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# WOMEN'S ELECTORAL LOBBY CAIRNS

11 July 2005

Fax to (02) 6277 4427

*JK*

Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs  
Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600

From Joan Trewern OAM Women's Electoral Lobby Cairns  
Representative

On: Review of exposure draft of the Family Law Amendment  
(Shared Parental Responsibility) Bill 2005

3 pages, including this page; with  
our submission, and  
a copy of our submission to the Standing Committee on  
Family and Community Affairs.  
Child Custody Arrangements, 1 August 2003

*J. Trewern*

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# WOMEN'S ELECTORAL LOBBY

## CAIRNS

11 July 2005

To: the Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs

Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600 Fax (02) 6277 4427

Re: the Review of exposure draft of the Family Law Amendment  
(Shared Parental Responsibility) Bill 2005.

In reference to '60B Objects of Part and principles underlying it', we note a difference in language in this section, from that in the Committee's letter to us inviting comment.

The draft says 'ensure', the letter says 'promote', as in 'the benefit of both of their parents having a meaningful involvement in their lives'.

Our comment is not just a matter of semantics - it goes right to the heart of the problem of the draft's aims in the context of the reality with which the legislation proposes to deal: parental responsibilities.

There is no way any amendments can 'ensure' the aims as stated under 2 Section 60b, when 'Every Picture Tells a Story' is taken into account, especially the paragraph 1.42 Parents' time spent on child care, that is, in relation to fathers' normal lack of involvement.

While mothers are increasingly in the paid workforce (43.9 per cent in 2000 to 44.8 per cent, as reported by Sex Discrimination Commissioner Pru Goward's discussion paper recently issued) fathers are increasing their time with children only by 2 hours 31 minutes daily in 1997 from 2 hours 24 minutes per day in 1992.

The Committee wishes to 'ensure' children's benefit from both parents' involvement, but as a statement of objects it is so far from reality as to throw the whole aim of the draft into question.

It would appear to be inflating the value of time spent by fathers - little enough in itself - while detracting from the duties carried out by the mothers.

The 'time' spent by mothers is worktime, real work in raising children.

Although mothers are entering the paid workforce increasingly, their time in unpaid childcare is not a great deal less than before (6 hours 7 minutes per day in 1997 compared with 6 hours 46 minutes per day in 1992). Lumping together housework, childcare and care of the elderly, Goward claims women are still doing 70% of 'the housework'. In childcare, EPTS puts it at roughly 6 hours daily for women and 2 hours daily for men.

It is the discounting of the actual work done by women in raising children that is most shocking in all discussion of the care of children by parents. Imagine what the financial cost would be if the 6 hours per day were contributed by nannies or housekeepers, a question never asked when child support is discussed - as though the unpaid work done by mothers were of no account. But it is of key concern, as Ms Goward says

Frequency of visits by non-resident parents (mostly fathers) is typically 'once a week' or 'once a fortnight' (EPTS Table 1.3) with 'less than once a year/never' at 29.8, a figure supported by the figures in 1.42 on time spent by parents.

Women's Electoral Lobby Cairns is not against fathers' involvement with their children - our submission to the Standing Committee on Family & Community Affairs. Child Custody Arrangements Inquiry 1 August confirms that - demanding an inquiry into how men succeed in child-involvement.

The rules in making up the draft are based on misapprehension of the behaviour of both men and women (in general) in child care.

Joan Trewern OAM

Attached: the WEL Cairns submission of 1.8.03

*Joan Trewern*