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To Whom It May Concern,

I am a mother of four children, all of whom were breastfed for varying lengths of time. When pregnant with my first child, I assumed I would breastfeed and I was told, yes breastfeeding is best if you can do it, but don't beat yourself up if you can't.

Well, it turned out I did beat myself up when things took longer to establish than I thought, and I have been amazed throughout my years as a mum, at the opposition I seem to have faced with regard to my children breastfeeding.

These comments have come from not only from family and friends, but also from various health professionals – several GP's and child health nurses amongst them.

I have persevered, I have stuck to my belief that human babies do need human milk in order to develop normally, and my children have been among the few in Australia, to continue to receive breastmilk into the second year of life.

The lack of support I found as a first time mum, led me to become involved in the Australian Breastfeeding Association (formerly the Nursing Mothers Association of Australia). I now work as a volunteer breastfeeding counsellor for the Association and in addition to several counselling contacts each week from mothers in my local community, I also do a weekly four hour shift taking calls on our breastfeeding helpline.

Although the content of the calls varies, the theme is very much the same ... mums want to breastfeed their babies, but they receive so much conflicting advice, and very little support in continuing to breastfeed.

I am delighted that the Australian Government recognises that breastfeeding is a national health issue and has launched this enquiry. It is my hope that this enquiry will lead to changes in the follow areas:

- Marketing of Infant Formula in Australia
In Australia, many people think that infant formula is just as good as

breastmilk. Indeed, some brands are marketed as being "just like" breastmilk – others promise to cure your baby's sleeping problem, or some other situation, that in reality is probably normal baby behaviour. The manufacturers of these products give away samples via child health centres, pharmacies and promotions, along with literature that gives biased information.

- **Education of Health Professionals**
Many GP's have little knowledge of normal breastfeeding behaviours and will often blame breastfeeding when a mother presents with an unsettled baby. I myself, have had comments from several different doctors (in different cities) saying that there was no longer nutritional benefit to breastfeeding my children beyond 12 months. The World Health Organisation recommends that infants are exclusively breastfeed for the first six months of life, and that breastmilk continue to be part of the diet until two years, or beyond.

And I am appalled to learn that maternal and child health conferences are sponsored by infant formula companies.

- **Positive Public Health Messages**
I would love to see a campaign educating Australians of the importance of breastfeeding. We know of the risks of smoking, obesity and heart disease to name a few ... but how often are we told that not breastfeeding increases a child's risk of so many diseases (asthma, eczema, diabetes, some childhood cancers, heart disease to name but a few).

Breastfeeding is the normal way to feed and nurture a human child. It ensures optimal development, and has health benefits that last a lifetime.

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