

Topic	Key Points
INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CHANGES	
Why they impact on women disproportionately	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More likely to be on awards and subject to minimum safety net standards. 60% of award dependent workers are women whereas women make up 45% of the workforce (ABS EEEH 2004) • Women have benefited from community wide improvements to salary and conditions via AIRC decisions, Test Cases such as the Family Leave Case and Equal Pay Cases. These have helped reduce the gender pay gap, but women still earn 85% of male ordinary time earnings (ABS Year Book 2004 1301.0) • Women's employment continues to be the most affected by unpaid work responsibilities (Striking the Balance, HREOC, p.14) • Women need particular working arrangements due to family responsibilities eg part-time work, flexible hours (ibid, HREOC, eg p.54-55) • Gender based discrimination and harassment are still prevalent in the workplace. According to HREOC (2004) 28% adults in Australia had experienced sexual harassment. In QWWS study over a three year period 6.3% women complained of sexual harassment (5000 cases), 5.3% of sexual discrimination and 3.3% pregnancy discrimination.
What will be the impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in wages for women. Award dependent women earn 83% of means earnings, whilst women on AWAs earn 60% of the earnings of men on AWAs (ABS 6306.0 May 2004) • Reduction in conditions. Academic analysis of AWAs shows that for ordinary employees (those below the managerial /professional ranks) had increasing hours and work intensity, a poorer work-family-balance and lower satisfaction with pay and conditions under AWAs (David Peetz 2004). In one study only 7% of private sector AWAs contained any work-family measure. (Gillian Whitehouse 2001) (Other studies (van Barneveld & Arsovska 2001, Charlesworth 1997 and O'Neill 2004) • Women will be less likely to be able to access the flexibility they need for their caring responsibilities. In 2003 68% of female employees were able to access paid holidays and/or sick leave in comparison to 76% of male employees (ABS Yearbook). These levels could be expected to drop further given the trend of AWAs to reduce conditions. • More casualisation of women's work as permanent roles mimic casual roles, ie reduced conditions but without loadings, impact on family responsibilities, incomes etc. • Women will be more likely to lose jobs when lawful grounds do not have to be substantiated. We are concerned that there is a relationship between workplace harassment and dismissal (QWWS study) and impact on women with family responsibilities • Women more likely to be in weaker bargaining position. Position weakened by lack of job security, casual roles, 60% low paid workers are women (SMH 8/03/05)
Our evidence of concern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop on 12 July: brought together key orgs to discuss this issue • Consultations by the 60 orgs represented through the Secretariats articulate these concerns
What do we want	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We seek a government commitment to "no disadvantage" in the implementation of its reform agenda (This will need to guide policy/legislative drafting and will require some rethink for example) • An ability for our concerns to influence the final outcome • A commitment to government research that examines the impacts of proposed reforms on women • Unfair dismissal exemption to only apply to small business with less than 15 staff (original proposal) • Retain current Australian Workplace Agreement no-disadvantage test • Retain award standards even if simplify the number of awards • Increase the amount of Federal legislation to provide consistent national terms and conditions and to protect community standards eg Work and Family Test Case, any items that fall out of awards etc • Provide a future mechanism for the improvement of community standards eg family friendly conditions, equal pay etc • Ensure that the future determination of minimum wages takes into account the needs of workers and their families

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mechanisms must be made available at no cost to assist women with disabilities to negotiate Australian Workplace Agreements where these are prerequisites • Initiatives must be put in place which will assist employers to retain employees with disabilities for long terms, with penalties where churning occurs • Accessible affordable mechanisms must be made available to assist women with disabilities in cases of unfair dismissal • Public exchange on the terms of the proposed legislation has caused confusion and we would like the opportunity to comment on any drafts
WELFARE CHANGES	
What are the key concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That less financial support is to be provided to women and families in need • Women will be disproportionately disadvantaged by the proposed changes
What is our evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussions from the Workshop: Sole parents and Women with disabilities and other issues raised and outlined in the workshop proceedings • Results of the NATSEM research on sole parents and people with disabilities • Significant disadvantage will be increased for women through these changes because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The vast majority (83.3%) of sole parent families are headed by women (<i>ABS Year Book Australia 2005 Cat No. 1301.0, p.141</i>). b) Currently, women with disabilities are much less able to access employment than their male counterparts. The new arrangements will only enhance this gap c) Single parents and people with disabilities required to move to Newstart Allowance will receive significantly less income when wholly reliant on this benefit (due to exemption from the work requirements or an inability to find appropriate work). Sole parents will be \$29 a week worse off and individuals with disabilities will be \$38 a week worse off (<i>Harding et al, 2005, NATSEM report on the distributional impact of proposed welfare to work reforms on sole parents</i>). d) It will be difficult to respond to the complexity of needs faced by single parents and people with disabilities under the new regime. This system will also reduce the ability to access education as a means of improving employability/family circumstances
Particular concerns with Newstart Allowance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those working 15 hours per week to meet their obligations as Newstart recipients will not receive sufficient financial gains from their work, due to income test – tax interactions. Costs associated with working include transport, childcare, uniforms, mobility aids and an increase in rent for public housing tenants receiving a greater gross income. • Shift to Newstart particularly impacts on individuals who were DSP recipients, a pension that is not taxable. We support the Government’s suggestion to exempt people with vision impairment but note that people with other disabilities such as multiple sclerosis, or spina bifida have similar challenges and similar costs • The activity test requirement for Newstart is to seek work (10 job applications per fortnight) and accept 15 hours of work per week. An available job offer must be accepted, or recipients will be penalised. This job may not offer family-friendly employment conditions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) it may not fit in with school hours which raises the issue of care for children during that time; b) casual employment may not provide parents with leave entitlements which can be used during school holidays; c) it may involve up to 90 minutes travel time each way and still count as a legitimate job offer under Newstart guidelines. • Inability to return to Newstart payment if an individual leaves a job voluntarily. (DSP recipients are able to return to DSP within 12 months if they are unable to handle the job successfully). • The annual education entry payment and the pensioner education supplement are currently offered to recipients of Parenting Payment/Disability Support Pension. The proposed reforms will not adequately support individuals to improve their qualifications through education. Newstart rules require recipients to look for full-time work as well as engage in study, if study it to be undertaken. Education participation should be allowed as an alternative to job search requirements for Newstart. • There needs to be an adjustment period – 12 months – in which parents are not required to meet Newstart activity test, e.g. following relationship breakdown, death of a partner etc. Since ‘new’ sole parents may need to move closer to family and/or where there is

	<p>more affordable housing, this would also need to permit the move to an area of lower employment, which is currently penalised under Newstart</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We commend the Government's consideration of reducing the severity of penalties for administrative/activity test breaches but note that other payments are not subject to these
<p>What do we want</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reconsideration of some of the proposed policy – particularly to ensure that stated policy is achieved (rather than providing further disincentives to work) by enhancing capacity for professional and technical education • Better integration/cohesion between policy objectives being pursued through FaCS (ie. Communities for Children) and the welfare reform agenda • Provide additional support for parents and people with disabilities to gain employment and do not change their income support eligibility – ie maintain voluntary workforce participation • Apply activity requirements to parents and people with disabilities who can work 15 hours a week, but maintain their access to pensions. • Make Carer Payment (pension) available for persons caring for a severely disabled child under 16. • Increase mobility allowance and extend entitlement to people with young children, carers, or in education, as well as working. • Allow parents and people with disabilities to access Austudy for part-time or full-time education, and to keep the pensioner concession card and Pharmaceutical benefit. i.e. 'enhance' Austudy for individuals on Newstart Allowance • Exempt sole parents from the Activity Test for 12 months after separation or death of their partners to allow a stabilisation period. • Provision must be made for time off work during school holidays with exemption from the Newstart Allowance activity test, or else inability to find affordable school vacation care must be an accepted ground for non-participation • For those already receiving parenting payment at 1 July 2006 – allow the savings provisions to remain during transitions between the partnered or single status. Otherwise it creates strong disincentives to reconcile or re-partner. • Women with disabilities on Newstart Allowance must have access to comparable income supports (Pensioner Concession Card, Health Care Card, Telephone Allowance) as those on the DSP. • All mutual obligation requirements must be applied flexibly to accommodate the additional time/energy that women with disabilities expend in order to function at a level comparable with able bodied job seekers. • All staff involved in Newstart processes (including Comprehensive Workplace Assessors, Supported Wage Assessors etc) must be given adequate training to work effectively and empathetically with women with disabilities. • A clarification of availability of child care (including before & after school, vacation etc) and immediate payment from Federal Government of child care costs (such low income families cannot afford to wait for 18 months for tax relief). • That work and welfare policy must include a consideration of ability to work, the impact of marginal employment and of regular cycling between work and income support • The needs of children over 6 for parental involvement must be more thoroughly considered

Prepared from What Women Want Workshop material (12 July 2005), NATSEM modelling and considerable input from members of three National Women's Secretariats.

<http://www.security4women.com>

<http://www.ywca.org.au/WOMENSPEAK.HTM>

http://ofw.facs.gov.au/networks/national_secretariats/awc.htm