



Queensland
Government

Premier of Queensland
and Minister for Trade

For reply please quote: TN79923 /LR04/SocPol

22 NOV 2005

Senator Gary Humphries
Chair
Community Affairs Legislation Committee
Australian Senate
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600


Dear Senator Humphries

Inquiry into Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Amendment (Welfare to Work and other measures) Bill 2005 and Family and Community Services Legislation Amendment (Welfare to Work) Bill 2005

I am writing in regard to the above Inquiry. It is disappointing that the Australian Government has provided an extremely short timeframe to respond to the Terms of Reference for the Senate Inquiry into this significant legislation. While it has not been possible to provide a detailed submission to the Inquiry, the Queensland Government would like to raise a number of concerns regarding the interaction between the "Welfare to Work" legislation and the *Workplace Relations Amendment (Work Choices) Bill 2005*.

I would invite the Committee to read this letter with reference to the current Submission to the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee into the *Workplace Relations Amendment (Work Choices) Bill 2005* on behalf of the New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia, Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory Governments (refer attachment 1). This letter also reiterates issues raised by the Queensland Government in the Submission to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee Inquiry into Poverty in Australia 2004 (full copy attached).

These concerns can be summarised in the following points.

- The impact of this interaction will be felt most severely by those who are already at greatest risk of economic and social exclusion.

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- The Queensland Government considers that “welfare to work” measures when applied in conjunction with the *Workplace Relations Amendment (Work Choices) Bill 2005* will have the effect of forcing many parents (in particular sole parents), mature age workers and people with disabilities to accept poorly paid, insecure work with hours and other conditions that may be detrimental to their health or ability to care for children.
- The “welfare to work” reforms do not include the significant investment required to enable workforce participation by the groups under consideration.
- People affected by the reforms will be forced to rely more on state-funded non-government organisations to maintain a reasonable quality of life.
- Parental participation in the workplace is predicated on the availability of suitable, quality affordable childcare. The reforms are being introduced in the absence of a strategy to improve and increase the number of accredited childcare places available to working parents, those seeking work and attempting to retrain.
- The legislation does not recognise the additional real cost of living with disability, (eg spinal cord injury) for those attempting to find and maintain a job, (eg the cost of transport, aids and equipment). A complementary and broad investment strategy is required to enable more people with disabilities to participate in the workforce.
- The punitive measures contained in the Bill fail to recognise the differential impact of either disability or marital breakdown on the ability of individuals to actively seek and maintain work. This is a one-size-fits-all approach.
- In relying on punitive measures, the “welfare to work” reforms do not empower individuals to make the transition to employment. The reforms together with the *Workplace Relations Amendment (Work Choices) Bill 2005* are likely to result in an increase in the number of ‘working poor’ Queenslanders.
- Lack of award protection, control over hours of work, and protection of entitlements resulting from the Workplace Relations legislation will have a profound impact on the lives of families and children, increasing wage inequality between skilled and unskilled workers.

Yours sincerely



**PETER BEATTIE MP
PREMIER AND TREASURER**