



**Police Federation
of Australia**
The National Voice of Policing

Productivity Commission hearings into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning.

11.45am Tuesday 26 August 2014

OPENING STATEMENT BY POLICE FEDERATION OF AUSTRALIA

The Police Federation of Australia represents the professional & industrial interests of over 58,000 Australian police officers, 98% of officers are members and 16,000, or 27% of the police workforce are women. This is well below the national average of participation in the wider workforce.

Policing requires a complete commitment 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for 365 days a year. Police work is unpredictable due to irregular hours and the risks involved. We are seeking to ensure that female police officers can continue to apply their skills, experience and knowledge to front line policing on a 24/7 basis and not be forced to retreat into office based roles where their skills and experience are not fully utilised simply because they cannot access flexible, affordable child care. Without that access, women's participation in front line police roles across the country will be adversely affected.

Australian communities deserve and expect frontline policing services that reflect the communities in which they live, especially as it applies to gender given that 40% of police time is taken up by attendances to Domestic Violence incidences, which costs the Australian community approximately \$13.6 billion per annum.

It costs approximately \$150,000 to train and equip a police officer. Across Australia, female officers remain in policing for less time than their male counterparts.

In 2008 research was conducted in part time officers by the NSW Police Association Research Unit. The research involved police from six of the eight police jurisdictions. 90% of those surveyed indicated the main reason for undertaking part time work was to provide care for children. 81% indicated that they had to change their duty type when commencing part time work to facilitate their carer responsibilities and 58% indicated that their former duty type was general duties, in other words, front line policing.

The same research also highlighted that 53% of police surveyed identified that they were offered no options by their command other than part time work. Due to this we refer to the Commission's information request 6.1 which seeks views on impediments to employers providing flexible work arrangements for parents. We believe it would be advantageous to the Commission to seek the views of police employers as to these impediments.

As we articulated in the dot points we provided to the commission last week, we believe there are three key issues for police in this debate. **Affordability, flexibility and accessibility.**

With regard to affordability, police pay a premium for childcare in order to guarantee the flexibility they need to balance their demanding non-standard work schedules with care for their children.

We welcome the extension of the commonwealth subsidies to approved nannies. However, subsidies need to be set at a level that makes the employment of nannies a realistic option for police and other shift workers. We believe there is a case for a police specific “top up” subsidy and other industries may have similar arguments. (We wish to make the point here that we’re not talking about a subsidy for 58,000 police, we are really only talking about those who fill 24/7 first response positions such as operations & investigations). It is from these roles that we see the retreat of women to lesser skilled office positions. It is unacceptable that women will often sacrifice their career in policing because they can’t be provided the flexible childcare that they need.

We believe that police will be worse off under the ‘deemed cost’ funding model proposed in the Commission’s Draft Report. Police are often required to pay well above average costs for childcare. In our final supplementary submission we plan to provide several examples.

With regard to accessibility police officers are very concerned that their children may be disadvantaged by not being able to access pre-school programs & other Early Childhood Education & Care Programs despite the COAG commitment to ‘universal access’ to pre-school. As earlier mentioned, the shift working model invariably leads members into making ad hoc, piece-meal arrangements in a stop-gap effort to fill the void of care during and between shifts. This has a detrimental effect on access to early childhood education programs, such as preschool. Instead, the often chaotic arrangements of using neighbours, friends, family and colleagues will disadvantage children’s development and transition to school.