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18 Valmadre Street

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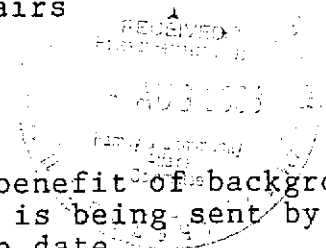
LAKE PLACID QLD 4878

WOMEN'S ELECTORAL LOBBY

CAIRNS

1 August 2003

Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs
Child Custody Arrangements Inquiry
Department of the House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600 Fax (02) 6277 4844



This submission is being written without the benefit of background material available from the Secretariat, which is being sent by post, so that we may get our submission in by the due date.

Simply, we think the fathers fall into three groups.

The first, which has been guilty of domestic violence, should not have access to the children following separation.

We in Women's Electoral Lobby Cairns have a particular interest in this, since in 1978-9 we founded The Women's Shelter Cairns, now named 'Ruth's Women's Shelter Cairns' after one of our founding committee, and for many years independent of our organisation.

Last year, 'Ruth's' (funded now by Federal and State Governments) sheltered 186 women with their 304 children.

This will give you some idea of what is 'normal' in this regard.

The second father's group is the very small one constantly identified by Justice Alistair Nicholson, Chief Judge of the Family Court, as the vocal group unlikely ever to become reconciled with allowing mothers reasonable custody, and like Judge Nicholson, we judge them by their intransigent behaviour.

The third group of fathers is by far the largest, and is one which we would like to know more about. Unfortunately it is not given anything like the publicity that the other two are given for the asking.

We believe that the majority of this group come to a pattern of sharing in parenthood following consultation with their ex-partners, not always entirely to the satisfaction of the male or female, but in a way that works, either well, or after a fashion, as well as they can manage in the circumstances.

The Prime Minister wants the children (especially the boys, but we think it should be the girls too) to have male role models as usually regarded as desirable in children's upbringing. We are in some agreement with this view.

But we think that men have the opportunity to exemplify this sort of behaviour, not just in following the pattern worked out by the couple, but in actually coming to the agreement with their ex-partner in a civilised manner.

We also think that quite a number of men actually succeed in doing this. It is the extraordinary lack of evidence that holds us back in our beliefs in what actually happens, and we would like to hear about it.

Any idea of rules and regulations about time-sharing between ex-partners runs completely against this kind of civilised behaviour which either happens a lot or should happen.

So, in conclusion, we believe that the formula works fairly well but could be helped with counselling or mediation to help the men who are dissatisfied but could come to a better situation.

And the number of couples already satisfied could be researched.

John Trevorn OAM Representative *John Trevorn*