the protection of employees in relation to work and family entitlements, and ability of employees to bargain collectively for improvements in workplace arrangements. Many State awards, agreements, and the *Minimum Conditions of Employment Act* provide for family friendly employment arrangements that may not be available to employees if these employees are integrated into a further simplified federal award system.

Conclusion

67. The Minister appreciates the opportunity afforded by the Committee's Inquiry to discuss the important issue of work and family balance.
68. The Western Australian Government takes seriously its responsibility to support working Western Australians in finding an appropriate balance between work, family and other lifestyle commitments. DOCEP will continue to progress a wide range of strategies and initiatives to educate and inspire employers, employees and all industry participants to work towards more flexible and family-friendly workplaces.