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Official Committee Hansard

**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT AND
WORKPLACE RELATIONS

Reference: Pay equity and increasing female participation in the workforce

THURSDAY, 27 NOVEMBER 2008

CANBERRA

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS
Thursday, 27 November 2008

Members: Ms Jackson (*Chair*), Mr Haase (*Deputy Chair*), Ms Bird, Ms Hall, Mr Hayes, Mr Keenan, Mr Marles, Mr Ramsey, Dr Southcott and Mr Symon

Members in attendance: Ms Bird, Mr Haase, Ms Hall, Mr Hayes, Ms Jackson, Mr Ramsey, Mr Symon

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

Pay equity and associated issues related to increasing female participation in the workforce including, but not limited to:

- The adequacy of current data to reliably monitor employment changes that may impact on pay equity issues;
- The need for education and information among employers, employees and trade unions in relation to pay equity issues;
- Current structural arrangements in the negotiation of wages that may impact disproportionately on women;
- The adequacy of recent and current equal remuneration provisions in state and federal workplace relations legislation;
- The adequacy of current arrangements to ensure fair access to training and promotion for women who have taken maternity leave and/or returned to work part time and/or sought flexible work hours; and
- The need for further legislative reform to address pay equity in Australia.

WITNESSES

BUCKLEY, Ms Elinor, Co-ordinator, Security4Women..... 1

**CASELLS, Ms Rebecca, Research Fellow, National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling,
University of Canberra 1**

**COLEMAN, Ms Marie Yvonne, Chair, Social Policy Committee, National Foundation for
Australian Women 1**

**McNAMARA, Dr Justine, Senior Research Fellow, National Centre for Social and Economic
Modelling, University of Canberra..... 1**

Committee met at 11.13 am**COLEMAN, Ms Marie Yvonne, Chair, Social Policy Committee, National Foundation for Australian Women****BUCKLEY, Ms Elinor, Co-ordinator, Security4Women****CASSELLS, Ms Rebecca, Research Fellow, National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling, University of Canberra****McNAMARA, Dr Justine, Senior Research Fellow, National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling, University of Canberra**

CHAIR (Ms Jackson)—This is the 10th public hearing for the committee's inquiry into pay equity and associated issues relating to increasing female participation in the workforce. I welcome representatives of Security4Women to today's hearing. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath today I should advise you that the hearing is a legal proceeding of the parliament and therefore has the same standing as proceedings of the respective Houses. We have received a written submission from you which has been accepted as evidence and authorised for publication earlier this morning. Do you wish to present any additional submissions or make an opening statement before we go to questions?

Ms Buckley—Security4Women is one of the four secretariats funded by the Office for Women. Our approach is lifelong economic security for women. The submission we made jointly was developed by the National Foundation of Australian Women, the Australian Federation of University Women and WIRE, which is Women's Information and Referral and is based in Melbourne. WIRE will be making a separate presentation.

Ms Coleman—We have a practice of—I hope—conducting well-researched policy submissions to government and others on issues which we see as being of interest and concern as far as the welfare of Australian women is concerned. We began work on child care in the process of developing our submission to the Productivity Commission and its inquiry into paid parental leave. We have continued to be very active in relation to the paid parental leave. We were asked specifically by the Women's Information and Referral Service to address the matter of out of school hours care, because they were having a lot of representations made to them by women who rang up seeking information and advice. That was outside the parameters of the Productivity Commission inquiry, which is technically about parents of new born children up to the age of about one year.

So we addressed the question of what is happening with care for the school-age children of working parents. That is what we are going to talk about today. I have asked our colleagues from NATSEM to come along so that they can talk to you about the gaps that exist in terms of developing any understanding of what ought to be happening for school-age care. As our submission points out to you, there a very substantial body of the work force is comprised of women with dependent school-age children, the greater proportion of whom work part time. Whether or not they want to work full time is another matter.

The most common issue is that they make a decision because of their responsibilities for parenting as to how much time they can work. They are also deeply influenced by the absolute shambles which constitutes care for school-age children in this country. There is no question that it is becoming increasingly evident that there are some policy lacunae as far as the question of care for children who are school age is concerned. But some of the problems with the care system are also problems that are associated with lack of services for older children.

One of the things that we also did to assist in this was to commission Newspoll to do a public survey, and I think that you have been provided with that. That is one of the most recent data summaries available about parent's choices. It is quite obvious from that that a lot of parents find the lack of care for their children a major issue. The people who are able to access organised care during school vacations tend to be the people who have a higher level of disposable income. Where parents do not have that level of disposable income, children are frequently left without any kind of supervision or are supervised by the inevitable grandma or somebody down the street who may or may not have the time to give the kind of supervision which is appropriate.

In summary, in terms of the out of school hours care area—which is a silly term because we are really also talking about the school vacation—we have these dilemmas that there is very little understood about what is the most age appropriate range of services. Any of you who have been parents will know that by the time a child is eight or nine, if it is bored rigid by a program, the child is going to find a way of escaping from it. Most of the parents I talk to find that their children at eight or nine will just refuse to go to minischool, holiday, or after-school-hours programs. There is very little around at all for children over the age of 11 and yet very few parents think that their 11-year-olds are mature enough to be left completely without adult supervision.

The childcare accreditation agency which is currently under review through COAG—and as you know there are a couple of COAG working parties looking at both a national framework for standards and a national framework for accreditation and registration—is also the body which accredits out of school hours care services. There is a very mixed picture from state to state as to whether or not there are any state licensing arrangements required. I am told that the standard of accreditation that takes place for the school-age programs is so marginal as to be inappropriate. It is a fair question as to whether an agency responsible for theoretically knowing a great deal about what is appropriate for children ought to five is necessarily equipped with the skills to decide what the best thing is five to eights, nines to 11s, and possibly even 11s to 15s—age-appropriate stuff—and it is not coming out of the childcare accreditation agency.

But if a service cannot get accreditation, either because it is not running for a sufficient period of time or a range of other reasons, not only can a parent not then access the Commonwealth childcare benefit, the fee relief, nor can they access the rather generous 50 per cent tax concession. So the problems around Commonwealth accreditation of these services mean that a great many parents are not going to have access to the current policy provisions which allow some people to access some kind of fee relief.

There are incredible gaps between states concerning licensing and there are enormous problems in terms of the calibre of the staff who are employed in these jobs. There is no continuity. There are no real requirements for qualifications, and that in itself is a problem. It is one of those self-reinforcing dilemmas that, if there is no adequate standard of training required, it is

very hard to get any kind of career progression or get beyond just the most casualised of workforces.

As we have said in the submission, there is a muddle at national level in terms of different agencies putting little bits of money in—for example, a minister for sport put some money in. At the state level there are also some state programs commonly around sport and recreation that put some money in but there are enormous variations between states. There are huge problems in terms of who in the system sponsors these programs. In some states it looks superficially as if it is schools or parent and citizens bodies. Commonly, school facilities are made available and there may well be lots of problems about the cost to the service of taking out appropriate insurance and paying rent, which is required by education departments. We find that in some areas parents and citizens associations will be dominated by parents who do not work and who are resistant to running programs for parents who do work—that old divide. I am advised by another member of Security4Women who works with disabled children that there is the most terrifying paucity of programs for children with a disability whose parents are in the workforce. Very little is happening at all. There is a mix, we know, of private for-profit and not-for-profit and local government provision but it is absolutely impossible for us to obtain a consolidated picture of how the system actually works.

Essentially, it is because we have this mess—there is no other way of putting it—with any kind of systemic provision of care for school-age children alongside the problems, some of which are rooted in the same issues, around accreditation and funding. We firmly believe that it is very important for this committee to examine this issue in terms of its impact on women's workforce participation and the implications for business, who are the employers of people who are disappearing for school programs. We note with interest that the Senate is contemplating an inquiry into child care generally, but the National Foundation for Australian Women has the view that it has reached a point where the funding machinery really needs to be looked at by a body such as the Productivity Commission. Perhaps my colleagues from NATSEM would like to comment briefly.

Dr McNamara—Marie asked us to come today and talk specifically about what the gaps in research might be in relation to this area. That is the only bit that we are dealing with. Rebecca and I did a piece of research some years ago, which I will table, looking at the use of before- and after-school care. At that stage we were looking at it especially in relation to whether use had increased between 1999 and 2002. It is really one of the very few pieces of Australian research looking at anything to do with outside-school-hours care. When we looked at literature for that paper there was very little Australian or, indeed, international research on the topic and it looks as though nothing much has changed in the last few years.

Generally, there are a lot of gaps in knowledge in the area. We do have some data sets that we use for this sort of analysis, although a number of them are limited in terms of ages. The ABS has just started collecting data for children 12 and under. It used to be only for 11 and under. The HILDA survey, which is a longitudinal data set, collects data about child care for children 14 and under and the National Foundation for Australian Women recently commissioned Newspoll to collect some data related to children 15 and under. Generally there has been a lack of data for older children and what arrangements parents make for those children. Although we have some of this data, there is an absence of deeper analysis of it, which I will talk about in a moment. The Bureau of Statistics produces a publication every three years based on their childcare survey

which provides some data broken down by age, and FaHCSIA does a census of childcare services which includes some data about outside-school-hours care. Generally in the academic literature there is a much stronger focus on early childhood and early childhood care. There is a great deal of interest in that and there has been much less done on care for older children.

I will go through four or five areas where we really believe that more research needs to be done. The first is that there seems to be a lack of detailed knowledge of and data about how parents make care arrangements for their school-age children, particularly for older children—once children get beyond those early primary years and certainly into high school. We know that families have all sorts of ways of combining care to make things work. There is not a lot known about how well these combinations of care work for children and families, including how well self-care works, and how these sorts of arrangements affect the workforce participation of mothers in particular. Once again, for children in early high school this is knowledge that we particularly lack.

The second thing is that more analysis is needed about how outside-school-hours care arrangements, including things like the cost of these arrangements and parental and child satisfaction with them, might differ for different types of families: lower and higher income families; families with a different range of work schedules and environments; and families with different levels of family support. We know that grandparents offer a lot of informal care to children this age. How does this work for families that do not have those sorts of family members around? And what differences are there across geographic locations? There is some data around to do this analysis but it has not been done, and richer data would also be good.

There is really nothing that we have seen or, I know, that Marie has seen, that looks at the benefits of school-age care, either formal or informal—formal might be care outside school hours or vacation services and informal might be grandparents or siblings or the like. So there is not much Australian knowledge on what the benefits of these sorts of arrangements might be for children and their families. We know a little bit about what the benefits, or not, of child care might be. There has been quite a lot of research interest in that, particularly internationally, for younger children and some evidence to suggest that, particularly for low-income families, child care has huge benefits. But we really do not know what benefits outside-school-hours care has for school-age children, and also, of course, how these might differ across children's ages, across the sort of services you use, how often you go and so on. There is an absence of data.

You might be familiar with the *Longitudinal study of Australian children*. It has had a lot of publicity lately, particularly on television. That is something that could potentially be used to look at these issues but at the moment those cohorts of children are very young, so it is certainly no help to us at present for, say, looking at early high school children.

There is a theme in the literature that Marie referred to that older children, especially late primary, year 5 and year 6, are just starting to not want to go to these sorts of services, which becomes a huge issue for parents. Certainly, at high school the traditional outside-school-hours care services are not available to those children. Sometimes there are other sorts of bits and pieces but very often these older children do not want to attend. So there seems to be a real issue about finding out how we might target services better, and perhaps particularly asking children and young people themselves what sort of service would be right and how it could be arranged.

We are not aware of any data that has done that, although there is a range of research that now asks children their views about many things.

Finally—and Marie has touched on this quite a bit—there is this whole issue of vacation care, which is part of outside-school-hours care, but we tend to think of before- and after-school care. There is some data about vacation care but it has only been analysed a very little bit and it is kind of hard to get at. So vacation care generally is another issue that needs more analysis. It was covered in the Newspoll survey done for the NFAW. It is covered in the HILDA data but not much analysis has been done.

CHAIR—I would like to be a bit clearer on something. One of our terms of reference goes directly to data and where you think there are specific gaps. I think what you are saying, overwhelmingly, is that no matter which survey instrument you are talking about there is a lack of consistent collection of data for children aged between 11 and 15. Is that the critical—

Dr McNamara—I think certainly for anyone over 14 there is nothing. HILDA has data for children who are 14 and under. So there is an absence for anyone over 14. For children 14 and under there is some data but not much analysis has been done of it. Because that is part of a large survey looking at huge numbers of household arrangements, the sets of questions they ask is relatively limited. So there would be other sorts of richer data that would not be available through that sort of data set.

CHAIR—I have a couple of other questions but before proceeding I would like to acknowledge two people who have joined the audience. They are Mrs Salim and Mr Komolafe from the National Assembly of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. We are very pleased you are able to join us in our public hearing today. Welcome.

The whole of your submission reflects, I think, some of the evidence. We have found that the single greatest factor impacting on women's pay rates and probably their long-term financial security, especially with superannuation, is their role as carers and rearers of children. So the system of child care that supports it, formal or otherwise, is pretty significant, particularly when there has been evidence that women are available to work more hours in a context where we have a skills shortage. But I think what you are also saying—forgive me if I am wrong—is that there is very little information about how the Australian child care system works. I note everyone is nodding their head.

Ms Buckley—It is frightening.

CHAIR—Would you go so far as to say that there is little understanding within government at both the federal and the state and territory level.

Ms Coleman—I think that it is true that there is inadequate understanding. You may be aware that I ran the Fraser government's childcare program, and even during that period we had exquisite difficulty in persuading people that the school-age child care issue was of significance. Everybody focussed very much on the under-fives—and I am not suggesting that the under-fives are not very significant. It has been very hard, for decades, to get a focus on this question of what is happening to the school-age child. It is not something that is new. I think that the progressive changes in funding arrangements and policy approaches at the federal level,

particularly once we abolished the actual support grants which were meant to provide some modicum of quality control, and simply looked at fee relief and a tax benefit, meant there has been much less incentive for the Commonwealth to look at these things as part of a service system.

That change is occurring in the under-five range. The government came to power with a well-established policy about what it wanted to do with the under-fives and work is in hand on that. There is virtually nothing occurring in policy terms—I am not attacking my former colleagues; I am just saying there is nothing happening—in thinking about this age range. It would be a tragedy, in my view, if the changes which are underway about such things as childcare accreditation simply kept on focussing exclusively on the under-fives. This is a big issue.

The situation is just as muddled at state government level. I have talked with colleagues in various states about what the focus there is and the message seems to be that it falls between ministers who are concerned with sport and recreation and child health, ministers for education—who do not want their nice schools mucked up—and the ministers for community welfare, who may have responsibilities for community services. There is no orderly management of policy at the federal or state level—I think I can say that.

Ms BIRD—It strikes me that a lot of the driver for the under-fives has been a comprehension of the importance of quality learning programs within child care or caring. Do you think some of the resistance is the view that after you are five, and enrolled at school, you actually are getting a full education program? So what you are looking at is viewed, maybe counterintuitively, as entirely child care, because it is really about how you provide some supervision for kids outside school hours so they are not getting into trouble. That is the driver of it rather than issues like whether these kids are missing out on supervised study time that other kids are getting. Our approach to it, it seems to me, is quite different. It is to do with whether we see it as care or education.

Ms Coleman—And bear in mind that we also have physical health—the health departments are increasingly interested in the latest moral panic about child obesity or whatever. You have got sport and recreation type programs, but they do not offer complete supervision for a child. Yes, there is a real dilemma. Probably people have also been working on an assumption—unjustified; nevertheless—that, ‘My 14-year-old sister always looked after me after school and it was fine.’ It is not fine any longer when you look at the proportion of women now in the workforce and you find whole streets where there is not an adult to be seen because parents are at work. A 14-year-old probably was fine if there was somebody next door—even if not quite the responsible adult, nevertheless an adult. People are thinking back to a different kind of Australia. The problem lies in the fact that nobody is focussing on who has policy responsibility as a whole for children in this age group.

Mr HAYES—I think you make a really good point. A lot of people I talk to in my electorate—which is very much a working-class electorate in outer metropolitan Sydney—put to me that when it comes to high school kids they need somebody to take them to their sport. One of things discussed about childhood obesity is that we have seen a decline in sport participation. They are not necessarily looking for accredited child care or early learning and the things that go with that. It is about what you said about keeping kids out of trouble, getting them from A to B and doing those things that a parent cannot do when they are at work. Intuitively, I suppose, you

are drawn to the fact that a lot of these facilities can be provided within schools. They used to be provided within schools to the point of school sporting activity other than just at those dedicated sports schools. That has now all dropped off. Is there a change between the expectation of what we expect out of child care for young children and what we really see, which is really just minding kids? It is a different form of accreditation, surely. Should we be putting more emphasis on those natural monopolies we have in regard, that being the education facilities, the asset base? It would not necessarily be a further impost on teachers, but maybe there are other ways that we could use the asset itself.

Ms Coleman—You would think that that could happen, but we just do not seem to have the driver. Things tend to get moving in governments—not just in the federal government but at the state level—if a minister is told, ‘You will have to make sure that something works around this particular issue.’ We do not have anybody trying to look at what the appropriate solutions are. I am told, and it is purely anecdotal, that a great many public libraries wind up being de facto childcare centres. The high school kids go in there after school and do their homework. That is good, although libraries would probably like some more resources to help them manage that. But for anything of these other things which add more—attending sporting programs, children interested in music camps, whatever—there is no method of financing those costs for parents who are wanting to make sure their children can participate in these things through the current arrangements for tax concession and childcare fee relief. Even if a parent is arranging for someone to take their child to a range of sporting things, they also want to know that the child is actually getting there, not just sloping off somewhere and getting into trouble nicking hubcaps or whatever children do with their mates today. I know there is a moral panic about what is happening to our teenagers: are they all getting into trouble?

Mr HAASE—They are not all of course, but too many are.

Ms Coleman—Some are, and some of these things are around not really having the sorts of things which will actively engage them. You cannot say to a child of 14, ‘You are going to go to such and such.’ It has to be, ‘I would like to be involved with such and such’. That is the dilemma and that is why it is so important to have information about what is age appropriate and to devise policies which will—

Mr HAYES—This is always going to be independently assessed almost on the basis of a family’s expectation or relationships. It is not going to be one-size-fits all-in how we apply it.

Ms Coleman—That is right.

Ms Buckley—No. That is why it is so complex.

Ms Coleman—But we have not really devoted the policy attention to trying to work out what some of the solutions might be and how you might finance them.

Mr HAASE—It is a complex issue. You raise a point but you also raise many questions in my mind. You are saying that out-of-school-hour care is nonexistent or almost nonexistent today.

Ms Coleman—In many places it is almost nonexistent.

Mr HAASE—But you accept that there are processes where funds may be applied for to run out-of-school-hour care. I know that even in my huge electorate of Kalgoorlie in some very remote locations there are services that provide out-of-school-hour care. I just wanted to establish that we accept that there are some.

Ms Coleman—Yes.

Mr HAASE—I have looked at your recommendations carefully and I note they all have a common theme of calling for government to review, to analyse, to make somebody responsible, to prioritise the review et cetera. My colleague has just mentioned the fact that the solutions are going to be diverse, depending upon the circumstances of the parent and the location and the work ethic versus requirement. Where do you see the issue of genuine parental responsibility in this regard in the shaping of their children to be more resourceful, responsible and reliable and where do you see the huge improvement in workplace flexibility and employers accommodating the requirements of their workforce in caring for children out of school hours?

Ms Coleman—Those two fit together. You will notice that in the survey we had done by Newspoll we asked questions about what would be helpful: flexible working hours and various other such things. There is no question that access to flexible working hours is very important and many parents would much prefer to have flexible working hours to be able to be with their children. Regardless of what one says about quality time, I think that with a lot of children you are not necessarily interacting with them all the time when they are 11 so much as you are there as part of the wallpaper and they are very pleased to have you there. So I think flexible working hours and making it possible for parents—where they can afford by the way to take the cut in wages that will come from working fewer hours or flexible hours—is one important aspect of this. But I do have a lot of concerns about what is happening with the children who are essentially just being left to manage themselves. I feel very apprehensive about that.

When I had school-age children I was very fortunate that when I went back to work I was able at that stage to say, ‘I will work during school hours but I will not work during school vacations.’ I had that capacity but a lot of parents do not have the capacity to specify that.

Mr HAASE—But do you accept that there has been a huge improvement in workplace flexibility over the last decade?

Ms Coleman—Yes. I think that is there and people are looking for more. No doubt as we look at both the new IR system and whatever comes out of the review of the Sex Discrimination Act we would be hopeful that there would be further policies going into place that will make it more possible for families to negotiate flexible working conditions, and that has to be true both for fathers and for mothers. I strongly agree with Liz Broderick on those points.

Mr HAASE—I am just concerned that government care of children from cradle to the grave is perhaps not something that is going to be desired by all taxpayers. Our brief quite clearly is to address or to investigate and to recommend changes that will address the issue of women participating to a greater extent in the workforce. That is perhaps the scope that allows this discussion to take place in this location. We were scratching our heads a little bit as to the broad nature of your submission when we were looking at pay equity. But we are also looking at female participation in the workforce so this clearly comes into that category. But on the

question of the provision of this out-of-school care, as you have alluded to, these care facilities have to be sophisticated ones that are sufficiently entertaining, well staffed and regulated for all of the pitfalls of that age group and the various age groups. So it is not going to be inexpensive. And if it is going to be available in cities, it therefore is necessarily going to be available in regional areas as well. We are presently having a devil of a job staffing day care centres for preschool children. If you are talking about entertaining school-age children, you are going to need perhaps a higher ratio of staff and you are going to need a more specifically trained entertainer.

Ms Buckley—Well, engaging them really.

Ms Coleman—I think ‘entertain’ is perhaps an unfortunate verb to use there.

Mr HAASE—I use it only because you have suggested yourself that the children will need to want to attend these facilities. We have already thrown the baby out with the bathwater saying we cannot ever rely on these kids to be where they are supposed to be.

Ms Coleman—I have a grandson who is a dead-keen footy player. The thing that he wants to get to is his rugby.

Mr HAASE—I thought you were talking about real football, Australian Rules.

Ms Coleman—But I have a smaller grandson who is going hunting for fossils next weekend, and I don’t think he has a great deal of interest in rugby, to be honest. So the things that interest children do not have to be something we invent out of the air. There are lots of things around what kids really like. It is somehow harnessing that into a system whereby we can provide some capacity to assist parents to be able to afford those services, or to pay if it is making sure that somebody gets a child to the football, Little Athletics or whatever—I am sure that all the people who support child health programs want more children going to Little Athletics. But it is beyond the reach of many parents as things are currently organised.

CHAIR—So following up your idea that you would recommend that these issues should be the subject of any inquiry of the Productivity Commission, would you keep an inquiry as narrow as childcare related programs or are you in fact saying that we need to have a good look at all programs related to children around school age?

Ms Coleman—I think so. I cannot speak for the commission, but clearly they have a role in advising government on matters which are about productivity, so if there were to be a reference on this issue they would clearly pick up both the care and education of under-school-age children as well as the programs for the school-age child and their impact on productivity. But I think these things and the funding mechanisms just need to be thought through. I feel horror at the amount of implicit as well as explicit expenditures on these issues at the moment from the Australian government’s point of view without any degree of adequacy or customer satisfaction. That bothers me.

CHAIR—Or indeed a decent view of what benefit—

Ms Coleman—It is to the child, yes.

CHAIR—it is to either the child or, indeed, to the economy more broadly.

Mr HAASE—Productivity—which is the bottom line that we are examining.

Ms Coleman—Yes, and this just comes back to it. If parents who are capable of greater workforce participation and seek that are impeded in doing it by the lack of access to affordable and locally accessible services then that is something that needs consideration. And within all that, as I said, I really detest the thought that we are spending money at a very hectic rate at the moment without necessarily being efficient in the outcomes from it. I am not just talking about the fee relief; I am talking about the taxation concession as well. That is very significant implicit expenditure without any indication that that is really effectively targeting the most problematic areas.

CHAIR—You are not suggesting the establishment of some new bureaucracy or that this has to be taken over as an area of policy responsibility by one level of government or not. You are suggesting having a good examination of where you are spending your money and whether you are getting value from it.

Ms Coleman—Yes, whether we are getting value from it. But as our recommendations have said, I think it is very hard when you have a policy area which is effectively an orphan to get focus on it. I have no disrespect at all for the parliamentary secretary for early childhood, but this is an issue which is beyond early childhood.

Ms BIRD—In terms of participation, I think you are absolutely right on the research. There is also a debate going on in our community about whether we are overorganising our kids at this age. They have just spent seven hours at school. At what point do we stop burning them out by sending them off to homework study centres et cetera? One of my local Catholic high schools has just opened—they do not call it a library—a learning centre. It has fantastic views of the Pacific Ocean. They keep it open until 6 pm but hardly anybody uses it because the shops are nearby and it is a girls school—they all head down to the shops; they are not going to stay back at the library. I think you are absolutely right in terms of doing the research before we further go down the path of advocating large amounts of taxpayers' money to these things. I am wondering if there is data from parents on the issue, whether parents are saying, 'I could do extra hours but I am not because of this' or 'I had a job offer and I could not take it up because I do not have the capacity.'

Ms Coleman—I do not think we have really got that kind of data.

Dr McNamara—You could get some of that sort of information out of HILDA. There have been a couple of people in the Social Policy Research Centre in New South Wales who have just published something looking at a whole range of work-family balance issues and so on for parents of adolescents. I cannot remember the details now, but they did find some evidence that mothers were certainly adjusting their hours to stay at home after school with their children. It is a little bit hard to get a sense of to what extent they would use services. I think that is the sort of thing that needs further research.

Ms BIRD—I would rather the maternity leave apply when your children are 15 to 19, having the hindsight that I have—nought to five they could not climb out the window! I think you

should be able to bank it and take it when they are 15 to 19. Finally, I am conscious that some nought to five-year-old care provides sibling care as well. I am thinking particularly of the family day care scheme that I used. I liked the fact that the two-year-old was there all day and his brother, at seven or eight, came home from school to the same home and there was still an interaction. I am conscious that for bigger centres, managing that number of older children could be problematic. I am wondering if there is any information on how common or widespread sibling arrangements are.

Ms Coleman—Almost always the answer about data is, ‘Mmm, not really.’ Anecdotally we know that for the younger school-age child, some family day care services do provide. I was speaking I think yesterday with the gentleman who is the manager of Woden Community Services here in Canberra, which is a large regional system that runs a range of programs. He told me that typically at the beginning of the year he might have a couple of hundred women urgently seeking a place in his 80-place out of school hours care program, and he just cannot fit them in. Because of the way the subsidies are run his organisation runs at an 80 grand a year loss trying to run a before- and after-school care program, which sounds as if we are not going in the right direction.

I do not know whether it will be any use to you, Chair, but the Minister for Youth and the Minister for Sport, the Hon. Kate Ellis, has provided me with some information about the Active After-school Communities program, which is run through the Australian Sports Commission, which she says provides up to 150,000 children across 3,094 schools activities in an out of school hours care program. Over 50 per cent of those sites are located in regional and remote Australia. I am happy to give you that if that is of use.

CHAIR—I think I have seen that, and we can accept that as an exhibit. The sad thing about that is that it does not provide information on how many days a week and on how many weeks of the year it operates. A terrific program one day a week that runs for 10 weeks is not going to solve a family’s problem with after-school hours care.

Ms Coleman—It is the nightmare that many families have. Monday could be the after-school sports program but Tuesday there is a different arrangement and Wednesday there is a different arrangement—and this makes life very difficult for parents who are working who have got school-age children. It is a juggle.

Mr HAASE—As far as the recommendations, and accepting that you are proposing a state of affairs that might exist for the duration of further analysis of this whole issue, it has brought to mind, Chair, that for the Sydney Olympics we had a special minister for the Olympics. In this case I am thinking of Kate Ellis—it is almost that situation but the focus is on sport, not on schoolchildren. I think the recommendations are strong, positive and quite sensible.

CHAIR—As there are no further question, on behalf of the committee, I thank you for taking the time to come here today and also for putting together a submission. We are very grateful. If you wake up in the middle of the night with the answer to life, the universe and everything, do not hesitate to let us know! I am not sure if we have asked you for any additional information, but this is a reasonably lengthy inquiry, so do not be surprised if we come back to you with further questions. You will be sent a copy of the transcript of your evidence, to which you can make corrections of grammar and fact.

The document presented by Dr McNamara, entitled, 'Before and after-school care costs and usage of formal child-care services for school-age children, 1999 and 2002' will be accepted as an exhibit. The letter from Ms Coleman written by the Hon. Kate Ellis and received on 27 November 2008 will also be accepted as an exhibit.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Haase**):

That this committee authorises publication of the transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 12.02 pm