Belinda Probert
Thank you very much for that Pru. What we are going to do now is to allow about 10 minutes for questions specifically to Pru about the paper, about the process and then we will move to introducing some new elements and open it up for broader discussion. Since we have the opportunity to have Pru here we thought we would specifically follow up with opportunities for questions.

Pauline Smit from Women’s Action Alliance
The Minister for Women here in Victoria, Mary said to us we should base our considerations on properly research statistics. I have heard the most amazing array of contradictory statistics in this debate. However, I do congratulate you Pru on mounting a fabulously successful debate as far as getting media coverage goes. The figures I have here in my hands, I have two lots and I want to put them before you. One is from the ABS Labour Force status and other characteristics of families and the catalogue number Australia June 2000 which shows that the biggest group the percentage of working families with dependents 34.3 are traditional families that usually means one wage earner, one carer. One +, one wage earner and a part time worker was 30%; career couple is 22.8, that usually means two full time workers, single working 12.2. So the biggest group out there is the traditional family like it or not. It might be nasty. The other one I want to present you with is this one. Mother’s favour home life with infants was the headline in the Age back on 1st October and it’s presenting figures from the 2001 International Social Science surveys, the Australian branch of that. You know these names, Mariah Evans and Jonathon Kelly which showed 71% of Australian Mother’s believed that they should not work, I think they mean paid work, before their children start primary school. Now is this true? That is the question that I would like to throw to you. Is this true? If it is not true then we will put it away but is it true.

Pru Goward
33% are traditional one income families, 67% are at least one and a bit or at least income families where the woman is the primary earner. I think what we have to accept is that we do provide a lot of support for traditional families because as your survey suggests a lot of women would like to stay home for the first 5 years but we can’t forget the other 67% and increasingly that is going to be the dominant group. Not because women have changed their views about child rearing, because they have changed their views about work. Now we can oppose that. We can say you must stay home because we think that is better for children or we can say we can hear what you want to do, if we don’t enable you to do it better so that you can provide a decent family life as well pay that mortgage off and the housing affordability issue is enormous for young couples as you would know from your kids. I mean it has been a decline of 29% in a generation on average in Australia. That’s taking in country towns and places like Hobart were there’s been if anything a move in the opposite direction. In Sydney the declining housing affordability has been 38%. This place would be about the same. These couples are having two income to buy their own slum.

Pauline Smit
You have touched on rather a sore point for me here Pru. My daughter is about to build her first house. She is building a 25sq house. When her father and I got married we built an 11 sq house and were very happy in it for about 19 years. I would suggest that the model that you are presenting through your paper and I have read every word
of it and I will read it again before we respond. It’s suggested and I suspect that it is
certainly by this group too that women who remain out of paid work for a number of
years would continue to get the current maternity allowance which gives them less
than $1,000 and women in paid work would get 14 weeks at average weekly earnings,
they would get $7,000 so are we trying to pressure women one way or the other.

Pru Goward
Well as I think I made clear in the report we are talking about the issue of women and
work. We are talking about the issue of women who currently have to decide whether
they leave that baby at home and go back to work at 4 weeks or whether they don’t.
In terms of women who have already chosen to stay home that baby isn’t part of that
dilemma so from that point of view paid maternity leave is irrelevant. If you decide
and I said this to Tony Abbot on Monday, depends on what your objectives are, if you
just want more babies write the cheque. Pass every woman who is going to have a
baby $10,000 a year or whatever you think it is going to be to get her to do it. If your
objective is welfare support for families, again write the cheques, make them means
tested and give them to people whether they work or not because you are really
talking about supporting family incomes. If your objective is to enable all babies to
have their mother’s with them for 14 weeks then you have to think about it
differently. This isn’t a welfare measure this is an opportunity cost measure.

Pauline Smit
If our objective is to allow women to be with babies for 14 weeks, we are pack of
cruel bastards.

Belinda Probert (Chair)
Sorry Pauline we have got other questions.

Barbara Jennings from the Australian Education Union.
Yes we are fully supportive of a paid maternity leave scheme. We think it is a
wonderful idea. I am wondering Pru you feel it has to be embedded in flexible work
options and the security of employment. It seems to me that is a very essential part of
the whole debate too. I know it is not necessarily as part of the options paper but I am
wondering how much you see it as embedded.

Pru Goward
It was part of the frustration of doing it. I mean you can see why I chose to focus on
one single policy measure because the result is people are actually talking about a
policy measure. Whereas if you start talking about work and family everybody just
drifts off and says isn’t that a good idea. But I agree with you that the price we pay
for is that we can’t bring in these other issues which are equally important and as
women remind me if you are actually most interested in preserving that capital
investment in women’s education and training, then you actually should focus more
on return to work issues like child care and flexible working hours and part time work
that gives you promotion and etc etc. That isn’t the purpose of this measure
particularly but as part of a suite of measures and certainly one that is provided by
employers that’s how that’s used, but as part of a suite of measures it can in total do
that. It’s very hard to see how you can have a decent working family policy without
paid maternity leave because the first thing you have to be able to do is say if you
want to stay home for 14 weeks yes we will do that and then we will think about these other things but at least that baby can have 14 weeks of it’s mother.

Belinda Probert (Chair)

We will just take a couple more questions for Pru in this session and then we have another session for discussion too and we need to bring in other speakers.

Lisa Heap from Slater and Gordon ~ Lawyers

It’s time, well beyond time, so thank you for the work that you have done on this matter. I am interested in relation to employers’ response. I think when your paper came out the response that was reported of employers in Victoria through VECCI and the like was Australia can’t afford a paid maternity leave scheme which seemed to me to trail out the old response to this. In your consultations, what is the feedback from employers, particularly small business employers? It seems to me, particularly those models which actually recognise Government contribution to paid maternity leave this is a great opportunity for employers to be able to be part of that proposal that benefits their employees and takes a lot of pressure off them as well.

Pru Goward

You are quite right. Their first reaction was Oh God we can’t pay for this let’s not talk about it. When they worked out that there were other options they started to factor in the benefits to them and I think that is why, I would hate to name any organisations but I’ve had indications from several leading employer groups that they will be putting in very positive submissions and writing to the Government and saying privately we think you should do it because as you say there are such tremendous benefits to them. Apart from anything else what employer wants a woman who is exhausted, has cracked nipples, still recovering from a cesarean and a baby that’s vomited down her back three times during the night, what employer wants her back at work during the first 14 weeks. I gather that for the first six weeks it is not on anyway. So they are coming to that view. They are however very concerned about making it an industrial entitlement because they feel it will have flow on affects for them and for that reason they talk about it very much as a social benefit and I think that reflects perhaps where the Government will also go. I think the Government will probably plump, because of the sorts of concerns you have raised Pauline, for a one payment that’s universal that all women will get because they don’t feel they can defend this new notion of opportunity costs for the Australian society. They feel they won’t be able to defend that politically, so they are going to write the cheque for everybody, but I think what they will have to do is re jig that money so that for the first 14 weeks she can stay home and we’ve got what we want and if they want to do it differently from then on well that’s their call.

Zana Bytheway ~ From Job Watch

I would like to join Lisa in thanking you for furthering this initiative. It has been a very worthwhile effort. At Job Watch I’m looking at this from the employment perspective and when I submit our submissions it will be from that perspective but I couldn’t help being caught back by the fact that in your paper you had indicated that in terms of the options it could extend beyond employment, that is paid maternity leave. My concern there is this and of course I recognise that and I thought well that is a very valid point but my concern here is about the approach that in submitting, in
putting in the submissions, do we then jeopardize, in casting a wide net, do we then jeopardize the position for women in employment and in particular I am interested in eradicating discrimination. In casting that wide net do we create some problems there for ourselves.

Pru Goward
Do you mean by making it available to all women whether they work or not what have we fixed for women in the workforce?

Zana Bytheway
Yes.

Pru Goward
In the sense of relative disadvantage you are quite right. But in terms of that first objective, and I know I keep coming back to it, I sound like a broken wheel, I am looking at Joan and I am thinking yes, well we both had kids at about the same age, a long time ago now and maybe we are reflecting our own motherhood. In terms of that first objective which is saying to women in this country like we have been able to say everywhere else in the world you don’t have to go back to work we can give you the choice to stay home, I think that issue is immaterial. In terms of these other issues of valuing paid work, recognizing the capital investment, ensuring that there are macro economic outcomes out of this, you are quite right it won’t do that as a National minimum wage scheme.

Wendy Weeks ~ University of Melbourne.
Thanks I have enjoyed very much your presentation. Can you say a few more things about the pros and cons of the contributory principle. As you know in this country and our country the labour movement, we have felt very strongly that people pay their taxes however I have personally been quite impressed by Canada and some of the countries where the contributory principal has worked well. I feel very worried about it on child care grounds but I am actually trying to ask you a question, not tell you what I think. So can you say a little more about that option as you would see it working in Australia.

Pru Goward
Do you mean a social insurance scheme?

Wendy Weeks.
Some sort of contributory social insurance scheme, how would you see that working and what are it’s pros and cons.

Pru Goward
I think a lot of us find the social insurance model very attractive because it means that you can see what you are putting your money in for, you can identify it separately and it’s much more then going to be related to your contribution which means that your number of years in the workforce and that sort of thing. But in Australia it would just mean an unpicking of the whole tax system. Doing the GST was one thing, it would look like a picnic compared with what we would have to do on this and if you think about the fact that so many Government payments in Australia are actually in other countries provided by a social insurance scheme. So I think at this stage they would
say it was too hard. Having said that we are, if you are going to take this whole work, life, family thing seriously, we are not just talking about kids we are talking about people who then stop in their late 40’s early 50’s to look after a Father who has had bowel cancer and he needs care for 3 months. Hello who is it, it is always her. You know, maybe we should be starting to think about a life long account, superannuation account that you can go in and out of for those periods but it would be an enormous re think of a system that most Australian’s would say has worked very well for a 100 years.

Belinda Probert
Thank you very much Pru for answering and you from the floor for contributing. There is obviously, you can begin to see the scale of debate and the complexities. What I would like to do now is move on to the next session in which we are going to have very short presentations from all these eminent speakers and I am going to very vicious and turn the microphone off after about 5 minutes. It is really to generate, to make sure that we hear some of the more specific questions that affect different groups and see the different angles from which people are coming to this issue and then we will open it up again to a more lengthy discussion with the floor.