



31 July 2007

PRESS RELEASE

PRESS RELEASE

PRESS RELEASE

PRESS RELEASE

GETTING THE SHORT END OF THE STICK

NGO representatives will be reporting to the CEDAW Committee that some policy initiatives are not reaching women in the rural sector with the result that there are too many disincentives for women to work, live and raise their families in rural areas.

Agriculture, horticulture and forestry workers are a group largely ineligible for the Paid Parental Leave (PPL) under the current criteria. This means that this group are resigning from this agricultural sector and taking up alternative career options more suitable for family life. The agriculture sector has a labour shortage and it is concerning that the PPL is not retaining such skilled labour in this particular area, which is illustrated by, only 25% of women in the agriculture sector having returned to fulltime employment.

Though New Zealand has taken more steps in increasing the eligibility of PPL and extended eligibility to self employed women, New Zealand is still not in compliance with ILO Convention 183. Areas of non-compliance include the level of payment. The Convention states payment needs to be 2/3rd of the average wage. Another area of non compliance is that many seasonal and casual workers are not eligible for paid parental leave.

“The maximum paid parental leave payment would approximate \$5,000 per child before tax,” said Christine Low, NCW NZ National President. “In contrast, the family benefit scheme abolished nearly 30 years ago was approximately \$5,000 tax paid, payable to every child. With inflation, that package would be worth around \$30,000 today.”

Women’s NGOs also suggest that the rural sector is missing out on the benefits of the 20 free hours early childhood subsidy. The limited availability of early childhood centres in rural areas leaves parents with few options. Also the limited availability of trained, fully qualified teaching staff will preclude centres from meeting the criteria for the scheme.

The NGO CEDAW report also documents that rural women are experiencing isolation due to transport difficulties, poor roads and the rising cost of petrol. There is further very limited or non-existent access to home help, maternity services (particularly postnatal care) and other commonly expected community services.

In 2002, NGOs reported that the rural sector was adversely affected by government policies which had led to the removal of services; this is again reflected in the current report, with closures of schools, post offices, banks and medical services.

Government-contracted healthcare and homecare providers continue to seek reimbursement of travel costs when servicing the rural sector. The Government implemented a fair travel policy, which is administered by DHBs where funding is allocated to providers as reimbursement of their travel

costs. The rates set vary according to DHBs, ranging from .80 cents per hour, up to the highest, \$1.60. This translates to each visit allows the provider to claim \$1 or \$2 per visit.

“The allowance model used estimates that the provider will travel 2 - 3km per visit, however the vast majority of providers are in fact travelling 10 – 12km per visit, with the most extreme case being 90 – 110km,” said Christine Low. “The difference between the travel allowance and the travel not reimbursed has to be met by the provider. Homecare and Healthcare providers are among the lowest paid sectors in the country, before the cost of their travel is brought into the equation.”

“When you add the losses the rural sector has and continues to experience, the clean, green setting and fresh air may not be enough to tempt people to leave urban centres,” concluded Christine Low.

ENDS

Further Information:

Christine Low, National President

Ph: 03 357 8887 or 021 065 5565

National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ)

PO Box 12 117

Wellington

Email: ncwnz@ihug.co.nz

NGO representatives:

Anne Todd-Lambie

021 961 547

03 548 2154 (wk)

Beryl Anderson

027 420 9432

04 914 0796 (wk)

04 236 7179 (hm)

"Women Influencing Policy"