

The Secretary of the Committee
On the Inquiry into Breastfeeding,

House of Representatives,
PO Box 6021,
Parliament House,
Canberra ACT 2600.

6 March, 2007.

To Sir/Madam,

I would like to offer a male comment in relation to the current inquiry into breastfeeding. I am a 31 year old male Police Officer, married for 10 years and father to 3 children daughter aged 6, son aged 4 and daughter aged 6 months.

My wife has breastfeed all 3 of our children, our daughter until she was 14 months, son until he was 3 years and still currently breastfeeding our 6 month old daughter. Despite the obvious benefits breastfeeding has for men (free cost of feeding our children, not being called upon in the middle of the night to feed the baby), the health benefits for both mother and baby are far more important and should be strongly encouraged and supported

My wife and I had our first child while we were living in Lake Cargelligo. There was little to no help for new or nursing mothers in this remote community. Despite this limited help, my wife was determined to breastfeed our daughter. This desire for my wife to breastfeed was due to her mother raising her with the same principals and importance to this natural behaviour and gift of life.

My wife struggled during pregnancy and after birth with sore nipples and mastitis, however she battled on and once she got the hang of it, it was like she was a professional that had done it a hundred times before. It was the most natural thing that she could do for our daughter and it provided all the food and nutrition that she required. Breastfeeding also provided other things, such as the ability to calm our daughter during times of distress, being able to put her to sleep and provide a close bond between her and her mother. I will always remember the joy of my wife's face when she fed and the comforting sounds our daughter made during these feeding times.

What surprised me the most during this time was that breastfeeding was not encouraged or supported by any health organization or community groups within this community. I worked closely with the Aboriginal mission in this town and I cannot recall one child that was breastfeed. I was amazed that local community members and the Aboriginal community immediately placed newborn children onto formula, while they attempted to

live with unemployment, low socio-economic and drought conditions. Children could be breastfeed for free, providing life and food for new born children; however disadvantaged families were spending a fortune on formula.

My wife feed our first daughter until she was 14 months. Our daughter stopped feeding herself; it was not due to my wife wanting to return to work or any other reason. My wife was sad that our daughter had stopped feeding from her, but was happy that she had feed her for over 12 months.

Prior to having our second child, we moved to Hornsby. Again, my wife was excited to breastfeed our son. She had similar problems with the pregnancy and with breastfeeding, however she battled through. She obtained assistance from a lactation consultant at Hornsby Hospital that gave her great assistance. As a result of this support and desire to help / support other women with similar breastfeeding problems, my wife decided to attend meetings with the Australian Breastfeeding Association and later agreed to become a Breastfeeding counsellor.

My wife fed our son until he was 3. This was another new thing for both my wife and I. Feeding a child to this age brought many questions and some criticism from friends and sometimes complete strangers. My wife and I knew that this was completely natural and had no problem in continuing to feed him. We believed that he should be able to breastfeed until he was ready to stop. Just like with our first child, the benefits gained from this breastfeeding was not just for food and nutrition, it provided comfort, support and a close bond that nothing else could achieve. I had no problem with my wife breastfeeding our son for this long; in fact I believe that all mothers and children should be provided with the same support and assistance for this to occur.

Around 2 years ago, we moved to Parkes NSW, another small country community. We had our third child in Parkes and she is still being breastfeed, now 6 months. Upon arrival at Parkes, my wife made inquiries in regards to breastfeeding information or assistance in the area. There was none. The nearest support group for breastfeeding was in Orange, some 100 kames away.

My wife has been working for the last 3 years to become a breastfeeding counsellor. She is almost finished her training and then will be able to assist and support mothers with breastfeeding questions, problems and support. She has done this all in her own time and own cost. She has sacrificed time to complete assignments, traveled in her own time and cost to Orange for training and meetings. She had attended conferences all over the country to obtain valuable information and guidance. The commitment she has shown to helping mothers breastfeed has been incredible and at the end of the day, when she is qualified she will receive no financial return for the work that she has done or will be doing.

I have watched and listened to my wife during the last 3 years of her volunteer training. The information and research available in regards to the numerous benefits of breastfeeding for both the mother and child is unbelievable. What astounds me is that this

information is not provided to nursing mothers, health professionals or media outlets. One of the main reasons for this appears to be the fact that they don't want to offend mothers, that it is their decision on how they raise their child. Yes, it is their decision, but how can you make an appropriate decision when you are not provided with all the facts.

I obviously have some more information than other persons due to my wife's training and research in regards to breastfeeding, but the limited benefits that I have been seen and read about breastfeeding is incredible, such as a dramatically reduced risk of breast cancer to mother if she breast feeds for more than 12 months, less chance of child being hospitalised for gastro related problems and reduced risk of obesity, asthma, allergies, diabetes and cancers to the child. The World Health Organisation recommends breast feeding for 2 years and beyond, in this country less than 40% of mother's breastfeed up to 6 months. If I was to feed my child on formula because it was just more convenient or I saw an advertisement stating it was better, only to be later informed of the dangers of feeding formula, I would be unbelievably upset. It is not difficult to provide the facts to people about breastfeeding and the dangers of formula.

I find it unbelievable that breastfeeding is not supported by health professionals, in fact the number of friends and colleagues that I have spoken to that have gone to see doctors or nurses for help and assistance to breastfeed, only to be told to just put the child on formula is phenomenally high. It makes me incredibly upset that these people, in a position of authority, are giving this incorrect and damaging advice. These professionals should be encouraging this wonderful and life giving act that breast feeding provides. Advising mothers to just place a child on formula because of a minor hiccup is disgraceful and inexcusable.

Although I do not have much to do with it, the Australian Breastfeeding Association is a non-profit organisation run by mothers. I understand the difficulty they have with trying to support and assist mothers, at the same time not wanting to pressure and intimidate them about the importance of breastfeeding. However, I do not know how they are supposed to compete against multi-national formula companies who are only interested in profit. To see commercials or advertisements stating they care about children's health and wellbeing is laughable. At the end of the day, the only thing these companies are interested in is money.

The Australian Government needs to support breastfeeding, through financial assistance and changes in formula advertising legislation. Money would be saved in the long term by supporting breastfeeding due to the long term health benefits obtained by both mother and child. The unbelievable benefits of breastfeeding, in providing joy / happiness to mothers and comfort to newborns cannot be measured. This is something that I have seen first hand. Changing people's beliefs on breastfeeding will not happen overnight, but it will never happen if the facts and benefits are not put out in the community or it is not supported by Government and health organisations.

I am proud that my wife is so committed to this cause. She has breastfeed our 3 children and provided the greatest gift to them in the first years of their lives. She could have left

it at that and not cared how other mothers feed their children, but she has chosen to sacrifice her time and money to help and support mothers struggling with breastfeeding their newborn children. There are many other women out there like my wife and they should all be encouraged and supported in any way possible.

I ask that the Australian Government support the Australian Breastfeeding Association and new nursing mothers to breastfeed their children. I encourage the Australian Government to not consider the opinions / submissions from the multi-national formula companies that are only interested in profits. The Australian Government needs to assist the volunteers who are supporting and encouraging mothers to provide the natural and normal gift of breastfeeding.

Yours Sincerely

Ben Dawson.