

10/7/09  
Emily Hehir

Ms Claire Moore  
Chair  
Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee  
By E-mail: [community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au)

Dear Senator Moore

**Re: Inquiry into Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and two related Bills**

I am deeply concerned by the prospect of Homebirths being illegal by July 1<sup>st</sup> 2010. We had a wonderful homebirth experience and wish to continue birthing our babies at home. We chose to have our daughter Meeka at home with Private Midwives from *Midwives Naturally* because they fulfilled our needs to have continuity of care, to be able to get to know our birthing team, to be comfortable and confident in their skills and in their understanding of our wants and needs. I can choose which medical practitioner I want to see if I have a cold; why am I not able to choose who will assist and watch me give birth to my children?

We strongly advocate Every Choice for Every Women. To us this is not about Homebirth being the only way, every woman and her family is individual and has different wants and needs. We just feel that homebirth is an important option to maintain for Australian families. It's about choice, about women's rights and human rights, the right to chose how, when and with whom we receive maternity care.

We received excellent one on one care from our midwives and feel empowered by our birthing experience. Their care set us up to be in a positive position for the massive job of becoming new parents and we are eternally grateful for their support. It is time the system looked beyond the act of birth and realised that a women support and experience during birth has a HUGE effect on how she will view herself and how she will be able to care for her children. I have many friends who were traumatised by their birth experiences, feel like they failed and have suffered from Post Natal Depression, surprisingly these women did not give birth at home. Every women/parent I know who took the time to research birthing options and chose the safety and peace of their own home and *independent* private midwife have a happy and empowering story to tell.

Women can choose to have an elective caesarean for no medical reason and this is publicly funded through Medicare, but families who wish try and birth naturally at home have not been financially supported in their choice, with home birth ineligible for Medicare funding, and are now being stoped from having a right to choose at all.

Most women can birth naturally with the support of an experienced birthing team. For those with complications we have medical intervention but this should be used when it is really needed, not for healthy women with normal labour. With the pressures and strains on our hospital system, Home birth provides the best opportunity for women to have the time and care to birth naturally. Home Birth is safe and produces the best rates of natural birth.



**I raised my child out of the water and watched her take her first breath.  
This is my most precious moment.  
Please respect my right to choose how I birth my babies.**

# Being home gives birth to beautiful experience

Health | James Dowling

FOR Emily Hehir and Nico Di Stefano, the birth of Meeka was a peaceful and empowering event.

The Mitcham couple sidestepped the hospital ward and gave birth to their daughter at home.

"It was a private, overwhelming and powerful experience; we didn't have different doctors and nurses always coming into the room like you would in a hospital," Mr Di Stefano said.

But they did have a private midwife and for Ms Hehir it was that relationship that made home birth so attractive.

"It was the one person from start to finish, so she knew what I wanted during the different stages of birth when I was unable to talk or explain," Ms Hehir said.

But Federal Government changes to the health system could soon mean private midwives would not be allowed to attend home births.

Federal Health Minister Nicola Roxon put forward legislation that would require all health professionals to have full indemnity insurance cover.

But private midwives have been unable to get proper cover, meaning it would be illegal for them to attend home births.

Australian College of Midwives



Emily Hehir and Nico Di Stefano with their daughter Meeka.

Picture: MITCH BEAR N02WH212

executive officer Barbara Vernon said the laws - which take effect on July 1, 2010 - could see private midwives face the dole queue and lead to dangerous, unattended home births.

"Midwives have knowledge and skills that ensure women who labour at home can do so safely," Dr

Vernon said. "They also have skills and equipment to perform life-saving emergency care in the unlikely event of a mother or baby needing urgent transfer."

Homebirth Australia secretary Justine Caines said the Federal Government should provide indemnity insurance to private

midwives and make it legal for them to attend births.

Katie Hall, spokeswoman for Ms Roxon, said the review did not support federal funding for home births, but that a \$120 million maternity reform package would give women access to different choices for maternity care.

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## My partner Nico, our daughter Meeka and myself in The Whitehorse Leader 8/7/09

I write to express my concern about the above bills. I understand that these bills will enable Medicare funding, access to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and professional indemnity premium support for midwives providing care for women to give birth in hospital.

Medicare funding for midwifery care is long overdue. It is not acceptable however to exclude homebirth from this funding and indemnity arrangement. By doing this Australia is totally out of step with nations such as the United Kingdom, Canada, The Netherlands and New Zealand.

These nations support the rights of women to choose homebirth and fund a registered midwife through their national health scheme. In New Zealand and the U.K women have a legislative right to choose homebirth.

The intersection of this legislation with the national registration and accreditation of health professionals will prevent homebirth midwives from registering. I believe this to be an unintended consequence and ask that you take steps to include homebirth within the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) and related Bills.

I support a system where all consumers are treated equally, with the same access to funding and the same insurance protection.

Yours sincerely

Emily Hehir