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**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FAMILY AND HUMAN SERVICES

Reference: Balancing work and family

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON FAMILY AND HUMAN SERVICES

Tuesday, 11 April 2006

Members: Mrs Bronwyn Bishop (*Chair*), Mrs Irwin (*Deputy Chair*), Mr Cadman, Ms Kate Ellis, Mrs Elson, Mr Fawcett, Ms George, Mrs Markus, Mr Quick and Mr Ticehurst

Members in attendance: Mrs Bronwyn Bishop, Ms George, Mrs Irwin and Mr Quick

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To 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.

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Committee met at 11.28 am

CHAIR (Mrs Bronwyn Bishop)—I declare open this public hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services into balancing work and family. The committee will explore a range of issues relevant to many Australians and the choices they make in relation to having children and raising families. Today the committee will take evidence from the Tasmanian government, the Catholic Women's League of Australia, and three mothers and one father who will tell us about their experiences in balancing work and family. These individual stories will be very important to the committee's deliberations. The committee wants to make sure that its recommendations will help individuals and their families. Copies of witnesses' submissions are available on the committee's website. This hearing is open to the public and a transcript of what is said will be made available via the committee's website. If you would like further details about the inquiry or the transcript, please ask any of the committee staff here at the hearing.

[11.29 am]

EVANS, Mr Jim, Acting Director of Industrial Relations, Division of Industrial Relations and State Service Management, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Tasmanian Government

HERBERT, Ms Carol (Ann), Senior Policy Analyst, Policy Division, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Tasmanian Government

KONS, Mr Steven, Attorney-General, Minister for Justice and Workplace Relations and Minister for Planning, Tasmanian Government

CHAIR—Welcome. It is a great pleasure to have you appear before us. I realise the submission we have before us was prepared before you became responsible for it, so would you like to give us an opening statement?

Mr Kons—I am the new Attorney and have been in the job for less than a week. My background is as an employee and employer in a significant capacity, so I do bring a different perspective to IR and, I think, the state Attorney's job. I possibly have a different perspective to my state colleagues as well. The government did provide a submission back in 2005. I commend the committee for undertaking such an investigation, because it is very relevant, at a time when the economy is ticking along very well, to be given the opportunity to discuss these sorts of issues before they seriously disadvantage our communities.

The issues of balance in work and family are important to the community, and for Tasmanians to enjoy a good quality of life is a central tenet of the Tasmanian government and what we have been doing in the past seven years. The changing nature of work means that people want to be more confident in their financial situation before starting a family and, once they have a family, to be able to maintain living standards and careers while caring for children and other family members. Addressing the issues must take account of the industrial relations environment in which families are working.

Governments can play a vital role in finding ways to maintain a responsible and reasonable balance between business and workers. An important way to provide Tasmanian workers and their families with more certainty is to protect workers' basic rights. The recent federal industrial relations reforms will undermine efforts both to remove disincentives to starting families and to making it easier for parents to return to the paid workforce. Provisions in recent industrial relations legislation, especially those that promote individual contracts based on minimum conditions at the expense of collective bargaining, have the potential to have a devastating impact on families. Research confirms that Australian workplace agreements are likely to result in increased working hours and do little to help workers balance their work and family responsibilities.

The new act legislates for unpredictability for employees, not flexibility. A loss of control over rosters and hours of work through averaging provisions and provisions that allow the employer to direct reasonable additional hours without notice will make it even harder for families to

spend time together and make reliable caring arrangements. Where employers use the averaging provisions to unilaterally vary hours and pay each week, it may be financially devastating for families. A secure weekly income, not merely an hourly rate, and secure days of work are vital for an employee trying to organise a child-care place and pay the rent.

Important protections for working parents, such as the right to take maternity leave and carers leave, are now established community standards. Promoting flexible working conditions through family-friendly leave entitlements and supportive work practices can help Tasmanian workers balance their work and family commitments. One way to do this is by providing small business with access to expert advice on modern human resources and industrial relations practices. Another way is to conduct research. It can be used to help the business sector invest in their workers and increase productivity through a skilled, secure and stable workforce. Yet another way is to recognise and showcase employers who provide family-friendly workplaces that help employees improve their work-life balance.

Access to affordable quality child care is critical, and capital investments in child-care services are essential to ensure there are sufficient child-care places for parents to access. Investment in child-care training is essential to ensure quality care is available. Child care needs to be affordable. The high cost of child care relative to income generated is a barrier to workforce participation as the costs of child care are not deductible. Relationship breakdown can result in the loss of emotional and psychological support and is a disincentive to starting a family. The pressure on families to pay their bills and hold down jobs in even more stressful work environments can also lead to family breakdown.

There is a role for government to play in creating a family-friendly culture within and without the workplace. One way is to support research that gives us more information about the factors that contribute to committed, supportive and nurturing family environments and other ways to rethink the way services can be delivered to both children and families in timely and appropriate ways. I congratulate the committee for taking an interest in this matter and commend you on your press release that I saw earlier today as well. It is relatively well balanced.

CHAIR—Thank you. In going to the submission that came in—although it was not yours you still won the election so I guess it is your attitude.

Mr Kons—It is what the people want.

CHAIR—I looked particularly at some of the work you have referred to in your submission. I looked at the section entitled, ‘Instability of intimate relationships’. It talks about the increasing family breakdown and consequential loss of emotional and psychological support. Then you say:

To understand why relationships break down and what the Government can do to promote committed, supportive and nurturing family environments is one of the most complex issues surrounding this inquiry.

The submission goes on to say how courting and marriage patterns have changed, which we are all aware of. There have been some federal initiatives designed to try to keep relationships together. As part of your Tasmania Together policy, have you developed specific policies aimed at helping relationships together?

Mr Kons—The Tasmanian government has certainly taken a very wide social reform agenda in the past few years and families have been a central tenet of what the government is trying to achieve. Providing a greater balance on the social side of things in an economy that was depressed until a decade ago is very difficult to do—to have the funds and the ability to be able to have a look at programs that can be delivered. The government is very focused on making sure that any initiatives we do take do take into consideration families. We have to stem the flow of people leaving the state. We have certainly done that in the past few years and that is a reflection of the government's commitment to making sure that family life and employment opportunities are available in the state. We certainly do have a track record of that.

CHAIR—Both the Commonwealth and state governments share the need to have a prosperous society to enable quality of life for our citizens. Federally, we have been looking at the establishment of new centres that will come on line where there will ultimately be compulsory conferencing before any divorce action can begin, and initiatives to try to make people consider the growth of their relationship rather than have things that deal with it once it has broken up. I was wondering whether the Tasmanian government had developed anything like that.

Ms Herbert—I can comment on that. Through the Early Years strategy there is a strong recognition that we have to do a lot more in terms of preventative work in supporting families, not just let them get to the point where they are in crisis and end in breakdown mode. Through those policies there is also an interest in working with the Commonwealth around some of the initiatives that you have. Certainly, we are looking at how we help services that support families work better together so that they can provide those early interventions in a timely manner. Some of the social projects that the government has supported include things like Kids in Mind, which is looking at mental health issues and helping to support families where that is happening. So there is certainly a keen interest in the preventative end of support for families.

Mr Kons—I think it is an opportune time to have a look at the Family Law Act and the way it has operated in this country. The flexibility that was introduced in the early 1970s was so dramatic—the things that came out of it were so dramatic. It gave the easier opportunity of opting out of relationships. That happened 30 years ago and it is pretty hard to turn the clock back.

CHAIR—I think it is impossible, really. Do you really think we could go back?

Mr Kons—No, we cannot. But it was touted as such a wonderful reform program.

CHAIR—Hopefully, the introduction of the Federal Magistrates Court and the work being directed there will be helpful. Certainly, there has been no end to people looking at the issues.

Mrs IRWIN—This committee's inquiry in the last parliament was *Every picture tells a story* and there have been a number of amendments that have gone or are going through the federal parliament. I suggest you get a copy of that report. There are some great recommendations. Unfortunately, some of them were not taken up by the government—especially one of the suggestions that you might be interested in looking at, which was a trial of the tribunal. I suggest you look at that seeing as we have just been discussing family law.

Mr Kons—Thank you.

CHAIR—Under the section entitled ‘Child care’, it says:

The Tasmanian Government responded to the situation—That is, of needing more child care facilities—in July 2003 with a Capital Program to develop child care infrastructure on school sites in areas where there is a high demand for child care. The Government’s provision of child care infrastructure in school space was done principally to address the unmet need for child care services and to benefit children, families and communities through the co-location of child care and school services.

Affordable, accessible child care is crucial to this issue.

I think we would all say ‘alleluia’ to that! Is that a Tasmanian initiative? Do those places attract CCB child-care benefit? I do not know what the fee structure is for those. Will they ultimately attract the 30 per cent rebate capped at \$4,000 for out-of-pocket expenses? Or do they fall outside the program altogether?

Mr Kons—We will have to take that on notice and get back to you.

Mr QUICK—I can assist. They are like any other child-care centre in Australia. It is one of the initiatives of the former education minister, Paula Wriedt. The first two were in my electorate. There was one at Blackmans Bay and one at Kingston Primary School. As we talked about yesterday in Melbourne, this is one initiative that could be part of our report.

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr QUICK—We heard about the seamless transition from early childhood into formal education. I think the state government should be congratulated. The initial schools were Burnie, Miandetta, Norwood, Bowen Road and Waimea. The one at Bowan Road is up and running but it is part, I think, of the Lady Gowrie Childcare Centre. So they are being auspiced by other agencies. I would be interested in finding out what other ones are planned. These were the initial ones.

CHAIR—If we have time before we do our final report it might be worthwhile coming down and taking a look.

Ms GEORGE—I also ask: are the people who have established these centres on school grounds private providers? Not for profit? Community?

Mr QUICK—They are community based child-care centres. Not for profit.

Ms Herbert—One of the issues we do have is having the most decentralised population in the country. It certainly has a lot of impacts and puts a lot of pressure on things. ABC recently set up a child-care centre in my electorate, on a population base of about 25,000. There are a lot of other communities that are much smaller than that. Perhaps there is an opportunity to reignite the capital grants through the Grants Commission to local government to facilitate this process. Perhaps local government in the state may have an opportunity to play a significant role in

providing child care as they do in some of the municipal areas in the state. They do take a very active role.

Ms GEORGE—You are seeing here, as elsewhere, a major increase in the number of places provided by the private sector. Is there a major problem finding places for the under-twos here in Tasmania—very young babies?

Ms Herbert—I am afraid that this is not an area that I know a great deal about, and the person who wrote this has moved on, but my sense from looking at this is that those kinds of places or the long day care and fitting in with shiftwork requirements and that kind of thing are where things are a little more problematic.

Mrs IRWIN—What are the hours of operation of the child-care centres at the schools? I know that a number of submissions we have received—I am talking about the mainland here—said that they have a child-care centre on school property but it is not flexible enough, mainly for the mother. Usually the mother will drop the children off at, say, 7.30 in the morning and will then want to pick them up at, say, 4 o'clock in the afternoon. However, they usually only go from nine to three. What are the hours? Are they usually a bit longer than that?

Mr QUICK—I can answer that once again. I know the one at Blackmans Bay operates very early in the morning and reasonably late at night so that there is before and after school care as well, which I think is essential. One issue that I would like to raise is that one of our senior secondary colleges, Claremont College, encourages young mothers to get back into education and then into work and, as part of that, has established a child-care centre where they train child-care workers. So the young mothers at Claremont College can study and have their children cared for by people learning to be child-care operators. That is part of the regulatory program, which I think is a wonderful initiative set up by the principal of the senior secondary college, Lynne Hanlon. Hopefully, it is something this government will look at in the future, but because of our regional basis—and we have senior secondary colleges spread throughout the state—something like this, a really good initiative, will enable young people to get into the workforce and become child-care employees, especially casual workers. It is interesting to see today's *Mercury* article about the casualisation of the workforce in Tasmania, which is probably greater than anywhere else in Australia. That is one initiative that we ought to look at.

CHAIR—I have often said that there are many similarities between aged care and child care, and one of the good developments in aged care while I was minister was to see providers of care training staff and giving people qualifications. The staff might move on to other employers, but it was a good model, and it sounds like a similar model.

Mrs IRWIN—I am interested to know a little more about Tasmania Together. I will quote a letter that was received by the secretariat on 24 May, signed by the Premier when he submitted this submission. He stated:

Tasmania *Together* is the State's long-term social, economic and environmental vision that articulates where Tasmanians want to be in 2020.

He went on to say:

For example Tasmania *Together* seeks to increase the proportion of employees with flexible leave options, and to improve access to accredited (child and aged) care services for dependants.

How long has Tasmania Together been going for, and how is it progressing?

Mr Kons—It was the initiative of the previous Bacon government in about 1998. It is based on a model from New Brunswick in Canada, and the concept is getting the community involved—getting the community to have real input into the benchmarking process—and it is all encompassing. There are annual reviews. There are questionnaires. The public is very involved in it, and it sets us for our direction into the future as far as developing policy goes. We can have a look at the benchmarks and determine that that is the way that the community is heading before we actually get there.

Mrs IRWIN—Have you seen an increase in the number of parents of young children returning to the workforce through Tasmania Together?

Mr Kons—The economic revival in this state has certainly been spectacular. In the last seven years, with a workforce of about 210,000, 32,000 jobs have been created and long-term unemployment has been halved in the process. It is not necessarily the younger or the older age group; unemployment has been whittled away across all sectors. From where we were, we are now very close to the national average. So it is hard to say whether it is older or younger people coming into the workforce; it is spread right across.

Mrs IRWIN—I want to refer to today's article on page 3 of the Hobart *Mercury*, titled 'Casual worker shock'. We were saying that one in five—about 40,000—Tasmanian workers were casual. I want to know, because I am noticing this is especially in Western Sydney, what the government has done for flexible hours for shift workers. You find that sometimes it might be part-time shift work, their income is not that high and they are lucky if they have got a car to get to work. I wonder what the metro system is like. Do you cater for shift workers?

Mr Kons—For the larger population centres, there is a metro network. It goes until relatively late in the evenings but not right through. In fact, I think it is subsidised to the tune of about \$17 million a year, and the usage of it is a serious issue. It is up to the minister to determine whether we start using it beyond the current hours. Fares are set by the independent regulator, so that is outside our area of responsibility.

Mr QUICK—It is interesting that when we were in Victoria we had a discussion about having free public transport, which would give people access. We have greater casualisation of our workforce, so people at all hours of the day and night will be able to access public transport because it is free. In my electorate and other electorates, the metro does not run to some areas and people are disadvantaged because they cannot afford cars to get to jobs. It is a bit of a disincentive.

Mr Kons—As I said earlier, we have a very decentralised population. A long haul for us is a 5-minute car trip, whereas in Victoria it takes you an hour or two to get from one place to another. We can get some advice on the metro aspect of it for you at a later stage.

Mrs IRWIN—It would be good if you could take it on notice.

Ms Herbert—Also, as part of taking it on notice, I believe there has been a review within the Department of Infrastructure, Energy and Resources on passenger transport concerns with a focus on some of those regional and rural issues. So I guess it is about taking on notice the findings that may be coming out of that. I do not know that it is quite concluded at this stage.

Mr QUICK—Is also impacts on retention rates. We have probably one of the lowest retention rates in Australia. Both you and I, Minister, represent areas with large, decentralised populations, and children have to travel very long distances to get to senior secondary colleges.

Mr Kons—As far as leading by example goes and what the government is doing within our department, the report we put in shows the flexibility that we have achieved in the last few years. We think leading by example is the best approach, and we have certainly done that.

Ms GEORGE—The submission outlines a number of good initiatives on work and family and supportive policies for state public servants. It is not just peculiar to Tasmania, but sometimes you wonder to what extent the provisions that governments can enforce for their own employees actually flow on to the people in the private sector. Has there been any analysis to see the degree to which family-friendly provisions operate outside the government sector in Tasmania? Is there any local research that you know of?

Ms Herbert—None that I can put my finger on at this point in time, but what is interesting from what has come through the election platform is the commitment to supporting small businesses that do not have the resources to gain access to the expertise around HR management and to create work friendly environments in their workplaces. I think that is part of one of the initiatives that is being put forward for this current term, as well as more research into how you build up that human capital that supports businesses so that they can maintain their productivity within the context of family-friendly issues.

Mr QUICK—What is the take-up rate of SSALS in the Public Service? I would be interested in a breakdown by agency. I would be interested in how many part-time teachers there are. I know that yesterday a Melbourne newspaper said that a school principal is taking a discrimination case to the tribunal because he wants to work part-time as a school principal because of the pressure. I would be interested to know how many teachers work part-time and what other agencies there are that have taken advantage of SSALS. It would be interesting to see, because we talk about family-friendly workplaces but if the take-up rate is small we ask, ‘Why is there such a small take-up rate?’ But if it is very successful, we can go around the other states and ask other government agencies what the take-up rate there is. Is it just in legislation and not being taken up? We can ask people why that is not the case.

Mr Kons—We will take that on notice.

Mrs IRWIN—Attorney-General, in your opening comments I think you mentioned that child care should be affordable. What would you like the Commonwealth to look at to make child care affordable? I am not sure if you mentioned a tax deduction or rebate.

Mr Kons—As I said, the capital contribution is a serious issue in a small state like this. We have many small communities of below 25,000 residents, so the Commonwealth could provide capital funds for the private providers and possibly capital funds for the initiative we have

undertaken within the schools. There is a lot of unused space within our schools. It is not only an issue in our state but also a national issue. Throughout the country there is space. That is one aspect of it. The capital contribution is the glaring issue. The tax deductibility is another issue. As was mentioned earlier regarding a casualisation of employment, having run a business myself and knowing that some employees may not like working three or four hours when they start losing the money that they get, perhaps in rural and regional Australia we could look at a scheme whereby before you start losing your Centrelink payment, for example, the threshold is higher. That would create an incentive for people who want to work more than three or four hours.

Mr QUICK—I think it was raised yesterday that there ought to be that six-month hiatus between going off unemployment benefits and starting your first job at low pay.

Mr Kons—I will give you an example. I am aware that in the hotel industry in this state three hours of work on a late night will take you up to about \$80 of gross pay, and I think it starts impacting on Centrelink. You cannot run a business when people start thinking about their options after three hours of working because they are going to start losing part of their income.

CHAIR—It is not so much about losing the income as it is about losing what goes with the Centrelink. It is the additional add-ons that people are concerned about losing. We had a lot of discussion yesterday with the Institute of Family Studies about the reservation payment, which is the amount of money people have to earn to make it worthwhile to go back into the paid workforce. What came out of that discussion was that there is a huge lack of comprehension and understanding of what that figure is, and people are fearful of it when in fact the reality is that they need not be. I think a third of people have absolutely no idea of what that figure would be anyway. So we had quite a discussion on that issue yesterday.

Mr Kons—That would be a very good initiative, because I have seen it, as I said, in the hotel industry, where people perceive, ‘If I work more than three hours I will lose X, Y and Z on my benefits.’ Perhaps Centrelink can put out some basic documentation that can go not only to employers but also to employees that says, ‘You can work X amount,’ rather than them taking a punt and getting it wrong.

CHAIR—It seems we are looking at different sorts of thresholds. We have income tax thresholds, and we have now discovered through our inquiries that we have multiple numbers of differing thresholds. A threshold can be \$6,000, \$20,000 or \$40,000 to \$50,000.

Ms GEORGE—They can often be different for different payments.

CHAIR—It can be enormously complex.

Ms GEORGE—The whole system is incredibly complex. I know from constituents coming to see me that it is hard enough to navigate the maze when you are a politician let alone when you are a part-time mum at work and there is this fear, ‘If I go over a certain number of hours, I am going to lose X, Y and Z.’ I think the whole system acts as a disincentive to get people into paid work.

CHAIR—I do not think there is any published help to tell people what that figure is, is there? It was overestimated in the work that the Institute of Family Studies did. Many people

overestimated what that figure would be, and that does act as a disincentive even though it is not real.

Mr Kons—As I said, many employers do not have the ability to tell their staff, ‘You can work more than three or four hours and earn X amount of money before it starts impacting on you.’ The opportunity is there—

Ms GEORGE—Do you have a strong view about tax deductibility for child care? That is an issue that we are obviously being asked to consider.

Mr Kons—I have a strong view on that—that it should be tax deductible. At the same time, on a personal level—I will not commit the government to this—I think there is a national focus on the wrong end of the tax debate. All the focus is on the top-end earners. It should be down at the bottom end, and the thresholds should be increased or low-paid workers should be looked after better. Regrettably, the problem is that in the political sphere the people who are making the political decisions tend to be the ones at the top end.

Ms GEORGE—Although if you raise the threshold the high-income earners benefit too, don’t they?

Mr Kons—That is right—everyone benefits. I think in a small state like this, where the average wage is about \$33,000, it would certainly benefit our people to make sure that the threshold gets increased down the bottom. That is where the economic activity will be driven anyway, because as the disposable income goes up there are greater opportunities to generate greater taxes.

CHAIR—Would it surprise you to know that 54 per cent of people earn between \$20,000 and \$50,000 a year and that 38 per cent of families pay no tax at all because of the action of family tax benefit A and B and then the child-care benefit kicking in? Right now, 38 per cent of families pay no tax; indeed, some of them actually get a top-up.

Mr Kons—Nothing would surprise me with the tax system.

CHAIR—What is surprising to me—and the others have heard me give this example—is that if you are a single person earning \$40,000 a year you will pay close to \$9,000 tax. If you are a couple with no children, where one partner earns two-thirds of the \$40,000 and the other partner earns a third, your tax will be \$5,500 because you have two thresholds. If you are a couple with a single income with two children under five, your tax-free threshold will be \$41,500. You will not pay any tax; in fact, your disposable income will be \$41,500. Does that mean that a couple who are saving up to have children but do not have any yet are in fact subsidising those who have already had children, and does that act as a disincentive to them to have children?

Mr Kons—As I said, tax is a difficult area. You can be a politician who earns a lot of money and have depreciation benefits because of your private affairs and be paying no tax at all. Those are the perks.

CHAIR—I do not think I have heard of anyone doing that.

Mr Kons—There probably is.

CHAIR—Do you have any down here?

Mr Kons—It is a difficult thing. As you said, the thresholds are all over the place.

CHAIR—If you are a senior and single, it is \$20,000.

Mr Kons—The combinations and permutations and working within the system—

CHAIR—But you think that tax deductibility is fair if you could have it for child care?

Mr Kons—Most definitely.

Mr QUICK—One of the major disincentives for people to have children, especially on the mainland, is the cost of housing. I know that the Tasmanian government has had that affordable housing policy, which has seen quite a few people on low incomes actually buy their house, but we have been smitten with the mainland disease of rapid increases in the price of houses. Is the government, as part of the Tasmania Together process, looking at perhaps increasing or tinkering with the affordable housing policy to enable more people to buy their house, given the price of houses in the broadacre has probably doubled in the last three years?

Mr Kons—We certainly worked together with the not-for-profit sector in the announcements that came out in November-December to make sure that there was housing held behind, simply because of the fact that the building sector was very buoyant. However, the government is certainly committed to working together with not-for-profit organisations. At the same time, economic activity has certainly been a No. 1 issue in this state, as has the creation of a stable economic environment to make sure that people do have the certainty and confidence to be able to buy a house. But, as was mentioned earlier, you can have certainty and all those sorts of things one day and the next day you can have industrial relations changes which can throw that certainty out the window. We are definitely committed to generating more affordable housing in this state.

Mr QUICK—Another issue which has been raised with us is the inflexibility of school hours. The schools have always started at the same time, and we have had an increase in the number of student-free days. We have a submission here from a parent who works at Purity Newtown that, when there is a student-free day, you cannot suddenly get one day's child care at a long day centre, so one of the parents—usually the mother—usually has to take a day off to cater for that.

Ms Herbert—My understanding is—and we would have to go and check—that schools offer that capacity for parents who cannot find child care.

Mr QUICK—But there is a bit of sense of guilt: 'My child is at the school because I do not have the flexibility in my workplace arrangements to take time off. You might have six or eight student-free days in a year, and I only have so much family leave owing to me, and I want the job.' That is one thing. Also, parent-teacher appointments are during school hours.

Ms Herbert—I do not think all of them are.

Mr QUICK—No, but that is one issue that has been raised around the country—that schools need to be a little more flexible in how they arrange a whole series of things, considering that more and more mothers, especially, are taking up part-time casual or permanent part-time work in our society. The silos talking to each other.

Mr Kons—I will pass that on to the new education minister.

CHAIR—I am very interested in looking at the issue we talked about—the state government taking the initiative regarding utilising school sites. I am quite interested in getting more of a handle on that policy. If it would not be too much to ask of you, perhaps one of your colleagues in Education, where it might fall, could give us some more details on that. That could be extremely useful for us.

Mr Kons—It came out of the fact that we did a strategic management plan in the education sector a few years ago. It looked at the usability of schools, how much space was being used, the changing demographics and those sorts of things that impacted on utilisation.

CHAIR—That could be very useful to us. The other thing I might commend you on is that in the state government's submission there is a nice little section that says that there is paid adoption leave under your Public Service policy. The submission says:

Employees are entitled to a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 52 unbroken weeks of adoption leave. Their period of leave has to include the actual day of adoption.

In our last inquiry into adoption, we were quite critical that in areas birth parents were given certain benefits that were not allowed to adopting parents, and we said it should always come from the date of the adoption of the child rather than the birth of the child. So it gave me a great deal of pleasure to read that.

Mrs IRWIN—I am very interested in finding out about school based child care. In the submissions that we have received that has been one of the greatest complaints by working parents, whether they are full-time or part-time. They might have a seven-year-old and a three-year-old, and they find that they are taking up to and sometimes over an hour in the morning just to drop off one child at school and take the other child to a preschool or child-care centre. They would like to have a one-stop-shop, if we could call it that. So I for one would be very interested in seeing that.

CHAIR—If we could find the time to come down and do a view, that would be equally good.

Mr Kons—We would welcome you back, and we would organise to take you around.

Mr QUICK—You could fly in to the north-west coast and then come down and fly to Hobart.

CHAIR—It is interesting that we found a really good model in Tasmania in relation to our adoption inquiry, when we were in this very room. We found that there were new things happening in adoption attitudes, which pleased us a lot and we said so in our report. So if we could find another nice model, which on another occasion we found in Tasmania, we would be very pleased.

Mr Kons—As Mr Quick said, I think there is an opportunity in my electorate. Where I live in Burnie the council is very instrumental in child care, and it has a couple of centres itself. There is a new ABC Centre in Devonport, and at Miandetta there is a school centre as well. So you could have a picture of all three arrangements.

CHAIR—We might see what we can do about that.

Mrs IRWIN—I know taxation is not your area, Minister, but what is the Tasmanian government's views on the advantages of income splitting? Would you like to take that on notice?

Mr Kons—Yes, we will take it on board.

Ms GEORGE—They make reference to it.

Mrs IRWIN—I think you have made reference to it in your submission.

Mr Kons—It does not impact on our general taxes so we think it is a great initiative.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for coming, particularly as you have taken on this responsibility in such a short time. We are very grateful that you came to present evidence to us.

Mrs IRWIN—So soon after the elections, too.

CHAIR—Yes. We would be most grateful for that additional information and we look forward to perhaps taking you up on coming to your electorate and having a view.

Mr Kons—Thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to come before you. It is a very noble cause to look at something before it impacts on us and there is no point of return. If we can be of any assistance, it would be our pleasure.

CHAIR—Thank you.

[12.13 pm]

FENNEY-WALCH, Ms Belinda Mary, Private capacity

CHAIR—Good morning. Would you state to the committee the capacity in which you appear before it?

Ms Fenney-Walch—I appear as a private citizen.

CHAIR—We thank you for your submission. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms Fenney-Walch—Would it be helpful for you to know what is happening with my family at the moment, to give you a bit of background?

CHAIR—Absolutely.

Ms Fenney-Walch—You will have picked up from my submission that I have three children, who are aged eight, six and two. I have recently doubled my hours and I am now working four days a week. My husband is in full-time employment. We access child care at Blackmans Bay, which is absolutely brilliant. I am a beneficiary of the model that you were recently talking about—that is, linking schools to child care. It is brilliant and I am happy to talk to you about that.

CHAIR—Good.

Mrs IRWIN—We would like to hear about it.

Ms Fenney-Walch—We use three days a week of full day care and four sessions—the boys have two sessions each—of after school care. One thing we have always found hard is estimating income. Over the last few years I have tended to change around my hours and my level of work a lot. I also do some freelance work. We have been badly stung in the past and have a fairly large debt.

CHAIR—This is from your family tax benefit.

Ms Fenney-Walch—Child care.

CHAIR—The CCB.

Ms Fenney-Walch—Yes.

Mrs IRWIN—Based on estimating your income in advance.

Ms Fenney-Walch—Yes. So we now tend to overestimate our income.

CHAIR—Does the gratuitous payment you now receive once a year assist in getting rid of that debt?

Ms Fenney-Walch—No. My understanding is we cannot be on the once a year payment because we are paying the debt back slowly. That is my understanding. I think we are eligible—

CHAIR—So if you have the debt you do not get the payment. They take the payment into account.

Ms Fenney-Walch—I think we are eligible for a \$10 a week family tax payment at the moment, and \$9 of that goes out for our repayment. We are about to reassess that as well and pay more back.

CHAIR—So the one-off payment does not come to you; it is offset against your debt.

Ms Fenney-Walch—I do not believe we are getting the one-off payment; we are getting the fortnightly—

CHAIR—You are not eligible for it.

Ms Fenney-Walch—Maybe not. I do not believe we have ever had a yearly payment.

Mrs IRWIN—You said in your submission that your one-year-old was waiting for placement.

Ms Fenney-Walch—That is right.

Mrs IRWIN—What has happened now that the child is two?

Ms Fenney-Walch—We waited I think 18 months to get the three days a week of child care that we wanted. When we got that, again, we were not able to choose the days. I had to fit work in around the days that we had available.

Mrs IRWIN—The reason being they were the only days available.

Ms Fenney-Walch—Yes.

Mrs IRWIN—If you do not take them, that is it.

Ms Fenney-Walch—Yes. at one stage last year I was in a position where I was able to get three days a week of mixed day care and after school care for my child who was at kindergarten, but those days did not relate to the days that I was able to get child care for my daughter. I think I only had one day for which I was covered fully with child care. So it was of absolutely no assistance at all to me. I am very lucky in that I and my husband have had very supportive employers. While I am working four days a week at the moment, I actually only go into work three days a week and I work eight hours a week from home, and my husband is doing something similar. He is at the uni and they are allowing him to work a day, or eight hours, a week from home.

CHAIR—So the kids have someone at home two days a week.

Ms Fenney-Walch—That is right.

Mrs IRWIN—How did you negotiate this with the employer?

Ms Fenney-Walch—I think we are lucky that the skills that my husband and I have are in short supply. I took 12 months adoption leave from work and then went back to work and had the opportunity to go part-time, which I chose to do. Then, if they wanted me to increase my hours, I could say: ‘I can do some work from home for you if it would help. I’m happy to do eight hours a week from home if you want.’ My skills are in short supply so they took that up.

Mrs IRWIN—How much is child care costing you per week?

Ms Fenney-Walch—About \$550 a month.

Mrs IRWIN—In your submission you were talking about child care being tax deductible. Would you support that? Is that what you would be looking at or would you like to see the government consider that?

Ms Fenney-Walch—Absolutely. I think it is fantastic that we have the 30 per cent rebate now, but my concern about child care is the family assistance side of it. In my book, child care has to be considered a work related expense. If it was not, I would eat straw for dinner—that is, if I was working. It is not just for the tax breaks; it is that, if it was tax deductible, it would also mean that families could get the family benefits they are entitled to, because the Family Assistance Office assesses their entitlements on their taxable income. If you are paying child care, taxable income is a grossly exaggerated figure as opposed to what you are actually taking home. I pay \$6,000 per annum in child care. If that \$6,000 was taken off my taxable income I would get tax breaks and far more assistance. I find it really strange.

CHAIR—It is a double whammy.

Ms Fenney-Walch—It is a double whammy.

CHAIR—It is an interesting point.

Ms Fenney-Walch—I find it really strange that there is not more public outcry. I say to people, ‘Don’t you find that annoying?’ and most people do not seem to have thought of it. It annoys me, because I have friends who bring home the same amount of money that I do but get far more assistance because they do not have the child-care costs.

CHAIR—You are the first person to actually express that point.

Ms GEORGE—On your combined income, are you a little bit over the limit for the family assistance?

Ms Fenney-Walch—We do get a small amount of family assistance.

Ms GEORGE—If you could reduce that income by \$6,000—

Ms Fenney-Walch—We would get far more. We would pay our debt off more quickly. It just seems to me that the family Assistance Office is using a false figure. The Australian government has quite rightly identified that families are ‘doing it tough; therefore, we’ll give them assistance’. But, if you are paying for child care, you actually get less assistance than you really should be entitled to.

Mrs IRWIN—I hope you do not mind my asking this question, but we are seeing a lot of evidence that people are delaying having a family. Were your circumstances similar? Before you decided to start a family or to adopt, which you did with your last child, was the delay to do with income, housing affordability or child care?

Ms Fenney-Walch—We did not delay, although we waited until we had a house and we felt financially secure. We both had permanent positions, so financially we felt it was okay. Why don’t people have children these days—they do—but why is the birth rate declining? You drop your income by half, you triple your costs, you double your work, you triple your stress and you halve your sleep.

Mrs IRWIN—Very well said!

Ms Fenney-Walch—If you look at it that way, why would anyone with any nous be having children? Thankfully, our desire to reproduce is stronger than our sense and the practicalities, so we do still continue to have children. We would have to be mad, wouldn’t we?

Ms GEORGE—That was a nice summation.

CHAIR—It was a very nice summation. I am sure I will see that in print somewhere.

Mrs IRWIN—If child care were—let’s use the words—a lot cheaper than what you are paying, do you think more people would consider going back into the workforce part-time or full-time?

Ms Fenney-Walch—Yes, although I think it is about more than child care and cost; it is about the availability of child care, which was certainly something we struggled with. Because my third child was adopted, we could not put her name on a waiting list as soon as I got pregnant, so that added to the delays for us. It is about the availability, it is about the location of having it linked with the school so it is easy to do your drop off and it is about quality. It has been well and truly demonstrated by research that the early childhood years are—

Mr QUICK—Critical?

Ms Fenney-Walch—so important for the foundations of life and that we have to get it right in those years. I think many people do not want to take the risk and want to keep their children at home to make sure. I personally have had a very good relationship with my child-care service at Blackmans Bay. It has been brilliant. But I think it is an underpaid and an undervalued workforce and it is pure luck that we have really good staff down there. It is lovely to see that

child-care workers are trained in a similar way to teachers and that they are paid and valued in the same way: these are our children; they are so precious.

CHAIR—You have heard the federal government float the idea that perhaps there should be a compulsory preschool year. Do you think that is a good idea?

Ms Fenney-Walch—I had not actually heard that, but I would certainly support that. I felt that both my two boys were ready to go to school before they actually did go to school. They did do preschool through the child-care service.

CHAIR—You felt they benefited?

Ms Fenney-Walch—Absolutely.

CHAIR—We heard yesterday that that the evidence certainly is that children who do have the benefit of preschool—and that means learning something—in fact do benefit by learning the basic skills.

Ms Fenney-Walch—I am sure they do. They also have the confidence when they start in kindergarten and prep. I did parent help with my child in kindergarten and in prep and I still do, and some children do not seem to have some of the basic skills like being able to cut paper in a straight line, whereas my children, having gone through child care and preschool, have a lot of those skills that some children do not have.

Mrs IRWIN—Can we just go back to child care and the problems that you have finding a good location and availability et cetera. How long did it take you to find the centre that you now use?

Ms Fenney-Walch—It did not take me long to find it at all. All my family are locally based there and the rest of my family have sent their children to the same place, so I put my child's name only on the one waiting list.

Mrs IRWIN—How long did it take on that waiting list?

Ms Fenney-Walch—It took 18 months for me to get three days.

Mrs IRWIN—One and a half years to get the three days and then they had to tell you what three days you were given?

Ms Fenney-Walch—Yes.

Mrs IRWIN—Then you had to go back and negotiate with your employer and say—

Ms Fenney-Walch—‘This is what I can offer you.’

Mrs IRWIN—‘I can't work the days that I'm working now because I can only get child care for these days.’

Ms Fenney-Walch—Yes.

Mrs IRWIN—You are lucky you have an employer who allowed you to do that.

Ms Fenney-Walch—That is right.

Mr QUICK—It is considered to be easier to get child care in Tasmania compared to the mainland.

Ms Fenney-Walch—Maybe if I had put her name down on other lists I would have got in earlier. It is quite possible, but I was not willing to do that. That was a choice I made. I was talking about the linking of child-care facilities to schools.

Mrs IRWIN—Tell us a bit about that experience.

Ms Fenney-Walch—It is absolutely brilliant.

CHAIR—Julia, can I pass the chairmanship to you?

Mrs IRWIN—Most definitely, Chair.

CHAIR—Thank you. I have to catch a plane. I was delighted to hear the beginning of your evidence, Belinda.

Ms Fenney-Walch—Just before you leave, I thank you for your support for intercountry adoption. It is brilliant.

Mrs IRWIN—It was a good report, wasn't it? I also add that it was a bipartisan report of both sides of the chamber.

CHAIR—Absolutely.

Ms Fenney-Walch—It was something to celebrate.

CHAIR—We were considering doing good things for Australia. We have all heard your comment and we are still on the case to ensure it happens.

Mr QUICK—Tell us about Blackmans Bay.

ACTING CHAIR (Mrs Irwin)—What is the name of the centre, Belinda?

Ms Fenney-Walch—Blackmans Bay Children's Centre. I believe that the previous minister, Paula Wriedt, did some work with other schools—I think, Kingston Primary, and there is a school on the eastern shore, and no doubt there are some other schools around the place. She did this linking of child-care facilities with schools. Psychologically, I think it is an advantage for the children. I take my three children to school and my husband takes my three children to school. Mistra goes to child care and we talk about that as being her school. We take her to her

classroom. Therefore, when she goes to school her transition to school will be far easier. She is used to being in the school grounds with the children. With respect to sharing resources, the buildings, the after school care buildings are all located on the same site. The ovals, the sporting facilities, the school hall—the whole lot—are all shared. With respect to the teamwork between the staff, there is open rapport. The holiday programs are all linked. It is good. If a child, for example, has some issues during the day at school, nine times out of 10, after school care will be told, ‘There’s been a problem, just let the mother know.’ It is teamwork; it is excellent.

ACTING CHAIR—The transition from preschool to primary or infant school would be good because they are in the same place?

Ms Fenney-Walch—There is no issue; there is no problem. It is just that you are moving to a different classroom. You just do not make a big thing of it: ‘You’re actually going to school now.’ It is a case of, ‘You’re in this room now.’ I also believe that it helps working parents because it is so much easier to do the drop off and the pick-up.

Mr QUICK—Also, I think if there is a crisis at work there is an understanding because the child is part of the community at the child-care centre or the school?

Ms Fenney-Walch—I think that is right. I think you have touched on a really important word there—it is community and that whole community is engrossed in that child and they all know the child.

ACTING CHAIR—The other feather in my hat is that I am on the Joint Standing Committee on Migration. It is an inquiry we have at the moment regarding skills shortages and the recognition of overseas trades. I am also interested in the point you make in your submission, where you state:

It is incredible that Australia faces a skills shortage in many occupations, yet many parents either can not afford to work because of the cost of child care, or are not able to work because they are unable to access childcare.

If child-care costs went down and there were more places available, do you feel that the skills shortages in Tasmania would reduce? I know that there are skills shortages here in Tasmania, especially in nursing professions in aged care homes and hospitals.

Ms Fenney-Walch—I do not know whether it would improve or not, but I know of a lot of parents who are not working or at least are delayed in going back to work because of child-care shortages or the perceived or real cost of child care—they think, ‘What’s the point? Most of my money would disappear.’ They balance the cost issues against the lifestyle issues and it does not add up. There is not enough financial gain to wipe out the extra hassle, stress and exhaustion of working. To me it is the straw that breaks the camels back in a lot of cases.

Mr QUICK—You must have very understanding employers, but most people in the workforce are not lucky like you and your husband.

Ms Fenney-Walch—That is right.

Mr QUICK—How do we encourage employers to see what you have achieved as a benefit and a bonus not only to them as employers but also to society in general?

Ms Fenney-Walch—I do not know. I am surprised that employers do not see more of the value of it. To train a staff member and give them a historical knowledge of the organisation—the whole broad picture around their career—costs a huge amount. You cannot replace it easily. Surely it is better for employers to try and get those people to come back after having a child so they can keep that knowledge rather than lose it. I am surprised employers do not see it; I do not know the answer, though. I was also going to mention breastfeeding. I was very lucky that I was able to express for my two biological children while I was at work, but I know my twin sister, who also made a submission to this inquiry, had a lot of trouble expressing milk and very nearly resigned because of lack of access to appropriate facilities to express breast milk.

ACTING CHAIR—Was this recently?

Ms Fenney-Walch—No, this was a few years ago.

Mr QUICK—The situation with the school.

ACTING CHAIR—I think I remember that. It was about nine years ago.

Ms Fenney-Walch—If I were breastfeeding now, there is nowhere in either of my current workplaces to do it—there is certainly nowhere in one of them and I do not think there is anywhere in the other where I could express, except in the toilet.

Mr QUICK—We talk about family-friendly workplaces, but has anything really changed? The attitude of some employers has changed. We finally got a place at Parliament House, which is not really sufficient, for nominal child care—you spend \$1 billion on a building but there is no child-care facility. Do the state and federal governments have to mandate some of these things to drag employers kicking and screaming to provide what mothers in particular see as a basic right? How would your employer feel if there were a mothers' room?

Ms Fenney-Walch—I think a lot of employers would think that it is a waste of space, and I can understand that because there may only be one person using it every couple of years. But surely it would be useful for most organisations and businesses to have a multipurpose room. If someone feels unwell for a few hours, they could lie down, and that same room could be used by mothers. It would not need to be a big room.

Mr QUICK—If we did something about child-care fees, more people would look at getting back into work. Their earning capacity would be altered if taxed deductibility were introduced and you would suddenly have an increase in the birth rate. You would have understanding employers, facilities at your workplace to breastfeed your child and a one-stop child-care centre through a seamless transition, and all these would add up to providing you with basically everything you want.

Ms Fenney-Walch—There is one more thing that you need: part-time work. I was lucky enough to get part-time work because I took adoption leave and maternity leave for the boys and chose to go back to work part-time after the 12 months. Had I decided to take another 12 months

off and lose my permanent position, I probably would not have gone back to work at all. There are very few part-time jobs out there, especially at high levels.

ACTING CHAIR—What we are also hearing, especially from women who have time off from work, is that they might have their 12 months off but, once they go back into the workforce, they can lose their promotion too.

Ms Fenney-Walch—That is right.

ACTING CHAIR—Especially if you are a professional woman.

Ms Fenney-Walch—Yes. That is another reason I have kept going with my career. At times it has been a struggle trying to balance work and family, but I keep going so that I can keep my peg there. I can keep my permanent, good position, keep the benefits of the work that I have done and I can keep promoting myself.

ACTING CHAIR—Of course, looking at the big picture there, if there was some sort of mechanism in place where there would be a guarantee that, if you decided to have, say, two years of unpaid leave, you would not have to wait a further two years to get that promotion? Did you want to go back to work part-time?

Ms Fenney-Walch—I was quite happy to go back to work. But I think that for a lot of people it is too early to go back to work after 12 months so they then relinquish their positions and lose the jobs they had. They no longer have that 12 months leave without pay for maternity leave. So they lose their positions and then they cannot go back. If it was two years, I suspect that a lot more parents would say, 'It has been two years and I am ready to go back.' They still have their position to get back into. That employer has not lost that person forever.

Mr QUICK—We also need to make provision for nought to twos, because, in lots of child-care centres, that is the real sticking point—you do not have that ability to do that.

Ms Fenney-Walch—That is right.

Mr QUICK—I have one other question. How do we encourage more men to take part-time work? At the moment, it is all skewed to women working part-time, especially lots of professional women. If anything happens to the child, it is always the mother who has to arrange her work habits to pick up the child if the child is sick or has an accident at school and the like.

Ms Fenney-Walch—That is a hard one for me to answer simply because a lot of my friends and certainly in my situation the father does take a very active role. It is actually a shared role. It is not so much that the father is helping out; it is actually a shared responsibility. I am hoping that, as more men do that, the whole culture will change. It is something that cannot change overnight. It is a cultural thing. The more men that are doing it, the more men will realise the value of it and we might see more men taking part.

Mr QUICK—We also need more employers, who are usually male at the very top level, to understand, because they have not gone through that process.

Ms Fenney-Walch—Yes, that is true.

ACTING CHAIR—You were saying earlier I think that you are paying \$550 per month for child care. We were talking about tax deductibility and tax rebate. What is your feeling about income splitting? Is that something that you and your husband have considered?

Ms Fenney-Walch—I am not comfortable to comment on it because I really have not given that a lot of thought.

ACTING CHAIR—That was another suggestion that we had heard.

Mr QUICK—Thank you for coming along any different capacity.

ACTING CHAIR—Yes, thank you very much. Thank you very much for putting in a submission and for being very honest about your family background.

Ms Fenney-Walch—Thank you.

[12.38 pm]

FULTON, Mr Paul Thomas, Private capacity

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you for coming today. Would you like to make an introductory statement before we proceed to questions?

Mr Fulton—Yes, I would like to outline the key issues for me and to put caveats on some of the things I am going to say. I am here as a private citizen and as a father in a family where both parents work I have not done a lot of research into this topic and the opinions are my own but are shared by my socio-economic circle of friends.

ACTING CHAIR—You are the people whom we should really be talking to—the ones who are hands on. Please continue.

Mr Fulton—I do acknowledge that, since I made my submission, some changes have occurred in tax rates and child-care rebates available to families. I will go through four key things that, in my opinion, would make a difference in bringing up a family in Australia. When our children were born, the key issue for my wife and I was the difficulty in accessing child care. It was a very stressful time, involving a huge number of phone calls and waiting lists. We managed to get child care a day or two before D-day. People in the child-care industry recognised the distress that we were in and responded to that.

It was not a lack of organisation that created this situation. As soon as our children were born we agreed that my wife would stay at home for a year, so we knew exactly when child care would be required. We put our names on multiple waiting lists. Perhaps part of the issue is that everyone puts their names on six or seven lists to try and get in, because everybody acknowledges that this is a problem. That happened to us twice—once for each child. The key issue is accessibility to quality child care. Obviously, we do not want to leave our child in a substandard institution.

As regards the next issue, I want to give my personal experience rather than highlight key issues that everyone has. Belinda mentioned it five minutes ago—that is, a cultural change is required to make men in male-dominated professions become more involved in the child-rearing process. In the organisation that my wife worked for, it was very acceptable for her to say, ‘I would like to work three days a week or four days a week,’ or ‘I would like to work seven hours a day.’ In my situation, it is not a thing that I would request because I do not think it would be granted. Perhaps the key issue is that I would not feel comfortable in asking for that. A cultural change amongst men in our society is required.

ACTING CHAIR—If you do not mind me interrupting here, do you feel that you could not approach your employer to ask for leave?

Mr Fulton—I could easily approach my employer and ask for a month’s leave or say to them that I need six weeks leave; that would be fine.

ACTING CHAIR—But not flexible working hours?

Mr Fulton—Even flexible working hours would be okay, as long as I still put in my eight, nine or 10 hours a day—if you see what I mean. That is the attitude. I would not bother asking to work consistently less than full-time—for instance, four days a week—because it would show a lack of commitment—

ACTING CHAIR—To the position.

Mr Fulton—It would create difficulties for the organisation. It would involve all these issues.

Ms GEORGE—I guess that will change in time with more men accepting responsibility for parental duties and being more involved. The stereotypes of dad at work and mum at home are all changing.

Mr Fulton—I hope so.

Mr GEORGANAS—Do you find among men that you associate with that there is a changed attitude towards child-rearing responsibilities?

Mr Fulton—Yes. I probably know three or four people who have cut back their jobs to four days a week to spend more time with their children. Quite often they do that for six months and then they bring it back up because they get another career opportunity. I do not think it is as acceptable—

Ms GEORGE—For men, no.

ACTING CHAIR—I think it is also the financial aspect—who is the major breadwinner within the family unit? I am hearing of a few role reversals where the wife might be on a higher income than the husband, so the wife—if she is fortunate enough to get maternity leave—will take off, say, 14 or 28 weeks and then dad will look after the child. But the most frustrating part for the dad is that he is not being offered the part-time work. So it is a cultural change, and it is up to governments of all persuasions to try to make this change.

Mr Fulton—I totally agree with what you are saying. Even if it is a situation where the female in the family unit is on a lower hourly rate, the tax implications mean that it has to be a fair bit lower before it is less than the male earns. If you take one day a week off, it takes the top 20 per cent of your wage off. If that is in the top tax bracket, that is really only a 10 per cent loss of income. If your wife is only working two days a week, the income and the fact that she earns the tax-free threshold means that you will be on a similar wicket financially.

ACTING CHAIR—Sorry for interrupting to ask those questions. Do you want to continue?

Mr Fulton—I will just keep going with this. The complexity of the financial calculations, with the interaction of child-care benefits, the taxation system and rebates—and these are all interrelated—is beyond comprehension. I expect that as a family unit we will receive 30 per cent of our out-of-pocket costs back in our next tax return, and that is over the last two years. That will be in the order of \$6,000.

Ms GEORGE—There is a cap on it of \$4,000.

Mr Fulton—So that is immediately reduced. I do not know the ins and outs of these rules. I do not know whether it is means tested.

Ms GEORGE—No, it is not.

Mr Fulton—So there are big chunks of money that have lots and lots of rules associated with them. It is very complex, from my point of view, to understand the interrelations between my wage, my wife's wage, the rebates—

Ms GEORGE—It is for everybody, Paul. It is a common problem.

Mr Fulton—and the baby bonus. We did not get that for our first child. She has just turned five. I do not believe we got it for our second child. He is 2½.

ACTING CHAIR—No, you would have just missed out, because I know that my daughter missed out and my grandson was born in February 2004. It was not in place then. So you have missed out everywhere.

Mr Fulton—Yes, I have just realised I missed out all the way along. I am not quite sure whether that is because of means testing or if I am over the limit. I do not understand the rules associated with it. Maybe I could make more effort, but I would like simpler processes if that is possible.

The fourth item that strikes me is something that was important to me at one stage. When I wrote that submission I worked for a company that had 600 employees in the same building and I tried to rally people together to organise on-site child care. It became clear that the organisation that I worked for did not want to do this because it was not core business and they thought the risks were too high, but it was not a financial decision. They came to a compromise where they could procure places elsewhere, but because they were not on site we could not pay for those places through our pre-tax income. I thought that was a ridiculous situation. If work provides you with child care, what does it matter—

Ms GEORGE—Where it is located.

Mr Fulton—whether it is half a block away in the CBD or on site. It seems to be a crazy situation. I think in a situation like that—which places like Westpac have, I believe, and a lot of universities have—it creates a better community spirit, it creates a better work environment and it goes a tiny little way to replacing the dislocation that work creates when people have to move away from their birthplace or if their parents have moved away. Quite a few of us do not have grandparents and extended family around. So I would like some changes to the taxation legislation to allow (1) off-site care to be provided by your employer and (2) for that not to be taxed under fringe benefits tax.

There are inconsistencies in the taxation legislation to do with the tax-free threshold of the non-working partner. My wife was very lucky and she had three months paid maternity leave, but if she had taken her three months off in the last three months of the financial year, effectively

she would have been paying either 42 or 50 per cent tax—I cannot remember which tax bracket she was in. But if she had taken that time off from 1 July that money would have been tax free. So when you have the baby affects how much money you get paid in your maternity.

Ms GEORGE—Isn't that interesting? You are absolutely right, but no-one has drawn that to our attention.

Mr Fulton—This is to the tune of 40 per cent of the figure—I find that incredible. Perhaps with a bit of extra planning you could work it out!

ACTING CHAIR—I think that Ms George is correct. No-one has really brought that to our attention. Thank you.

Mr Fulton—Income splitting—I heard that mentioned before.

ACTING CHAIR—You are answering all the questions that we were going to ask, because that was my question. Please continue.

Mr Fulton—I brought income splitting up in my submission. From my point of view, this relates to the fact that my wife has given up a professional career and has made sacrifices that in reality I did not have to make. I think that income splitting highlights the fact that both parents could be working, and there is great emotional benefit in that for the female of the partnership. I think that the tax-free threshold should apply to the family unit. If my wife is not in paid employment during that full year then her tax-free threshold is not used and is not of benefit to the family unit. So whether it is the tax-free threshold—

Ms GEORGE—So you would aggregate it for the two?

Mr Fulton—I would aggregate it for the family. It seems that, if I ran a small business, I could employ a nanny to look after my children and my employees' children—

ACTING CHAIR—You put that in your submission, yes.

Mr Fulton—and that would be part of the business expenses. Obviously, it would cost a lot less than the \$10,000 of after-tax money that we as a family fork out for two children three days a week.

ACTING CHAIR—Is that \$10,000 per year?

Mr Fulton—That is right. We are very lucky in Tasmania. In Hobart we pay \$46. At the time I wrote that submission the out-of-pocket cost was \$46 per day per child.

ACTING CHAIR—How many children do you have?

Mr Fulton—Two. I had this written down, but I do not have it in front of me. It is approximately \$500 a fortnight. It is a fair amount.

ACTING CHAIR—That is a big chunk out of the family budget.

Mr Fulton—Yes. We are lucky to have a mortgage that is under that. It is only for four years, maybe, until the children are 4½ to five, depending on when they are born and when they go to kindergarten—which is prep. Then those costs are reduced.

ACTING CHAIR—What are the ages of the children now?

Mr Fulton—My eldest is five and in August the youngest will be three—so 2²/₃.

Ms GEORGE—What is the school starting age in Tasmania? Five?

Mr Fulton—Prep is five.

Ms GEORGE—That is like kindy, is it?

Mr Fulton—Yes. There is a different system in New South Wales.

Ms GEORGE—I know. What inspired you make the submission? It is unusual for us, isn't it, Acting Chair? Individual statements have come from women, predominantly. So I was interested in reading yours in particular, from the perspective of the father, not the mum, as they have been the overwhelming majority of people who have submitted to us.

ACTING CHAIR—It is very good to see, Paul, that we have finally got some good males coming forward and putting in submissions. You are the first one that has come before the inquiry.

Mr Fulton—As you can see from the length of comments I made in my submission, the third point was the one that hit home with me.

Ms GEORGE—The point about your briefcase and your computer being tax deductible?

Mr Fulton—Yes. The fact of the matter is that I had been trying to set up this work based child care because these costs were quite high to me. The quality of care at the place that we have our children in is, I think, fantastic—but it could be improved if they had further resources. The way I saw it was that if I could set up work provided care I could keep paying the same out-of-pocket expenses but effectively the money available to look after my child would be much higher. It was a quality issue. I was cognisant of the issues involved with this due to the process of trying to set up work based child care.

ACTING CHAIR—I do not know if you work at the same place now, but you were saying that there were 600 employees there. Is that correct? And you are the one that started to initiate that. What sort of support did you get from the other employees regarding the work based child care?

Mr Fulton—Huge support from the other workers who had children there. My work responded in that they put on a part-time family centred person, for anybody who had family issues. They started paying for long day care during school holidays for the employees. So it had positive outcomes. I had a fantastic employer, really, in the scheme of things. It did create good outcomes, but not the key good outcome that I was after.

ACTING CHAIR—Have you finished your opening statement?

Mr Fulton—I have one more point to make, which is, again, on the inconsistencies in taxation law. We have our child at the moment in a non-profit based organisation run by a church organisation. I would like to be able to make a tax-deductible donation to that organisation to improve services. Even if I could do that it would be great. But I cannot do that. The people that work in that organisation do an absolutely fantastic job with minimal resources. I believe that has to change somehow.

ACTING CHAIR—Wages are very low, as well, within the child-care industry.

Mr Fulton—Wages are very low, and that is not reflecting the emphasis that our community should have on the extremely important formation years of a child.

ACTING CHAIR—You stated that you have two children, five years and three years. You have also stated that you have had difficulty in obtaining child care. How long did it take? Did you have to put your name forward when your wife was expecting your first child?

Mr Fulton—I do not think we put our name forward until the baby was born. Soon after the baby was born, we put that baby on multiple waiting lists. The way it panned out was that the waiting lists were a bit of a laugh. My wife rang up every six weeks to make sure we were still on the list—she kept on hammering and really played that role of ensuring that we were prioritised. We played whatever games we could play to make sure we had a position. That did not actually work. What worked were signs of stress on the phone—tears, voice breaking up: ‘You have to help me. I have been doing this, this and this.’ Then the reaction came in. That disappointed me because it was a process that created stress at exactly the time we did not need stress.

Ms GEORGE—In my area parents are putting their names down when they conceive. And then they are still waiting a year to get a place.

Mr QUICK—Yes, after the 12-week test—and being charged \$100 for every registration.

ACTING CHAIR—You did not have to pay a fee to put your name forward?

Mr Fulton—No, I do not believe we had to pay a fee.

Mr QUICK—As a rate payer, would you be interested in the proposition of perhaps a small increase in your rates on the understanding that your local government authority would provide child care, as they do with ambulance, fire, library and water and sewerage? We would have a community service rate which perhaps might mean that your rates might go up \$50 a year but when you have children there is a guaranteed child-care centre or centres within your area. If you have a child with a disability, you have disability services and respite; as you age there are aged care facilities provided as well. That would be better than the current crazy situation that you are facing, and that many other families in Australia are facing.

Mr Fulton—To be honest—

ACTING CHAIR—You can think about it and get back to us.

Mr Fulton—How it is provided is a little bit out of the field that I would like to comment on—

Mr QUICK—That is okay.

Mr Fulton—and which level of government provides it, or whether it is provided by private business or NGOs. I will leave my child with an organisation that I feel comfortable with—that is well-resourced, that has well-trained staff, that is safe and that is child centred.

ACTING CHAIR—That is what every parent wants.

Mr Fulton—An extra \$50 on my rates is one-tenth of what I pay per fortnight in child care. It is neither here nor there. Even if I had to pay it through my lifetime it is still minuscule compared with what I am paying.

ACTING CHAIR—You were saying that you pay \$500 per fortnight for child care for three days a week for the two children.

Mr Fulton—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—When you got that child care were you given the days that you had to take it or could you say, ‘Look, these are the days we need to put our children into child care’?

Mr Fulton—We were lucky enough to get the days we requested. Once you have formed a relationship with the people in the child-care centre that you are using they do try to be flexible. I pity parents who have to work Saturdays, Sundays and at other odd times of the week. I do not know how people possibly cope with the deregulation of industry—the supermarkets and entertainment services. We are lucky that we work Monday to Friday. We did not have a lot of issues in changing the days from Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday to Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, like they are now, and manipulating things once we were in the system. It has not happened automatically; there has been some waiting time but we have been accommodated.

ACTING CHAIR—I hope you do not mind me asking you this question. As you know, we have an ageing population. Our Treasurer has recently said, ‘One for mum, one for dad and one for the country.’ People are not having that number of children. People are having their first child when they are in their early 30s, and some are in their late 30s. What we are finding from some of the submissions we have had before this inquiry and some of the people who have come before it as well is that it is mainly the cost factor. They want to have children but they cannot afford to have children. Was that something that you and your wife talked about when you got married—‘We have to wait a number of years because of the cost of housing, child care and so forth’?

Mr Fulton—No.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you for answering that very honestly. It was straight to the point.

Mr Fulton—I think that is reflected in the answer to the first question. We were both 30-31. We had the financial resources to do it. There was always going to be some sacrifice but the money issue for us was not a factor.

Ms GEORGE—Out of interest, how did you find out about the inquiry? You are in a small minority of men responding. How did you know about the inquiry?

Mr Fulton—It was forwarded on to me by a female colleague.

Ms GEORGE—Because of your interest in the child-care issue at work?

Mr Fulton—Perhaps so—or perhaps I was on a global email list.

Ms GEORGE—It is great that you took the trouble.

ACTING CHAIR—Ms George is asking this because you are the only man from Tasmania. In an inquiry we did in the last parliament on family law matters we received hundreds even thousands of submissions. That is why we were curious to find out how you found out. There are a lot of people out there in Australia and Tasmania who do not know about this inquiry. So, thank you for that.

Mr QUICK—It is one of the key issues for people. The total inflexibility of child care impacts on families. We have a 30 per cent divorce rate at the moment. You do not need any additional pressures on families. You are one of the lucky few, I guess, who, despite waiting for a while, were able to get what you wanted. We have heard some horrendous stories of shonky child care as the only way for people to maintain their jobs. When you are paying huge mortgages like most people in Melbourne and Sydney are doing you virtually prostitute yourself and sacrifice a whole a lot of things in order to keep your children in child care so that you can work to pay the mortgage off.

Mr Fulton—I feel very blessed that we have been lucky on that front, for a variety of reasons.

ACTING CHAIR—What are your views on school based child care? I am not sure if you were in the room when we were discussing that with Belinda. The story that I am hearing in my electorate in south-western Sydney is that a parent, it is usually mum, will drop the children off at child care but they might have a five-year-old—I think your youngest has just started kindergarten—who goes to another child-care centre, so they have to hop back in the car and drive for another half an hour. What are your views on that being a one-stop shop? That sounds like a terrible term to use with children. What if you just went to the school, the little one went off to kindy and mum or dad then walked down to the child-care centre on the school grounds?

Mr Fulton—That is exactly right. Even in a city the size of Hobart it takes 40 minutes. I live two kilometres out of the city centre. I live probably three kilometres from both places where we drop our children. We have to go to the creche first and then the kindergarten. That, again, is difficult to do. Even the timing of primary school hours makes—

Mr QUICK—Yes, I raised that issue about inflexible school hours.

Mr Fulton—There are inflexible school hours. Hopefully the school that we send Eve, my eldest child, to will have care after school.

Mr QUICK—Before and after care.

Mr Fulton—Even now that she is at kindergarten, she cannot be dropped off before half past eight and after kindergarten she has to be taken to a long day care centre, which is a separate building on the same campus. We are lucky that she can be left there until 20 past four, which is when my wife picks her up, or she can stay there longer.

Mr QUICK—Are there penalties if you are late picking your child up?

Mr Fulton—Not for us.

Ms GEORGE—It is quite common for centres, isn't it, to charge—

Mr QUICK—We have heard evidence that if you are 20 minutes late because there is an accident on the freeway in Sydney you get docked so many dollars because someone has had to stay longer to look after your child, which adds to your guilt, takes out of your pocket and adds to the frustration of working and having children. It might not be a Tasmanian occurrence.

Mr Fulton—We are in a lucky situation in that we have such short distances to travel and it is unlikely that the traffic is going to create that sort of delay for us. Basically the children get priority. They get picked up on time. So that is not our experience, but of course I can only speak from my experience.

ACTING CHAIR—Would you say you would like to see the child-care facility on school grounds if the grounds were big enough?

Mr QUICK—As part of a package that the child-care centre, early childhood and then—

ACTING CHAIR—Before and after school care.

Mr Fulton—Absolutely. It would be great if we could drop both children off at the same place.

ACTING CHAIR—It would also be good for the child, instead of being pulled from pillar to post, I suppose. They would be on the grounds where they would eventually go to infants.

Mr Fulton—For instance, we have a primary school 100 metres down the road from us. That has a kindergarten, but it is only from half past nine to three o'clock on three days of the week, so there is no way that we can use that facility.

ACTING CHAIR—I think also—and this is the same on the mainland—the child has to be three years of age and toilet trained before they can go into one of those centres. Sometimes I think the Commonwealth and states should work together in partnership because our children are our future. Thank you very much for your submission. We are grateful to have more men come forward. Thank you very much.

Proceedings suspended from 1.14 pm to 1.59 pm

BARROW, Ms Jane Alison, Private capacity

ACTING CHAIR—Welcome. Do you wish to make an introductory statement before we proceed to questions? You can read it for the record if you want to.

Ms Barrow—I have compiled a few things about why I put in my submission. Firstly, I am the mother of two daughters, who are now aged nine and 11. I am a professional telecommunications engineer, I am a manager and I work in the electricity supply industry. I have been with my organisation for nearly 14 years. During that time I have taken maternity leave twice, I have worked part-time as an engineer and I returned to full-time work when my youngest child was two years old. I am now the manager of 35 people in my area. As I had no relatives living nearby who were able to assist with child care when the children were younger I made significant use of family day care before the children attended school. In fact, my carer even looked after my older child when I was in hospital having the second one. This was done as a favour. Family day care worked extremely well. That was just as well because I was given the run around from the child-care centre where I had had my name down for quite some time.

Because I was able to stay in the workforce part-time that meant I was able to be considered for a promotion to management when I returned to full-time work. I think it is very important that women are able to stay in the workforce at least doing some sort of paid work. Now that I am at management level, I have found that I am able to have more flexibility to successfully balance work and family responsibilities. But it is very dependent on your manager being accommodating, even when your organisation has a broad policy, which mine does, that encourages family-friendly work practices. They are often only available at the manager's discretion, so that is an important issue.

Even though I do have good flexibility, I find that I still have issues in that I am expected to attend functions, workshops or something after or before normal working hours. I find that I usually have to decline those sorts of things due to my family responsibilities. This causes me a few issues. I also notice that generally in the workplace there is a push from employers to have a more flexible workforce. That sounds good but this flexibility is usually to suit the work requirements, not the family requirements. That can be even worse for employees who are trying to juggle family responsibilities. I have found with my group that there are often trade-offs that you can make if both parties can be flexible. For example, I am now in a position where I can actually help facilitate a family-friendly workplace. My staff are predominantly male. They are technical and engineering staff. We can be flexible for their family responsibilities and I support their making use of arrangements such as carers leave, working from home—and some of them bring their children into work when they need to—

ACTING CHAIR—When they are desperate.

Ms Barrow—Yes. And arrangements such as part-time work and phased-in retirement. I think this is probably unusual in our type of business. But in being flexible, we all recognise there is a job to be done first, but that we can also be flexible for family responsibilities within reason. In return, we get flexibility in work practices back from them. My staff often come in on weekends or when they are on leave. They get called out, they work at home. They exceed expectations to

get their job done. They know that when they need flexibility from work for family responsibilities, they will get it. I would speculate that because we are able to provide such a flexible working arrangement there is a lesser need for child care than there otherwise would be and that some of their partners—the mothers of their children—are now able to undertake paid work when perhaps they would not have been able to in the past.

I move on to a couple of other issues. I talked about child care and so on in my submission, and I guess others have. Once the children go to school there are other issues that need to be considered, such as before and after school care and the quality of it. There are also transport issues associated with dropping more than one child off in two or three different places. This means that people need to have a car and they need to have somewhere to park when they get to work. That is the first issue.

I have found now that my kids do not actually use child care or after school care anymore; they are at the stage where they want to do sport and music and so on after school. As a good parent, I want them to participate in those things. But because these things occur after school and they require transport and so on, the flexibility required for that from working parents is even more demanding than it was when they were going to child care. So that is just another issue. In closing, I do not have the solutions, but I hope my experiences can assist you.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much.

Mr QUICK—You raise in your submission the inflexibility of school hours. Would you like to elaborate on that?

Ms Barrow—I guess it is not the inflexibility of them. My children start school at 10 minutes to nine and I should really be at work at half past eight. A lot of my staff start even earlier than that. The school that my children go to does not have before school care, so it is very difficult to get them there and then get to work myself on time.

Mr QUICK—What if we established, as some people say, that every primary school should have child care or some form of early childhood care like at Blackmans Bay and Kingston as a given, so that there is this seamless transition from child care, in whatever form you require it, through to grade 6?

Ms Barrow—That would certainly help. My kids go to Lauderdale primary. There was no child care when my first child started there.

Mr QUICK—There is now.

Ms Barrow—My second child went there for kindergarten. She would go to school for half the day and then spend half the day in the child-care centre. My other child was past the age where she could go into the child-care centre, so that did not help with her. One of them could go to the child-care centre before school but the other one could not. But if what you are suggesting in regard to before school care occurs that would be good.

Mr QUICK—Before and after school care—so you do not feel guilty about having to finish at a specific time and you know that your children are being looked after.

Ms Barrow—That would be good if it were a given.

Mr QUICK—Now that you are a manager and people are coming to you to ask for flexibility, you would be one of the few people in a managerial position that we have heard from that have been there and done it and in a position to say yay or nay. As part of a structure like Hydro Tasmania, which is a monolithic structure—

Ms Barrow—Male dominated.

Mr QUICK—male dominated, as you say—

Ms Barrow—Not that there is anything wrong with men.

Mr QUICK—how has it changed over the last 10 years as far as flexibility goes?

Ms Barrow—I think it has changed a lot. When I first started, I did not know of any people working part-time in an engineering field. There were very few women for a start—there are a lot more now. When I first started, maternity leave was okay and was well-established. When I came back I applied to work part-time—four days a week, I think it was—when my youngest child was in day care. I was successful in that, but it was unusual. It was something that had to be carefully considered.

ACTING CHAIR—How did you negotiate that? Was it one-on-one with your manager?

Ms Barrow—Yes. Having said that, I did not want to work set hours, if you know what I mean. Being an engineer, you do not need to work set hours as long as you get the job done. I found it was a bit difficult because the payroll system was set up so that you had to work certain hours every day but I had an arrangement with my manager that I would work a number of hours per week. I would do it when I could, but the payroll system thought I was working nine to three or whatever. I think I mentioned in my submission that meant with child care I had to pay for every Friday, because I ended up working every second Friday, to keep the place open. It was the same when my older daughter went to kindergarten. I had to pay for child care while she was at kindergarten and that sort of thing.

ACTING CHAIR—On the part-time issue, you make a point that a lot of the flexibility comes at the discretion of sympathetic managers. We found from a number of submissions that this is a real problem where women, particularly after a birth, want to come back part-time. Would you be in favour of a legislative provision such as in Britain where people have the right to request return so it is a legislated right rather than an individual one?

Ms Barrow—I would think so for a few years afterwards. The Hydro had a policy that you could ask for part-time work—this was after I had gone through—for up to two years; until your child was two years old. I know some women who have requested it and were refused. It was: work full-time or you don't have a job.

ACTING CHAIR—Or give up the job.

Ms Barrow—Although there is a policy, it was at the manager's discretion. I guess it depends on how valuable your employer thinks you are.

ACTING CHAIR—In some of the submissions we have received, especially from professional women who have time off, whether it be their 28 weeks on half-pay or the full 12 months—hopefully, some of them might be lucky enough to get two years—they say that, once they go back into the workforce and to their old job, it takes a while—perhaps an extra 12 months or two years—to go up the ladder of promotion.

Ms Barrow—I was not in the running for a promotion or any of the good jobs while I was working part-time. I was not able to do that until I came back full-time, but the fact that I had been keeping my hand in and doing some of the stuff made it so that I could get there.

ACTING CHAIR—You mentioned family day care was okay but you said you had frustrations finding—was it child care?

Ms Barrow—A child-care centre.

ACTING CHAIR—Can you let us know your experiences and what changes you would like to see?

Ms Barrow—I put my name down—it would have been fairly soon after I knew my child was on the way—with a child-care centre in Rosny; Harry, you probably remember it.

Mr QUICK—Yes.

Ms Barrow—At the time, not being a mother already, I did not understand what the pressures were going to be like. I thought, 'I'll have six months on maternity leave and I'll come back to work full-time.' I put my name down for full-time child care at that child-care centre but, by the time my daughter was four months old, she was still waking up three times a night and not going to sleep without being rocked. I thought, 'I can't go back to work while I'm not getting any sleep.' I talked to my boss and it was okay to extend my maternity leave for another four months and then I decided that I wanted to work part-time. I negotiated all of that. Then I went to the child-care centre and they said: 'You've changed what you want. You only want to work part-time now, so you'll have to go to the bottom of the list. People who want full-time care have got priority over you.' So that is why I ended up with family day care. It was a rush in the last two weeks before I went back to work because you go and meet the carer and find out if they are okay. It was down to the last couple of weeks before I knew that I had a suitable carer in place.

ACTING CHAIR—Would you have been happy if you had had something similar to family day care but in your own home rather than taking the children to the carer's home? Is that an option that we should be considering?

Ms Barrow—Like a nanny arrangement? I think that would be good, especially if you have two or three children. I have only got two. It would help, but I could not consider it because it was so expensive.

Mr QUICK—If it was tax deductible.

Ms Barrow—If it was, I think that would be a good option.

Mr QUICK—At the moment we seem to have one option to fit everybody and, because it is so inflexible, we now have corporatisation of child care on the mainland and it is coming here to Tassie. As you say, the emphasis is on people who want long-term full-day care.

Ms Barrow—That is right, and fixed hours. You have to pay for full-time even if you do not use it. In my job, it is expected—and more so now—that if there is work to be done, you have to stay until it is finished. I watched the clock and I had to go and get the kids from day care. It makes it very difficult. When your colleagues can stay longer, they are more likely to get promoted and that sort of thing.

ACTING CHAIR—How do you manage with vacation care with your nine- and 11-year-old?

Ms Barrow—At the moment, I do not use any form of day care because my kids are old enough to come home from school and look after themselves for an hour or so. I am fortunate enough to have enough annual leave to cover the school holidays.

ACTING CHAIR—So you take time off in school holidays.

Ms Barrow—Yes, I take time off.

Mr QUICK—You have three terms and a long break over Christmas compared to the mainland states where they have four terms. You have got an eight-week break over Christmas. How many people have eight weeks leave?

Ms Barrow—Not many. I have not actually worked it out. Do they have more holidays if it is four terms?

Mr QUICK—They have the same number of holidays but, because you have four terms, you have four 10-week terms. Then you have the two weeks and a bit of a break at Christmas, but it is not as long as it is here.

Ms Barrow—From the point of view of work, I think it would be better to have a shorter break at Christmas—and the kids do too. They are pretty keen to get back to school usually by the time it is nearly the end of February. I always find at work that we start our budgeting process and things like that towards the end of January. If I am still having to take leave until the middle of February it makes it a bit difficult and I always end up working when I am on leave at home anyway.

Mr QUICK—What about salary sacrificing? The Hydro are big and ugly enough and there are enough employees to set up their own child-care centre. What about salary sacrificing if they set up their own child-care centre? How would that operate?

Ms Barrow—They have looked at setting up their own child-care centre before. They were considering doing it on-site, and I think that might have put a lot of people off because they did not want to have their children in that big horrible building. I also think that they came to the

conclusion that they were not the best people to be running a child-care centre, so they formed an alliance, I think, with Lady Gowrie Child Centre and have some arrangement there.

ACTING CHAIR—They buy places for employees.

Ms Barrow—I think that is what happens but I am not aware of it because I am out of the child-care scene.

Mr QUICK—Do you see it as a good option that under the fringe benefits scheme you can salary sacrifice and be guaranteed it so that it takes some of the pressure and the guilt away from you?

Ms Barrow—Yes. That would certainly be a good idea.

ACTING CHAIR—I found it interesting that in your submission on page 3 you state:

Schools could be encouraged to arrange networking opportunities for parents who work to enable some of these issues to be resolved.

You are the first to make a comment like this in a submission. Could you explain what you see as ‘networking opportunities’?

Ms Barrow—I am thinking of my own problems at the moment. I have two kids who want to go to sport and so on after school and I am desperately trying to find someone who can take them. I can collect and bring them home afterwards. However, a continual problem for me is getting them where they need to go after school because, to do so, I have to leave work.

ACTING CHAIR—I have heard that is difficult, especially for single mums or even single dads bringing up children on their own. When you are in a work situation, it is very hard to arrange for your children to be taken to ballet lessons, music lessons or football practice.

Ms Barrow—That is right. I am a single parent as well.

Mr QUICK—Have you approached the school about this idea? I think it is quite a good one.

Ms Barrow—I probably feel a little guilty that I have not done that, because so far I have managed to scrape by with the few people I do know. I know there are other people who are not able to be as flexible and who do not have anyone to transport their kids. No, I have not approached the school.

ACTING CHAIR—It would be like a morning car pool that takes children to school.

Ms Barrow—At the moment I rely on the goodwill of people I know.

ACTING CHAIR—Neighbours.

Ms Barrow—The trouble with being a working parent is that you often cannot pay people back. Often, I guess that the lift home from the activity is being undertaken by the other parent. But I think that could be good and perhaps I should take it up.

Mr QUICK—It is not an isolated incident.

Ms Barrow—No, it would not be just me. For much of the time my kids have been at school, I have thought I was the only one in this situation. I came to realise only recently that it is not just me but many people who have those issues.

Mr QUICK—Do your children still go to Lauderdale?

Ms Barrow—Yes, at the moment they both do.

Mr QUICK—If, with your children, eight other children go to music lessons with one particular teacher, it might be feasible for the school to purchase something so that your child can have music lessons along with those others in the rooms that are vacant from three o'clock that afternoon until nine o'clock the next day.

Ms Barrow—Yes. Activities arranged at school are certainly a lot easier to manage than the ones that are not. My older daughter is in the combined primary schools band; I do not know whether you are aware of that. She has to get from Lauderdale to Warrane Primary School every second Monday. Fortunately, I have organised a car pooling arrangement. But a notice came home stating, 'You are going to have to get your child there.' Also, they have a full-day workshop some time later in the year and a bus will be provided to get them there, but I have been told that I will have to pick her up and bring her back again. So I guess those transport arrangements have not been that well thought out.

Mr QUICK—Thank you for raising that. I can now raise it with some other people.

ACTING CHAIR—I was reading the submission last evening and I thought this networking opportunity for parents was interesting. As I say, I have heard about car pools that are used to get children to school of a morning but not to get them to other activities.

Ms Barrow—I feel a bit guilty, because I have not been to the parents and friends association and suggested it.

Mr QUICK—That is another issue. If you are a working parent bringing up children, you are flat out finding time to have input into your child's education and the P&F.

Ms Barrow—It is very difficult.

ACTING CHAIR—You say in your submission—and I think you also said it in your opening statement—that, if you want full-time care, you get priority over those wanting part-time care. Did you experience that when your children were younger? I think they are nine and 11 now.

Ms Barrow—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—To your knowledge, is that still happening?

Ms Barrow—I have not heard of anyone else experiencing that, but that certainly was my experience with my first child—and that would be 11 years ago. Also, I know that it suits family day care—although they are a lot more flexible—to have those who are full-time. With full-time places, they know their week will be filled up, even if they have to juggle. I guess it is just a matter of economics. For them, having one full-time payer is more convenient and more cost effective than having a number of people each using a small amount of time.

ACTING CHAIR—As an alternative to tax deductibility of child-care costs, you suggest that the child-care benefit be assessed against one income only and not the total family income. For the record, would you expand on your thoughts there?

Ms Barrow—Yes. When I took my children to child care, I noticed that I was the only one paying any substantial amount of money; everybody else had their child care pretty much paid for. That was because both my ex-husband and I were earning reasonable wages and we were assessed on our total income. Also, a friend of mine decided not to go back to work at all. Her husband earned a reasonable income and, if she went back to work and needed to use child care, it would cost her more to pay for child care than she would earn—because she would be working at a supermarket or whatever. They would be assessed on their combined income and not on just what she would earn if she went back to work. So I suggested that as an alternative. I do not know whether that has been raised by anyone else.

ACTING CHAIR—No, I do not think it has.

Mr QUICK—Negotiating your way through family tax benefit A and B—

Ms Barrow—I do not get it.

Mr QUICK—In the workplace, when people come and put a proposition to you, do they talk about flexible working hours and how hard it is to get child care? As they are in the first stage and you are in the next stage, do they talk about some of the problems you have raised today?

Ms Barrow—I thought about that this morning. I do not think many of them use child care. At Hydro Tasmania, one of my technical staff is married to a woman who works in accounting in our organisation. They recently had a child and they are both working part-time. I think they use one of the grandmothers to care for their child on the one day of the week that they both work. But certainly, in that instance, they both came to me and she said, ‘This is our circumstance. Would it be all right if your staff member went part time while I go part time as well?’ For the greater good of the organisation, we wanted to keep both of them rather than to be inflexible and say, ‘No, technical people are not allowed to work part time. It will be too disruptive in the workplace.’ So we worked around it.

ACTING CHAIR—Has it been disruptive?

Ms Barrow—No. It does cause issues but, when this person is not at work, he is available on his mobile phone or by email. It works pretty well most of the time and, in fact, it is probably no more disruptive than having a full-time employee, who takes leave.

Mr QUICK—Does productivity increase when you have a happier workforce?

Ms Barrow—I think it does. In fact, I did not read this bit out before. As a result of having a flexible working arrangement, my group is one of the most productive and engaged groups in our organisation. I am not just saying that; it is reflected in our business results, our group's financial performance and the staff feedback/survey results that I get. Having this flexible working arrangement for both staff members and the organisation has certainly helped to improve our business performance, which is contrary to the way that many people think; they think it will be detrimental.

Mr QUICK—Aurora deals with downed powerlines and the like and I guess it faces other problems where a flexible workforce is needed. If there is a crisis, people need to drop whatever they are doing.

Ms Barrow—You can only be flexible to a point, I suppose. My group is in a similar situation. We manage a telecommunications network, so people are rostered on call. For example, if a fault occurs in the middle of the night, they have to go out and fix it, but they are on call only one week in five. As long as they are available for those times, we can be flexible with the rest of their working time. You are right: you can be flexible, but first the job must be done.

Mr QUICK—So your friends who are not lucky enough to work for Hydro Tasmania—

Ms Barrow—I do not want to sound like an advert for Hydro Tasmania.

Mr QUICK—No. But we want to find out about the best practice. We will receive a submission later on today about—

Ms GEORGE—Worst practice

Mr QUICK—Worst practice, yes. People are being virtually coerced into neglecting their children because of something that you raised: student free days. It really puts you under the hammer, because you feel guilty about saying, 'I can't arrange anything for you in the way of care, so you have to go to school,' and they are one of the small group of children who are there while everyone else is at home being looked after by their parents.

Ms Barrow—I have done that with mine once or twice and they absolutely hated it, so I take leave now.

Mr QUICK—Yes. But if your employer says, 'You have taken off eight days,' and then your kid gets asthma and you have to visit a doctor—and, in trying to get to a doctor these days, you have to fit in with whatever appointment they give you—how do you arrange your working hours around that if you have an inflexible manager?

Ms Barrow—That is right. That relates back to what I said earlier—that it is very dependent on the manager that you have. Even if your organisation does have broad policies that say it is family friendly and flexible, it is still very dependent on the manager that you have and your ability to convince them that you will be able to do the job and still have flexible working hours.

Mr QUICK—In the training of managers—and you are picking people to assume managerial positions—is there a mind shift into this concept of family-friendly workplaces? In 20 years time, when your children are in the workplace and they have formed relationships and had children, do you see them in exactly the same position as you are in now or will we have this mind-set?

Ms Barrow—I think things will change because they have changed so much for me in the last 10 to 20 years. I think it will just continue, but I do not think it will be quick change. As to what I said earlier about letting my staff bring their kids in when they are sick, I think that our group is probably pretty unusual and that is probably because I am a female manager who has been through all through this. I know what it is like and I understand what it is like for the staff, but I think the vast majority of managers do not. A lot of the female senior managers at the Hydro have not had children, so I do not think they understand what it is like.

Ms GEORGE—And the male senior managers, more often than not, have a wife at home looking after the children.

ACTING CHAIR—That is right. How would you change that culture?

Ms Barrow—As I said, I do not have any of the solutions. I really do not know how you change a culture. I think it is by just walking the talk, to use a buzz word, and telling people about your experiences.

Ms GEORGE—It really has to be driven from the senior level, hasn't it?

Ms Barrow—Yes.

Mr QUICK—They could do a feature in the *Tasmanian Mercury*. This is a big thing that we are talking about; it is up there with some of the big issues. We are talking about industrial relations, workplace agreements and a family-friendly workplace. If we have some great examples, we ought to be out there extolling their virtues so that someone else will think, 'If they can do it ...' The Hydro is perceived to be a monolithic structure that is totally inflexible, but there are some good things happening.

Ms Barrow—Some parts of it.

Ms GEORGE—How many hours a week do you work now?

Ms Barrow—I probably do 37½ to 40 hours week.

Ms GEORGE—So you are full-time now?

Ms Barrow—Yes, I am full-time, and I have been for seven years.

Ms GEORGE—Did you study here to become an engineer?

Ms Barrow—Yes. I have been an engineer for about 23 years.

Ms GEORGE—Were you one of the few women who were studying it at the time?

Ms Barrow—Yes. I went to Melbourne university. I am from Melbourne originally. In my final year, out of 150, there were four of us doing electrical engineering.

Ms GEORGE—Is that changing now?

Ms Barrow—Yes, that has changed. In fact, when I came to work for the Hydro 14 years ago, it was the first time I had ever worked with any other women engineers. There were three or four of us in the same group. So the Hydro is not that backward.

Mr QUICK—Thanks for an excellent submission.

Ms Barrow—I hope I have been of some assistance.

Ms GEORGE—Yes, you have.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much.

Ms GEORGE—It is always good to hear real-life experiences.

ACTING CHAIR—We definitely need to hear them a lot more, so thank you.

[2.30 pm]

FRACALOSSI, Mrs Maria Nalda, Member, Social Issues, Catholic Women's League Australia

TRIFFETT, Mrs Maree Elizabeth, Member, Social Issues, Catholic Women's League Australia

ACTING CHAIR—Welcome. Do you wish to make an introductory statement before we proceed to questions?

Mrs Triffett—It was mentioned we could bring along some forms and more current information. Can we give that to you?

ACTING CHAIR—Yes, you can. Is there any objection to the document tabled by the Catholic Women's League Australia being accepted as an exhibit? There being no objection, it is so ordered. Is the exhibit your opening statement?

Mrs Triffett—It is our opening statement. It is the latest in evidence suggesting that child care at home needs more emphasis, as does mothering time.

ACTING CHAIR—As it is quite short, perhaps you could read it into the *Hansard* record. After that we will ask you questions.

Mrs Triffett—This is an article entitled 'Day-care nightmare: Child expert warns of mental-health risk' from the *Sunday Times* of 19 March 2006. It says:

FOR many parents, day care is the ingredient that allows family life to function, careers to be forged and mortgages to be paid.

It is a perfect solution for working mothers. There's no need for a busy mother to leave work early and risk black looks from the boss. She can be content knowing her baby is being cared for securely.

But in a controversial book, psychologist and best-selling Australian author Steve Biddulph argues that creches aren't just bad for children under three, they damage them for life.

The father of two has spent 30 years examining the way children are nurtured. His previous books, such as *Raising Boys*, have sold four million copies.

For his latest, *Raising Babies*, he combined an exhaustive review of the evidence of the effect of creches on youngsters with his own research. The results make fascinating—and shocking—reading.

Biddulph concluded that children who went to day care before they were three had 'inferior-quality childhoods', increasing the risk of mental-health problems, including depression and aggression, later in life.

One in five children in day care too early would develop such issues, he said. As adults, they might turn to drink or drugs to cope.

Biddulph was once such an ardent supporter of creches that he helped set them up.

But he's had a change of heart because of the rising number of very young children—often just three months old—left there for up to 60 hours a week.

He believes parents would be better to use registered childminders. If affordable, nannies were best because they could give children one-to-one attention.

He said no baby should be cared for by anyone except the parents or close family in their first year.

Before the age of two, they should spend no more than one day a week with a carer—ideally on a one-to-one basis.

The earliest a girl should go to day care was 2 ½—and then only for two days of no more than six hours a week. Because boys developed more slowly, they should not go until three.

He said parents should make financial sacrifices so one could stay home for the first couple of years to bring up the baby.

His views will cause anger among thousands of mothers whose families cannot afford to live without two salaries.

But Biddulph is not trying to demonise working mothers—he is critical of the system that cannot give children the care they need.

Biddulph is also alarmed at the way big business has taken over the industry. Once, those who set up day-care centres loved children and wanted to help working parents by providing the best care.

Now, he said, profit rather than love was the main concern. Staff were employed on low wages, so turnover was huge and experience and morale low.

Biddulph is convinced creches stop youngsters developing normally and prevent them learning to love, care and form strong bonds with others.

At best, he said, they 'struggle to meet the needs of very young children'. At worst, they were 'negligent, frightening and bleak: a nightmare of bewildered loneliness that was heartbreaking to watch'.

'This is a wake-up call,' he said. 'If you put your child in a nursery, you are taking a gamble. All the evidence—including long-term studies, stress tests and brain development research—shows they are bad.'

The research he used included studies by the National Institute of Child Health and Development in the US, the government-sponsored Effective Provision of Pre-School Education study in Britain and child-care expert Penelope Leach.

They have all reached the conclusions 'That these kids turn out anxious, aggressive and not close to their mothers', Biddulph said.

‘Being in a nursery for too long, too young increases the risk of mental illness. If your child is genetically vulnerable to depression, you’re adding to that vulnerability by putting them in a nursery.’

The danger lies in the recently discovered importance of one-to-one care that scientific studies suggest babies need to develop properly in their first two years.

The attention of a mother towards her baby isn’t just a way to pass the time. Instead, as babies are naturally anxious, a mother’s gentle voice calms them.

Biddulph said this sense of calm stayed with them for life and the memory of the peace of those first few years got a child through difficult times, such as adolescence.

Through constant attention from their mother, babies learnt to love and relate to others. Even the best creche, which could have just one member of staff for five children, could not provide this attention. Many babies in day care were ignored for most of the day, he said.

Scientists who measured cortisol, a stress indicator, in babies cared for at home and day care, found even those who seemed calmest at creche had stress levels twice as high as those cared for at home.

Biddulph urged employers to act.

‘It’s gradually dawning on corporations that good staff are hard to replace. They must realise that families are important to the best people,’ he said.

‘So if they introduce family friendly policies, they will get a fantastic amount of loyalty and have other businesses’ best staff wanting to work for them.’

But he said parents’ attitudes needed to change most. ‘Babies don’t care if you’ve got a new kitchen or a bigger car—they just want your undivided love and care,’ he said.

ACTING CHAIR—Why do you feel that women are delaying having children? Many years ago they were in their very early twenties. A lot of them are having their first child when they are 32 years of age. Do you feel that it is because they are looking at their employment situation, the cost of child care and housing affordability?

Mrs Fracalossi—I think people are marrying later. It is more to do with the committed relationship, I would say.

Mr QUICK—But are they marrying later because you are now looking at a mortgage of \$150,000, \$200,000 or \$300,000 unless you are lucky enough to have parents who are benevolent? With a lot of dysfunctional families, it might be because of trying to raise that deposit and the fear that perhaps you might not have full-time work anymore. That culture where you had a job for your whole life has gone.

Mrs Fracalossi—There is a lot of insecurity.

Mrs Triffett—But a lot of young ones, like my young children, have their careers. They have become nurses or whatever. Then they want to travel. So it is a bit of a balance. They do want to see the world before they settle.

Mrs Fracalossi—There is definitely a delaying of responsibility within the culture.

Mr QUICK—But the mortgage, the cost of child care and a whole lot of other issues all compound. It is not just one or two—there is this multiplier effect.

Mrs Triffett—Once they decide to have a family that is when they will delay because of the mortgage. But they are getting together to actually have the families later and making that commitment later.

ACTING CHAIR—Do many members of your association work full-time or part-time?

Mrs Triffett—The younger ones work part-time. There are perhaps a few full-timers. A lot of mothers like Maria are at home with their children.

Mrs Fracalossi—And most are retired. We are an ageing group. We are very much a retired demographic.

ACTING CHAIR—An ageing population, yes. Maria, I noticed a letter that I think you sent to the manager of Purity supermarket in Main Road, New Town. How long ago did this happen?

Mrs Fracalossi—That was quite a few years ago. It was probably about six years ago.

ACTING CHAIR—After that letter was sent, what happened?

Mrs Fracalossi—I left. They really got rid of me.

ACTING CHAIR—Because you were asking for more—

Mrs Fracalossi—Because I sent the letter.

Ms GEORGE—Were you a casual then?

Mrs Fracalossi—I was. It was very much starting on that individual contract thing then. We had no rights whatsoever.

Ms GEORGE—So you were on call all of the time for a minimum amount of hours of paid work?

Mrs Fracalossi—Yes.

Mr QUICK—As a Tasmanian one would have assumed that Purity would have been friendlier than Woolworths, which has now taken over Purity.

Mrs Fracalossi—No, I think Coles was better at that time. I think it was just that it was very weak management. I think that might have been as much a factor as anything else. They really used bullying as one of their tactics. With people who are not trained, that is the sort of way they deal with staff. This particular person used to target one member of staff to make sure that everybody else did the right thing. Of course, if you saw someone like me go because I complained, no-one else was going to complain.

ACTING CHAIR—There was a risk of losing a job that they were most probably desperate to have.

Mrs Fracalossi—Yes, it could be, but it is just easier to keep quiet and get on with it, isn't it. It was just the work climate.

ACTING CHAIR—How did you cope with those hours? Did you have support within the family home? You had children, I gather.

Mrs Fracalossi—The reason I chose that job was because it was night fill. A lot of mothers do that. They can get out of a night. They cannot get out during the day when they have young children. I am actually a teacher. You just do what you can.

Mr QUICK—What are the things that determine whether a woman is part-time or full-time? Is it job satisfaction or a sense of fulfilment?

Mrs Triffett—In my own case, with nursing, you have to stay in nursing. Otherwise, if you are out for too long, you have to retrain. So you have got to keep your finger in the pie, so to speak. I have only ever done part-time work with my family. They have grown up a bit now.

Mr QUICK—Has there been a change of mind-set? I know we are struggling to get nurses in Tasmania, especially in the aged care sector. There are advertisements in every Wednesday and Saturday *Mercury* asking for nurses. Has there been a mind-set change so that if you do want to take some time out there is a retraining program?

Mrs Triffett—There is retraining, but it costs you to retrain. You actually have to pay to retrain.

Mr QUICK—So it is not done by the royal or any of the others?

Mrs Triffett—Yes, but I think you still have to pay for it. That was a few years ago when I did know about it. I have not come across anyone who has retrained recently.

Mr QUICK—Should it be free?

Mrs Triffett—Yes. If they want the nurses to come back in after they have had their children, they should have more opportunities for them to come back.

Mr QUICK—Are you aware of any state or national organisation that says: 'We are desperate to get you. It's not going to cost you anything to retrain, because we value you as a person.' You might have 20 years experience, then have some children then want to come back part-time.

Mrs Triffett—I could not comment on that.

Mr QUICK—Should there be, if you are out of the workforce and you are doing the thing for Peter Costello and having one for the country—

Ms Triffett—There should be an easier way to slot back in.

Mr QUICK—So should there be some sort of payment so that it is not going to cost you an arm or a leg for TAFE fees or HECS when you have the skill and all you need is to be refined and rehedoned so that you can take your place?

Mrs Triffett—Yes. I had four years away. In that four years a lot changed in nursing. It was quite scary coming back after that amount of time. In those days they did not have refresher courses. In these days it would be even more difficult if you were out for a lengthy period of time.

Mr QUICK—I know, not anecdotally but first hand, how difficult it is, because the service providers who retrain you are being paid for success rates. So if it is all too hard they tend to say, 'You go somewhere else and we'll take the people who are easy to retrain,' because the Commonwealth government gives them X thousands of dollars because their clients are then back into the workforce. So they are only interested in the success, not necessarily all those who want to take advantage of it. So we have got the skilled people but we are putting hindrances in the way.

ACTING CHAIR—You were talking about your daughters.

Mrs Triffett—They are both nurses.

ACTING CHAIR—Have they started families yet?

Mrs Triffett—One has, yes.

ACTING CHAIR—Would she be going back to work part-time?

Mrs Triffett—She has gone back to work, yes. She puts her little one in a creche every Monday. We are not against creches. We are just saying that there are problems with creches. She finds it difficult. If her husband goes away—because she is in Launceston—on a business trip she has to find someone to help. It is so hard to get out of the work, because they are so busy. So to find someone to replace her at work really is a problem for her, especially in a specialised area.

ACTING CHAIR—And she would be working odd hours, especially shift work.

Mrs Triffett—Yes.

Mr QUICK—How does she cater to that, if her husband is away and she is suddenly called in?

Mrs Triffett—No, she is actually on a set shift, and she would know, but if her husband is away she has to try and find one of her workmates to work in with, so that she will look after theirs and they will look after her little fellow. So it is a case of juggling, really.

ACTING CHAIR—They have a shortage of nurses, as you would be aware, right throughout Australia—Tasmania and the mainland—especially in aged care facilities. What are your views on child care in some of our major hospitals? Do you feel that this would get back some of the female nurses?

Mrs Triffett—They used to have child care for the Royal Hobart Hospital but that was disbanded several years ago. A lot of the nurses relied on that. Where I work—I am sorry if I am saying ‘I’ too often; just tell me to shut up—the actual ward that I am on is very family friendly because some of the nurses who have gone off and had children can come back and start work at five o’clock after their husbands get home, which is ideal. So they are keeping their skills up. They have not got to sacrifice the children, because the fathers have come home. But that is only the one ward that I know of. I do not know whether they do that in too many other places.

Mr QUICK—Which ward is that?

Mrs Triffett—Second floor, surgical, at Calvary. It is ideal.

ACTING CHAIR—It would be very hard though for the single woman.

Mrs Triffett—This is it. The single woman has a huge problem. How do they cope?

Ms GEORGE—On the section on tax and family income in your submission, you come up with an interesting proposal that, instead of child-care benefit being paid to the centres, we ought to transfer that money to the mother so that the mother then purchases the services. You quote the example:

In Sweden, the government has adopted such a scheme whereby mothers are given a payment that is equivalent to the amount the government would pay for a subsidised child care place (around \$12,000). The result has been that many women have chosen to use it to assist them to stay at home, rather than pay it to a child care centre.

Do you want to elaborate on some of the options that you think the committee should be investigating, because at the moment the model is family day care or long day care and not much else in between—

Mr QUICK—That is right, and you have got no option—

Ms GEORGE—particularly tying in with your arguments about the emotional and psychological development of very young children.

Mrs Fracalossi—In-home care is another good option that the Commonwealth government does subsidise—

Ms GEORGE—They are just starting to.

Mrs Fracalossi—but it has a very narrow framework of criteria. I have a sheet that outlines the categories of people it deals with. You may or may not know it, but I will hand it over anyway. It is the in-home care sheet.

Ms GEORGE—It is only fairly new and fairly limited in spread, isn't it?

Mrs Fracalossi—Yes. As you can see, the category for people that meet the criteria is that they live in a rural or remote area. There is a bit of a problem with that because it has been found from speaking to carers that they do not like to travel to rural or remote areas because they get paid so little. There is a lot of work in the rural areas for carers, but they all live in town and do not like to travel out. They get paid so little it is not worth it, especially if it is only for a few hours. If you had non-standard working hours, say, for nurses, this would be ideal. To multiple births, more than two children of non-school age, a seriously ill child or parent or a breast-feeding mother working from home, we feel that if you added a mother with a child under three that would be a perfect solution for child care. It is a good system and it would work. Funnily enough, I was talking to a carer this morning and she was opting not to take up this job because they had to pay \$400 insurance—

Ms GEORGE—The carers?

Mrs Fracalossi—Yes, before they could start the job. If you only get a few hours a week, it is ridiculous. It is a flaw in the system.

Mr QUICK—Who do they pay the money to? Is it public liability?

Mrs Fracalossi—Yes, it is.

Mr QUICK—Is this the Sorell Council?

Mrs Fracalossi—No, it is not. The Sorell Council only manage it; they do not run it. The carers themselves have to get their own insurance, which is a real flaw.

Ms GEORGE—So it is like an independent contractor, supposedly?

Mrs Fracalossi—Yes. It is a problem.

Mr QUICK—But surely if there were innovative councils, as there are around Australia, they could say, 'For the health and wellbeing of our community, at no great cost—

Mrs Fracalossi—Put it into their own insurance.

Mr QUICK—because we have public liability for hundreds of millions of dollars, we will take on 20 carers and then people will come to our municipality because they know it is family friendly and children friendly.'

Mrs Fracalossi—I really think that is a great solution.

Mr QUICK—I know the Glenorchy City Council is more family friendly than Hobart City Council, and Clarence Council is now getting more involved, so it might be an option.

ACTING CHAIR—What is the difference in money between in-home care and, say, child care?

Mrs Fracalossi—If you had one child in child care it would cost you, with the full benefit, probably about \$20 to \$30 a day.

Ms GEORGE—It would depend on how many children you had.

Mrs Fracalossi—But this one can be a lot cheaper. The carers set their own rates. Say you had three children in child care. You might get \$4 for each child in that benefit. If the carer charged \$12 an hour, that would be fully subsidised for the parent. They would not be paying their own money. So this could quite conceivably be cheaper.

Mr QUICK—Who is responsible for ensuring that the carers are qualified in the broader sense of the word?

Mrs Fracalossi—They do have a process. I do not have the other sheet that has a bit more about that, but they do a very full—

Ms GEORGE—Service.

Mr QUICK—Are they trained through TAFE?

Mrs Fracalossi—They do an inspection of the home. The carers have to have a current first aid certificate and a police check, but I am not quite sure what qualifications they have to have.

Mr QUICK—So they come to your home; you do not take your kids to their home.

Mrs Fracalossi—Yes, they come to your home.

Ms GEORGE—It is like family day care but it is in the home of—

Mr QUICK—It is reversed.

Ms GEORGE—Yes, it is reversed.

Mrs Fracalossi—And you do not have a lot of children; you only have a small number of children. They say that they only look after the children in the home. They do not take on any extras, so you cannot invite your friends' kids over.

Mr QUICK—I know there is a problem if something—God forbid—happens to your child while they are in the carer's care and they have to go to the Royal Hobart Hospital, for example. Are they surrogate—

Mrs Fracalossi—You sign all those forms.

Mr QUICK—Do the hospital accept that? I know there are some difficulties if they have to go to a hospital. They ask, ‘Are you the parent of the child?’ The carer answers, ‘No, I’m the carer.’ Does the carer carry the form with them so that a stick fracture can be seen to straight away rather than the parent having to be called in?

Mrs Fracalossi—I am not sure of the protocol there, but they do have a lot of forms that the parents sign to say that they are fully aware that the carer is in charge of the child and also where the parents are going to be. There is quite a bit of communication there.

Mr QUICK—Where is it happening best in Tasmania? Is anyone doing in-home care better than anyone else?

Mrs Fracalossi—In-home care, as you say, is only new and has not really been tested. Very few people know about it and very few people qualify for it.

ACTING CHAIR—How do you qualify for it?

Mrs Fracalossi—You have to have non-standard working hours, live in a remote area or have multiple births.

ACTING CHAIR—There are very few places.

Mrs Fracalossi—Very few people would come under those categories.

ACTING CHAIR—You have not taught for a number of years.

Mrs Fracalossi—Sixteen years—or probably less than that.

ACTING CHAIR—A woman in your position, who might have two or three children under the age of five or six, would not be entitled to that, would they?

Mrs Fracalossi—I am eligible for it because the non-school ages include kindergarten age. I have a child in kindergarten.

ACTING CHAIR—So you would be eligible.

Mrs Fracalossi—I would be eligible for it. I know about it because I have been looking into it.

ACTING CHAIR—You were thinking about it.

Mrs Fracalossi—I was thinking about it, but the carer that I chose does not know whether she can do it, because of the cost of the insurance.

Mr QUICK—I know there are not many areas in Tasmania that are rural and remote compared to Queensland, New South Wales or Western Australia. So we have problems. Cygnet is not really remote in Australian terms, yet it is in Tasmanian terms.

Mrs Fracalossi—There is also that thing about no other child-care service being available. It is really trying to meet the needs of non-standard child care. We are trying to say that the needs of infants should be primary. I have a document that might answer your question. It has a few suggestions, or solutions, if you like, of where this might fit into the child-care pool.

Mr QUICK—Back to Jenny's thing about the Swedish model: if we allocate \$12,000 to a family, how do we ensure that it is used for what it was designed for? When the \$600 per child payment came along, many of us can give anecdotal evidence of lots of people going to Harvey Norman and spending it on flat screen TVs and a whole lot of other things. Other people spent the money on their children. If we are talking about \$12,000 a child to buy services, how do we ensure that that will be done?

Mrs Fracalossi—The first thing I would like to say about it is that the money that goes to child-care centres is not necessarily money well spent if children are coming out of their child-care experience with mental problems and scarred from not having their emotional life nurtured. So you really have to say to yourself that that is not a good use of public money. On the whole, I think most mothers would be able to give that emotional life to their children. The key issue here is the relationship between the mother and the baby.

Mr QUICK—As politicians—unless you have been a schoolteacher, as I was lucky enough to be, and you understand the development of children—you do not really see the impact on children until they are 14, 15 or 16, and then you have to find the money to deal with juvenile justice and drug related issues. How do we convince people to invest—

Mrs Triffett—No. 1 is education.

Mrs Fracalossi—Parents have the information about the emotional needs of their infant and the time that is required in order to fulfil those needs. People are always looking for the right thing to do for their children. A lot of people, not just teachers, read the Steve Biddulph books all the time.

Mr QUICK—Going by the average age of federal politicians, not very many of them are having children; to have children is the exception. On both sides of the House, a lot of males and females are having children and their perceptions about policies are changing—even some of the opposite persuasion—because they have suddenly been confronted with their own situation of being away from their family, spending 20 weeks in Canberra, and their spouse having to raise the children and their not being part of the children's development.

ACTING CHAIR—I think you mentioned Tanya Plibersek in your submission.

Mrs Fracalossi—Yes, we did.

Ms GEORGE—She would have back-up support which would be over and above the call of ordinary people.

Mrs Fracalossi—That is what we say. Something like in-home care would give that support to parents so that they could maintain it. If you worked in a factory, you probably would be better off with your baby anyway, because it is more important in lots of ways for the baby's development that you get the money in some other way and spend your energy and time on their emotional development. You have a whole range of needs there: maybe the mother needs to continue in a career or maybe the mother does not have a career that she needs to continue in. There would be two different ways of approaching it. There are a lot of different needs that have to be met. We are saying that the primary need should be looking at what the baby needs, because they are non-negotiable. If mothers miss out a few loops on their career path, so be it. But if babies do not get the emotional nurturing that they need before the ages one, two and three, they can have very big problems later on in life.

Mr QUICK—If you have a \$300,000 mortgage in Sydney, there is economic pressure.

Mrs Triffett—Can people somehow access their superannuation at a younger age? I think it has been done in Singapore to help people with their mortgages.

Mr QUICK—But lots of people in Singapore live in 30-storey apartment buildings and the concept of a house and a front and back garden is foreign to them, unless they are extremely wealthy. Do we want all Australian mothers or one of the parents to stay at home—hopefully the mother, I suppose; I am not being sexist—to nurture the child for those three years? As a cost to society, how do we put it in place and yet enable people to own their own home, which is the Australian dream?

Mrs Triffett—Thirty per cent of Tasmanians have a second home these days, and they negative gear that second home. How do we help people pay for the first or family home?

Mr QUICK—We saw in the *Mercury* today the number of people who are part-time workers. One in five, 40,000 workers, are casual. One quarter of casuals are worried about feeding their children. We have this huge social problem.

Mrs Triffett—It is a huge social problem. Can I make a couple of other points?

Mr QUICK—Yes.

Mrs Triffett—This concerns the Swedish model. Another problem that parents have is that, when they are working and have a child in a creche, they have to be able to take time off to look after that child. There is a lot of pressure from creches to get them to put the child on antibiotics so that the child will not infect everyone else. There is a lot of pressure from the employers for the parents to go to work and not take time off to look after their children. Sweden have a policy whereby leave for both parents is mandated. They can use about eight days per year solely for their sick children. Most people go to work sick so that they can keep time available for when their children are sick, or they go to a doctor and say that they have fatigue to get a doctor's certificate. I do not know how a doctor's certificate for this type of thing is going to work with the new IR laws, because it is very hard to get into a GP at the best of times.

ACTING CHAIR—They reckon now that you might have a telephone call centre where you can speak to a nurse, and if you cough the right way over the phone, you are sick; if you do not cough the right way, you are not.

Mrs Triffett—The government could bring in a family-friendly policy that mandates days for either parent to use so that they can stay home and look after a sick child rather than pushing them back into a creche when they are not fully well. We have a lot of information here about recent tests showing how creches are predisposing the whole community to infections that we have no resistance to.

Mr QUICK—Some parents would say that it is best for a child to get all these infections when they are young, and then you do not have to worry about them.

Mrs Triffett—The studies are now showing that it is not working that way. The risk of a child in day care getting a prescription for antibiotics is double that of a child at home.

Mrs Fracalossi—And the amounts they are giving are greater.

Mrs Triffett—As a nurse I can see they are tripling the doses that they used to give and patients are going home on long-term IV antibiotics. It was just unheard before. The studies are saying that the day care centres are fuelling this, because children are going there sick. I have friends whose children are always sick. I will read out a few things from a study in Denmark:

In a country as reliant upon day care as Denmark, the finding of sharply elevated antibiotic use among day-care children alarms the researchers for several compelling reasons. First, the use of antibiotics is “a morbidity parameter,” indicative of the “increased risk of infectious disease in day-care centers.” Second, the infections for which antibiotics are necessary “may give rise to long-term complications, such as mastoiditis and hearing loss after otitis media.” Third, “increased transmission of infectious agents [among day-care children] may also result in excess illness among parents, day-care workers, and other children.” Finally, since “use of antibiotics is associated with antimicrobial resistance,” day-care centers may be helping to incubate deadly new strains of super-bugs.

As I said, the use of antibiotics to enable children to go to day care is a real problem. I do not think the government is looking at that, and down the track it is going to impact on our health bill.

Mr QUICK—Can you provide us with the study? Does it have a name and a webpage that we can look at?

Mrs Triffett—It is www.worldcongress.org.

ACTING CHAIR—After reading something like that, you think ‘Should all child-care centres be closed down?’

Mrs Triffett—But there is a definite need there.

ACTING CHAIR—There is a very big need there.

Mrs Fracalossi—It is particular to the age of the children. When they are a little bit older, it is not so much of an issue. But it is a real issue when they are very young.

Ms GEORGE—In terms of the Swedish experience, you cite an article by Evans and Kelly from Monash University. Can the secretariat make sure that members of the committee get hold of that? It is by Dr Evans and Dr Kelly, in the Monash University journal, *People and Place*, from 2001.

Mr QUICK—If you were on the committee, what recommendations would you make to put in a bipartisan way to the government in order to address this very complex issue? As Maria said, some employers are still back in the Dark Ages although before you we heard from an employer that is flexible and family friendly. Do we pass legislation? If we do that, how do we have it broad enough so that it caters for workers at Dover and workers in the western suburbs of Sydney? When you do national legislation, that is one of the problems. One size does not fit all. You need the flexibility. What would some of the recommendations be? Would it be something as draconian as saying that no child goes to a child-care centre before they are three?

Mrs Triffett—I think that education is the key. If people knew that there were problems with leaving a child for 60 hours a week in a creche and what the ramifications are, I think most people would think—

ACTING CHAIR—Sixty hours a week?

Mrs Triffett—Some can be left for 60 hours a week.

ACTING CHAIR—What sort of work would the parents be doing—the mother or the father?

Mrs Triffett—I would presume that would be somewhere like Sydney, where you have to travel for an hour to get there and an hour to get back. It would be something managerial probably.

Mrs Fracalossi—The child-care benefit is for up to 50 hours. That is what the government pays. So that must be within the parameters of a normal working demand.

Mr QUICK—That is a huge amount of time.

Mrs Fracalossi—Yes, for a baby.

ACTING CHAIR—I have a lot of friends whose grandchildren are in child care. I know a lot of child-care centres in my area would not be open. They are only open from seven until six.

Mr QUICK—This is something we could get from the department—the number of children who spend from zero to 10, from 10 to 20 and from 20 to 30 hours in child care and so on.

Ms GEORGE—For a centre that is open from seven to six, over a week that is 50 hours.

ACTING CHAIR—Yes.

Ms GEORGE—It would be more than 50 hours.

Mrs Triffett—And I think in Victoria they are trying to open them 24 hours a day. That is a real worry.

Mr QUICK—Yes, for nurses or—

Mrs Triffett—But some people can abuse that system. That is the whole thing.

ACTING CHAIR—What do you mean by abuse the system? Who would they be?

Mrs Triffett—Perhaps if you had a gambling addiction, you might want to go gambling after work. It is very hard to come back to the children if you get caught up.

ACTING CHAIR—Child-care centres these days have to have contact numbers in case of an emergency or if something goes wrong with your child. So, if you are a shift worker—

Mr QUICK—You could be at Crown Casino and have the mobile phone on if there are 24-hour day-care centres.

Mrs Triffett—The other thing for young people that put their children in day care is the tug between putting the child there and keeping the child at home. A lot of women do like to have their child in day care just so that they can go back to work for the social aspect and to have that adult interaction.

ACTING CHAIR—The majority of them also go back for a financial reason as well.

Mrs Triffett—Yes, which, as Harry was saying, is about the cost of housing. It is huge. It has just blown out of all proportion.

ACTING CHAIR—Women might have a career and they do not want to lose that. They might want to have a child desperately, but they also want to keep up their profession and work, say, on a part-time basis. Then there is the woman who is on her own. She might have lost her husband. I heard of a very sad case within my area. A woman was a teacher and expecting her second child when her husband passed away. But she wanted to continue with that. So there are all sorts of different stories. As you were saying, there are high mortgages as well.

Mrs Triffett—The taxation system is definitely skewed towards double incomes, whereas in my parents' day it was skewed towards the one income—the father supported the family so that the mother could stay at home.

Mr QUICK—You need the wisdom of Solomon to come up with recommendations.

Mrs Triffett—I think with education people know that there are problems now surfacing, and people will themselves drive the politicians to do something about that.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much. Thank you for your submission and for coming to the inquiry today. Is there any objection to the document on the Danish study, tabled by the

Catholic Women's League Australia, being accepted as an exhibit and received as evidence to the inquiry? There being no objection, it is so ordered.

[3.18 pm]

WALCH, Ms Caroline Jane, Private capacity

ACTING CHAIR—Welcome. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Ms Walch—I am appearing on behalf of parents.

ACTING CHAIR—Do you wish to make an introductory statement before we proceed to questions? You can read anything into the *Hansard*.

Ms Walch—No, that is fine. I was listening to your last discussion and did feel the urge to just jump in and join the discussion; it was quite interesting.

ACTING CHAIR—For the record, please let us know what your opinions were.

Ms Walch—I jotted down a few things. Following on from what you ended with—parents wanting to go back to work for the social interaction—I should add that it is quite important for children that their parents remain in the workforce and get that encouragement and stimulation rather than be stuck at home all the time and feel totally unproductive. I do not think we should ignore the importance of that, particularly with single parents, who are at risk of getting depression if they do not have anything stimulating in their life. That is something I wanted to add to that discussion.

On your discussion about the 60 hours a week, I have known quite a few parents who have had very young babies in child care. I actually did work as a childcare worker once and I now work as a full-time teacher. I am a single parent. I know quite a few parents who have had children in child care for up to 60 hours per week. Even as a teacher, you would think that I would work fewer hours, but when I taught at Dover and I lived at Woodbridge, my travelling was from Woodbridge to Blackman's Bay down to Dover—over an hour each way.

ACTING CHAIR—That is similar to my daughter who is a teacher. I should have taken that into account. She drops her little boy off at preschool at seven in the morning. Fortunately, her husband, because of his work commitments, can pick him up between four and 4.30 in the afternoon.

Ms Walch—Yes, but I did that trip for about five years while my daughter was very young. I was very lucky that the education department supported me when I said, 'Look, this is too hard for me and for my child. I need somewhere closer to home.' They were excellent. So I have a good employer and I am very lucky in that! That was one of the other things that I wanted to say. In fact, 60 hours a week child care—or at least long hours in child care—need not be a problem. If the quality of the child care is good, it does not really matter how long they are there for. If the children have established good relationships with their carers and they have the same carers all the time, then there is not a problem with the child care as long as the parents are happy and the child is happy and that bond is being created.

ACTING CHAIR—How many children do you have, Caroline?

Ms Walch—I have one child.

ACTING CHAIR—What age is your child?

Ms Walch—Ten.

ACTING CHAIR—Tell us about your experiences—you had your child and then you were trying to get child care.

Ms Walch—I did not have any problem getting child care back then. It was exceedingly expensive. The only reason I did not have a second child—and I wanted to have four or five—was because of the cost of child care, and specifically it not being a tax deduction. My husband at that time had just finished university. He was beginning his career, so he was quite low paid. I had just finished university and was paying HECS and child care and petrol to Dover, and none of those things were a tax deduction. My take-home pay after paying HECS and child care was not reflected in my taxable income amount. We really did struggle.

ACTING CHAIR—So you feel that you would have had more children if child care had been tax deductible.

Ms Walch—Absolutely! There is no question about that at all.

ACTING CHAIR—Do you feel that that might benefit people who are on a higher income compared to someone who has two children in similar circumstances to yours, but the wages might be a lot lower and they are paying exactly the same amount? Would it be fairer to look at a tax rebate?

Ms Walch—I do not know how that would work. I do believe that it would benefit any parents who are at work who are having to pay extra tax—surely it is going to benefit them.

ACTING CHAIR—What do you think about salary sacrifice?

Ms Walch—It has not really taken off in Tasmania so I cannot really comment on how it would work. I know that the options are out there but I do not know anyone who has done that. I do not know how it would work financially.

ACTING CHAIR—Being a teacher—and I do not know if you were here earlier when we were having this discussion—would having a child-care centre on school grounds be a good idea? It would be a one-stop shop so that, if you had a five- or six-year-old you would drop the child off at infants and the other child would go to the child-care centre on school grounds. You could also do before and after school care. What are your feelings on that?

Ms Walch—That is just fantastic. I am teaching at Blackman's Bay and we do have a child-care centre attached to the school.

Mr QUICK—The best one?

Ms Walch—The best one!

ACTING CHAIR—This wouldn't happen to be in your electorate, by any chance, Mr Quick?

Mr QUICK—Yes. It was the first one—

Ms Walch—It is a fantastic school and a good child-care centre. The communication that happens between the child-care centre and the school is excellent. I am specifically talking about before school and after school care. If the child-care centre is having problems they can contact the school and say, 'Are you having the same problems?' or 'What strategies have you been using?' There is a lot of communication whenever the need is there. There is no hesitation. It is the same with the school contacting the child-care centre.

ACTING CHAIR—Do you have to live in the area for the child to go to the centre that you have just been telling us about?

Ms Walch—No.

ACTING CHAIR—It would benefit someone like you, being a professional woman, going back to teaching. If you decide ever to have another child you could take your child to a centre like that, not far from your place of employment.

Ms Walch—Absolutely. It has been fantastic for me teaching at Blackmans Bay and having my daughter close by. There is less commuting for the child, which is far less exhausting for them. They are in the same network of friends, and that continuation of environment and social interaction is very important for the kids.

ACTING CHAIR—Would you feel that that is the biggest hiccup for women in deciding whether to have more than one child? Some women are having only one or two children. Would it help if that sort of facility was in place so they did not have to drop the children off at various points before they even try to get to their place of employment?

Ms Walch—Definitely that helps, but that is really a managerial issue for the family. Most families can work a way around it. It certainly helps, but from my experience and the experience of most people I know it has been the cost of child care which is a problem. I do not know what the answer to that is. I believe child carers are very poorly paid and very undervalued, which is another issue.

Mr QUICK—Do we say to them, 'You are at the foundation of the child's development, you should be a four-year trained person.' When I was a teacher if you were a male you taught grade 6; if you were a woman you were down in the early childhood grades. There was this misperception that it was easy down there and difficult in grade 6.

Ms Walch—My partner still asks me when I am going to be promoted to grade 6, as I am a grade 1 teacher.

Mr QUICK—Teachers and educators are supposed to be enlightened but they still have that mind-set. When we put the child-care centres in school grounds there were some early childhood

people who demeaned workers in the child-care centre because ‘formal education does not really start until we get them in the formal system’. That is changing now, and some teachers are actually in child care for a variety of reasons. With Paula Wriedt’s enlightened ‘let’s put them in the school grounds’, hopefully, we can get there.

Ms Walch—Getting those links between home, school and child care is very important.

Mr QUICK—Today some people raised the issue of the inflexibility of schools in that they start and finish at fixed times and we have more and more pupil-free days. People—usually the mothers—who are not in family-friendly work situations have to take those days off because they do not want their kids to be one of half-a-dozen or a dozen sent to school because they do not have an arrangement. They feel guilty. How do we change the school mind-set?

Ms Walch—I do not know. I can quite understand how parents feel. If I was not a teacher I would feel pretty crabby about those student-free days.

Mr QUICK—What happens to your child on those days?

Ms Walch—She goes to her grandmother.

Mr QUICK—In our society in lots of cases people do not have grandparents handy.

Ms Walch—This is particularly a problem. As we become more mobile we are leaving our families behind and going all over the world. That family network is not in place any more.

ACTING CHAIR—You stated that after you had your daughter the travelling time to go to the school where you were teaching was so long that you negotiated and said that you wanted to get a school closer to the family home. In New South Wales it is usually the point system. You cannot go and say, ‘I want to teach at that school because it is closer to my home.’ They usually say, ‘How many points have you got?’ How did you negotiate that with the education department?

Ms Walch—It was fairly similar. I had done five years at Dover followed by five years at Goodwood, which is in our northern suburbs—there was about 80 per cent unemployment amongst the parents. I had done a good 10 years of difficult schools.

ACTING CHAIR—You were lucky that you had those points behind you.

Mr QUICK—Dover is as far south as you can go in my electorate. There are no schools any further south than Dover.

Ms Walch—I could have flown there really fast but driving was all over the place.

ACTING CHAIR—I notice that you had a very bad experience, and I am thankful that it has changed—I hope it has changed—when you wanted to express milk for your baby. That has now changed in the system, I gather.

Ms Walch—I nearly resigned; I was absolutely mortified to be told by a group of staff—not just one—that they found it unacceptable for me to be expressing milk in my own private space in my own time. I think it was because I stored the milk in the fridge so it was obvious. I do not know.

ACTING CHAIR—That has changed. Unfortunately, in private enterprise it has not. Women cannot do that.

Mr QUICK—What about the Swedish system—you are given a lump sum and you can spend that on your child up until school age. You can have a nanny living in or whatever. What do you think of that system?

Ms Walch—Licensing is the crucial thing. We need to ensure that whatever child care we are providing for our children is quality child care.

ACTING CHAIR—Properly regulated.

Ms Walch—Very properly regulated. Even now we have a lot of child carers whom you would not want your children to be with, and it is fairly heavily regulated already. A lot of parents do not realise the importance of early child care. They do not realise the importance of the early years. I see a lot of parents who are having to take their child to this place on Monday, this family day care on the Tuesday and that one on Wednesday. I have only had positive experiences with family day care but personally I prefer my child to be in a child-care centre where I am more assured that the right thing is happening.

ACTING CHAIR—You have qualified staff. Many of the staff who are there have to have a university qualification, I think.

Ms Walch—Exactly. I would feel more secure in the knowledge that the right thing was going on in a child-care centre. I think we should be trying to encourage community based child-care centres as much as possible. If we have small care centres where the child has the same carer each day, it does have that continuity. You are going to have less illness and a much more established relationship happening. I do not know what you do about that Swedish alternative. Was the money to be spent necessarily on child care or was it a lump sum that could be spent on anything?

Ms GEORGE—It was the equivalent of a subsidised child-care place on an annual basis. You give it to mum and say, ‘You can use it either for part-time in-home care, long day care, bringing someone in, having a nanny for two days’—whatever.

Ms Walch—It sounds a lot more commonsense than, as you said, giving people a lump sum and they go out to Harvey Norman and spend it on a TV.

Mr QUICK—As a teacher you have the long summer vacation. Can you understand the frustration of lots of parents who try to organise care for their children and the guilt that they accumulate over that long Christmas period. They have only four weeks leave and you have the May and September holidays as well.

Ms Walch—I do not know what we can do about it except to reassure parents that the experiences children have in holiday centres are generally fantastic.

ACTING CHAIR—Some of them are attached to the schools or take place within the schools.

Ms Walch—Yes, they are with their friends and they go on excursions. My daughter says, ‘Why can’t I go to holiday care?’

ACTING CHAIR—My children loved it.

Ms Walch—If we are providing good quality and affordable experiences for the children we can remove a lot of that guilt.

Mr QUICK—But how do we sustain it? You and I both know that in Tasmania there are some good schools, and there are some that you would not send your kids to.

Ms Walch—No, they are all good schools.

Mr QUICK—I mean in terms of before and after school care. Blackmans Bay has done it for years and people send their kids there because they understand it as good. But other schools do not do it.

Ms Walch—Other schools do not have the child-care centres attached, no. I believe that is changing, though, isn’t it? It is already in the pipeline.

Mr QUICK—It is in the process, yes. But the for-profit, the ABC schools—there is one at Margate, I think—argue that it is a form of subsidy and ask, because taxpayers are paying, why can’t they get some sort of taxation benefit.

Ms Walch—I do not know what you could do. The biggest problem that we have is one that I see it all the time as a teacher. I teach at Goodwood and there is something like 80 per cent unemployment amongst the parents. The parents are breeding very happily and having lots of children. As we all know, the professional people and the educated people are not. It comes down, I think, to the cost of child care and child care not being a tax deduction.

Mr QUICK—As a teacher, can you see any difference between the children who have been in long day care and the children who have had their mother, father, or a combination of both stay at home for those first two or three years to give them that cut and paste, play and structured learning at home before they go into school?

Ms Walch—There is a difference—and this will sound very snobby, but it is true. You have some parents who do not provide those stimulating activities at home. You have poor quality child care, you have good quality child care and you have parents who provide lots of stimulating activities at home. So we cannot really simplify it into parents at home or child care. It depends on the quality.

Ms GEORGE—It is because for some children, Harry, the option of child care would be preferable and more stimulating than being at home with mum or dad.

Ms Walch—It is a very good option for them—definitely.

Mr QUICK—Sure.

Ms Walch—Most child-care centres do a really good job, and most parents do a really good job. Teaching at somewhere like Goodwood or Dover, you see the children who went to child-care centres outperform their peers who stayed at home. Teaching at Blackmans Bay, you do not see a lot of difference. I get some children who have particularly good parents, and those children are possibly outperforming the other ones, but the others catch up anyway. But the ones who are in a negative family environment have a huge bonus from going to child care. I do not think that children who are in a poor family environment with no child care experiences catch up.

Mr QUICK—As an educator in Dover, which is a K to year 10 school, do you see any evidence of boys and girls in years 9 and 10 acquiring any of the skills to make them better parents? Should something be introduced so that at least they are thinking about some of these issues prior to forming relationships?

Ms Walch—It is hard enough even to keep the kids in school at Dover. If it is apple season, they are off picking the apples—and they are off for any other reason. I do not think it would have much impact. The role models are not there. They are not attending child care. They are not accessing the education that is available to them. I do not know how you change that.

Mr QUICK—Thank you for coming along.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much for your submission and taking questions from the committee today. We need people like you to come forward with your thoughts on what you would like governments to be doing.

Ms Walch—I was going to say something about the social side of it as well. When I was raising my child, I did not have any friends who had raised children. It was socially isolating. I found that quite difficult. I think it is getting worse every year. As it is becoming almost abnormal to have children, people are feeling more isolated and having more reasons not to have children. That was the last point I wanted to make.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Quick**):

That this committee authorises publication, including publication on the parliamentary database, of the transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 3.40 pm