

About the House

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Balancing work and family

Australian women are having fewer children, with many delaying starting their families. As a result we have a declining birth rate. What disincentives exist to starting families? What are the factors that affect parents' choices to undertake paid work? How can an environment more conducive to having families be achieved?

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services has begun a public inquiry into the problems encountered in balancing work and family responsibilities. The committee has invited public submissions on:

- the financial, career and social disincentives to starting families;
- making it easier for parents who so wish to return to the paid workforce; and
- the impact of taxation and other matters on families in the choices they make in balancing work and family life.

If you are interested in these issues, please make your submission to the committee by 8 April 2005. For more information on the inquiry visit www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/fhs or email fhs.reps@aph.gov.au or phone (02) 6277 4566.

Antarctic funding inquiry resumes

The adequacy of funding for Australia's Antarctic Program is being investigated by federal parliament's External Territories Committee. The inquiry, which was put on hold when committee work ceased for the federal election, has now resumed. For details visit www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/ncet or email jscncet@aph.gov.au or phone (02) 6277 4355.

National inquiry into teacher education

How well prepared are our teachers for the classroom? The Minister for Education has asked the House of Representatives Education Committee to conduct a national inquiry into the quality and adequacy of teacher training courses in Australia. The House Education Committee will examine the scope, suitability, organisation, resourcing and delivery of teacher training courses in Australia's public and private universities. It will examine the preparedness of graduates to meet the current and future demands of teaching in Australia's schools. The expansive terms of reference identify a number of specific issues that will be examined including:

- the criteria used to select students for teacher training courses;
- the structure of courses and teaching methods used;
- how teachers are prepared to teach reading and numeracy;
- how teachers are prepared to deal with bullying and disruptive students and dysfunctional families;
- ongoing professional learning for teachers already in the workforce; and the
- adequacy of funding of teacher training courses by university administrations.

For details, including the full terms of reference, visit www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/evt or email evt.reps@aph.gov.au or phone (02) 6277 4573.

Conduct of the 2004 federal election to be examined

Federal parliament's Electoral Matters Committee is investigating the conduct of the 2004 federal election and invites interested people and organisations to make a submission. The committee has examined the conduct of every federal election since 1983. Submissions for the inquiry into the conduct of the 2004 federal election are due by 31 March 2005 and should be emailed to jscem@aph.gov.au or sent to The Secretary, Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, Parliament House Canberra ACT 2600. For more information visit www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/em or phone (02) 6277 2374.

Views sought on independent contracting and labour hire

An inquiry into the use of independent contracting and labour hire arrangements in Australia is being conducted by the House of Representatives Employment, Workplace Relations and Workforce Participation Committee. The committee has invited public submissions by 11 March 2005 on ways independent contracting can be pursued consistently across state and federal jurisdictions; the role of labour hire arrangements in the modern Australian economy; and strategies to ensure independent contracting arrangements are legitimate. Further details are at www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/ewrwp or email ewrwp.reps@aph.gov.au or phone (02) 6277 4162.

Norfolk Island governance inquiry continues

The sustainability of government arrangements on Norfolk Island is being investigated by federal Parliament's External Territories Committee. Put on hold when committee work ceased for the federal election, the Norfolk Island governance inquiry has now resumed. For details visit www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/ncet or email jscncet@aph.gov.au or phone (02) 6277 4355.

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Free magazine

The next issue of the free, colour magazine *About the House* will be published in May. Packed with news and features on the work of the House of Representatives and its committees, the *About the House* magazine helps you stay in touch with the issues that are being investigated by House of Representatives and other parliamentary committees. To join our mailing list email liaison.reps@aph.gov.au or phone Freecall 1800 139 299. You can also ask for back copies from last year.

Seminar on how parliamentary committees work

The next House of Representatives seminar to be held in Canberra will look at the way House committees investigate and report on issues of importance to all Australians. The seminar will be held on Friday 11 March. Details are available from the 2005 seminar program available at www.aph.gov.au/house/seminars or email seminar.reps@aph.gov.au or phone Freecall 1800 139 299 for your free copy of our seminar booklet. Seminars and presentations can be arranged for organisations anywhere in Australia. Contact Bronwyn Allan on the above number for details, including seminar fees.

