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**PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Extending Paid Parental Leave gives families real choices**

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) welcomes the Families Commission report *"It's About Time"* which proposes a phased in extension of the current paid parental leave scheme, as well as increases in the allowance paid and broadening of the eligibility criteria.

The Council is set to debate policy on extending paid parental leave in New Zealand to cover a one year period at its annual National Meeting in September.

"Women and families want real choices," said Christine Low, NCWNZ National President. "The current scheme places women under a lot of pressure to return to work as quickly as possible. It also diminishes the responsibility the father/partner should be making at this critical time. The current standard of living often necessitates that women make an economic choice and return to work earlier than they would like. Separating from babies for many mothers is emotionally brutal; some have a sense of failure because they weren't there for that important first year."

"Today's release is timely," said Christine Low "The proposals in the report provide a researched basis on how the system may work. Women are likely to see the extension as not only beneficial to families, but to society in general, especially with the welcome recognition of the role of fathers/partners."

"It is not a matter of having your cake and eating it too, rather it is about being there to raise responsible, caring citizens, so the wider society can benefit," said Christine Low. "Stay-at-home mums are becoming a rarity, particularly in the large centres, many are experiencing that they can't find other full-time mothers to spend time with, as children are increasingly put into the care of nannies and childcare centres."

NCWNZ supports women having the choice to work or remain at home to care for their children. Increasingly young women have questioned whether real choice exists, giving rise to women relinquishing having children to instead focus on their careers.

"Women struggled long and hard to establish the right and societal acceptance that they should have paid employment and a career path," said Christine Low. "The irony is that in some cases, women are under pressure from their partners and more broadly from society to return to work early. Frequently we hear of cases where partners are demanding that women return to work fulltime to maintain the standard of living they had prior to the arrival of children. Some women despair over the advent of this modern-day phenomenon. Expansion of the PPL scheme would reduce the pressure on these women so that they could make choices the whole family would benefit from".

New Zealand recently extended the paid parental leave period to 14 weeks, which means it now complies with the minimum set by the ILO Maternity Protection Convention 2000. Self-employed women who work more than 10 hours per week also became eligible under the current policy. However, as reported in the NGO CEDAW report, the payments received by most women are still less than the ILO's minimum requirements and the scheme does not extend to women working on short-term contracts, such as seasonal workers. The UN CEDAW Committee expressed concern that seasonal and temporary workers remain ineligible for paid parental leave.

ENDS

**Concluding comments of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: New Zealand**

**[http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw39/concludingcomments/NewZealand\\_Advance%20unedited.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw39/concludingcomments/NewZealand_Advance%20unedited.pdf)**

37. The Committee requests that the State party act expeditiously to amend eligibility criteria to ensure that seasonal and temporary workers are eligible for paid parental leave. It also urges the State party to undertake further measures to increase the participation rate of mothers of young children and single mothers in the labour force by strengthening parental leave programmes for men and encouraging men to share child-rearing responsibilities with women. The Committee further requests that the State party analyse and assess the barriers that rural and Maori, Pacific and minority women face in accessing childcare and parental leave, and implement measures to reduce these barriers and increase their access to such services.

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*"Women Influencing Policy"*