

## **Women's Electoral Lobby Submission Paid Parental Leave Amendment (Improvements for Families and Gender Equality Bill 2022)**

Senator Marielle Smith,  
Chair, Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs Legislation Committee

Dear Senator Smith

Women's Electoral Lobby, established in 1972, is a volunteer, member driven, independent, non-party political lobby group dedicated to creating a society where women's participation and their ability to fulfil their potential are unrestricted, acknowledged and respected and where women and men share equally in society's responsibilities and rewards.

WEL applies a feminist approach to all its work, from policy analysis and development to campaigning. WEL has developed a Feminist Policy Framework, which sets out the values which we use to measure fairness for women and fairness for society. WEL believes that good policies should address these indicators and work with governments at all levels to achieve better and fairer policy outcomes.

WEL believes that fair policies are those that:

1. Ensure the benefits and outcomes are fairly distributed between women and men, as well across different groups of women,
2. Value and reward fairly people's different skills, experiences and contributions,
3. Recognise the value of caring and supporting roles, whether paid or unpaid,
4. Recognise and rectify past and current inequalities between men and women, and
5. Enhance opportunities for women and men to take on equal rights and responsibilities in all aspects of society: politics, community, employment and social life.

Women's Electoral lobby is pleased to see that the 20 weeks paid parental leave provided in this Bill will allow Australian parents to progress (by two weeks) to an entitlement of 20% of the OECD average of 12 months paid parental leave. We note that the Minister has committed to bring forward more legislation to start on July 2024, which will progressively increase the scheme by six weeks until it reaches 26 weeks (or six months) by 2026.

We are disappointed that such a gradual and piecemeal commitment leaves attainment of the OECD 12 month (55 weeks) benchmark for paid parental leave as a distant prospect, stretching into the next decade.

WEL's 2022 Federal Election policy called on Parties to commit to 12 months paid parental leave shared between parents and legislated flexible work and leave provisions for parents and caregivers.

We would like to see a stronger Government commitment and timetable for provision of 12 months paid parental leave, well before the end of the decade.

WEL strongly supports other provisions of the Bill including those for single parents, the removal of the notion of the primary caregiver, the use it or lose it provisions for the two weeks of what was formerly designated dads leave and the new family income limit..

We congratulate the government on enhancing the flexibility of paid parental leave so that it consists only of flexible PPL days. As the notes to the Bill clarify, this will allow claimants to take the payment in multiple blocks, as small as a day at a time, within two years of the birth or adoption, and remove the requirement to not return to work in order to be eligible.

An increase to the OECD average of 12 months paid parental leave shared by parents, with an option of staging the leave in blocks over 2 years, would help both parents to care for children in the first 2 years and ease the transition to early childhood education and care settings.

WEL is concerned that the Government has yet to make a commitment to a plan to introduce superannuation in association with their paid parental leave legislative commitments through to 2026. Superannuation on paid parental leave is a vital gender equality measure that will support economic security for women and families.

Together with existing disincentives for fathers to take parental leave, the absence of superannuation provides a further discouragement for fathers. Without superannuation parental leave even when it is paid is a significant contributor to women's retirement poverty, with final balances roughly half those of men. We call on the Government to incorporate superannuation provision in planning for the next tranches of legislation extending the Paid Parental Leave scheme.

**Mary O'Sullivan Convenor Women's Electoral Lobby NSW**

**Jozefa Sobski Convenor WEL Australia**

