


**Clifford, Julia (SEN)**

From: Forrester, Loelle [Loelle.Forrester@dva.gov.au]  
Sent: Monday, 28 April 2003 3:26 PM  
To: Legal and Constitutional, Committee (SEN)  
Subject: Inquiry into the provisions of the Australian Human Rights Commission Legislation Bill 2003



Dear Sir/Madam,

I am 51 years old, and have been a working woman since 1970. I remember the old ways of working, and have great experience of the new since the HREOC was instituted.

Like most Australians, I want a fair go for people. If they're not happy I don't want to stand in their way. But again, like most Australians, I have found that the agitators for change, in so many areas, invariably go further than I'm comfortable with.

Outlawing discrimination on the grounds of sex, marital status or pregnancy in employment and education has worked really well, I think, in the sexual harassment area. I remember how patronised I felt when I was a young woman in the workplace, being treated as a female first and a work colleague second (if taken seriously at all). Things are much better now.

Equal pay for work of equal value has been a lifesaver for so many unmarried women. However, equal opportunity in employment is preferential treatment (which is not fair under the merit principle) and seems to have resulted more or less in tokenism. This has brought the selection system into disrepute, and resulted in frustration among able men, which has turned to anger. Even if a woman is the most able, we can never be sure that that was why she was chosen. Consequently her standing among staff is ambiguous at best.

The problems seem to have arisen over the outlawing of discrimination (on the grounds of sex, marital status or pregnancy) in the provision of goods and services. All the people I talk to are not happy about IVF treatment for people who are not in a committed heterosexual relationship. Mainly because we believe a child needs a mother and a father.

We don't believe in paid maternity leave. It's middle class welfare, why should an employer have to pay it? Also, it nags at me that the needs of the mother to maintain her career or not do without a digital TV are placed over the needs of the child to have that mother at home in the first 3 years of life.

If there's a problem getting this bill through the Senate, there are two compromises I can think of that I have not seen mentioned anywhere. First is to amend the SDA to eliminate the ground of provision of goods and services, or to introduce a requirement on the part of such providers that the welfare of any child involved be placed before that of the adult/s seeking the good or service.

Agitators for change will respond with a mountain of studies and statistics, but that is not what this is about. It's about what the broad Australian community feels comfortable with. By all means let adults be free to go to hell in a handbasket if they so choose, but I have a continuing deep unease about our responsibilities to the children.

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