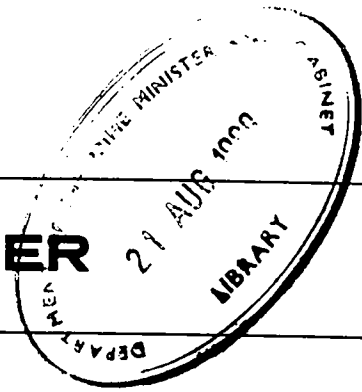




PRIME MINISTER



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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
LAUNCH OF THE REPORT "CHILD CARE IN THE WORKPLACE"
NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE PERSONNEL AND
INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS GROUP, MTIA
CANBERRA - 7 AUGUST 1989**

Bert Evans and Members
of the MTIA,
Parliamentary Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I want to thank you, Bert Evans, and the Metal Trades Industry Association, for your invitation to launch this important study at your Conference.

In recent years, the MTIA has been at the forefront of industrial relations reform in this country. I've had opportunity in the past to commend you on your involvement in the economic restructuring sweeping Australia, and I repeat that commendation today. Your constructive approach to workplace reforms and award restructuring is an example to all those concerned with effective industrial relations.

I know the MTIA has expressed its support for special efforts in the award restructuring process to utilise better the skills of female workers.

Now, by having this launch take place at this Conference, you are signalling your determination to tackle a related issue for women in the Australian workplace - the key issue of work-based child care.

We are already seeing that women are the fastest growing component of the workforce. With the ageing of the population, employment of women will become even more important to maintain Australia's economic growth and living standards.

Throughout Australia, employers are becoming increasingly interested in the tangible shared benefits of child care in the workplace.

Esso and Lend Lease have funded a joint child care centre at Observatory Hill in Sydney. IBM and the St George Building Society have become involved in making child care places available for their employees. I had the great pleasure of opening a multicultural child care centre in Broadmeadows in December 1988 on land provided by The Ford Motor Company.

With this report, the Government is throwing new light on the costs and benefits of this kind of child care.

And with this report we are offering practical and detailed advice to employers on how to go about setting up a child care centre in the workplace.

In an area which is recognised as crucial to women's employment, this report provides a model of how employers and employees can co-operate to their mutual advantage.

The availability of affordable, accessible, good quality child care services benefits all of us in the Australian community.

For parents, it opens up new employment prospects. It is often the difference between whether a family will live in hardship or not. It is also vital in enabling women to contribute to their full potential in the paid workforce.

For the Australian community as a whole, getting parents with young children to stay in or return to the labour force means that the energy and skills of many more Australians can be tapped.

And since all of us - Government, industry and the community at large - stand to gain from the availability of quality child care, we should all play a part in making it a reality.

If this is true for child care generally, then the advantages of child care located at or near the workplace are even greater.

The advantages to parents of accessible and reliable child care are obvious.

Advantages to employers who grasp the challenge are more complex and varied. As this Study points out, savings can be expected from reduced labour turnover and a reduction in employee absenteeism, because employers would be better able to retain trained and experienced staff.

There are also significant taxation concessions available to employers providing child care for their workers.

The study quantifies these benefits against the costs of setting up and maintaining child care centres.

It concludes that when labour related benefits are taken into account, the fees which an employer would have to charge in order to break even would be significantly below those charged by commercial centres.

But equally compelling benefits outlined in the Study are not so easily quantified. They stem from an increased ability to attract employees, improved industrial relations within the organisation, better morale - intangible benefits that many employers see as very important motivations behind the provision of child care.

This Study is the first of its kind to be published in Australia.

The analysis is based on a commissioned study undertaken by Dr Russell Ross of the Social Policy Research Centre. Data was provided by Chester House Child Care Services and updated by Childcare at Work Ltd.

I also want to pay tribute to the assistance provided at various stages by the Business Council of Australia, the Confederation of Australian Industry and the ACTU.

The report sets out the practical steps to establishing a good quality child care centre in New South Wales - including concrete, reliable and quite detailed information about the costs that are likely to be incurred in setting up and running such a centre. It provides contacts for acquiring similar information in other States.

And it provides information about Commonwealth Government assistance, about overseas experiences and about conducting employee surveys on child care needs.

The data is impressive, the information is useful and relevant and I am convinced this study will substantially help employers make informed decisions on whether or not to establish centres.

But let me make this point quite clear. Stimulating debate which encourages employers to become involved in the provision of child care in no way suggests that the Government is forgetting its own responsibilities in this area.

To the contrary - my Government has recognised that most of Australia's paid workers are also parents, and we have been and remain determined to provide what help we can to people seeking to balance the potentially conflicting demands of work and home.

Our achievements in developing and improving this country's child care services give me great personal satisfaction.

The measure of our achievement is that by 1992, a total of 98,000 additional child care places will have been funded by this Government - a trebling of places since we came to office in 1983.

Our comprehensive fee relief system ensures that child care is affordable to Australian families.

The National Child Care Strategy, announced in the last Budget, will provide 30,000 new child care places over the next three years in co-operation with the States, local government and employers.

The National Strategy includes incentives to assist industry in the provision of child care for employees. One thousand of the new centre-based places have been earmarked for a new co-operative venture in which the recurrent costs will be shared between users, the Commonwealth and the employer. Commonwealth assistance will take the form of a contribution towards fee relief to ensure that lower income families can afford the cost of child care.

I have been pleased to hear that many employers have contacted the Department of Community Services and Health for information on this initiative and the first approval is to be announced shortly.

Equally, there has already been strong interest among employers in this Cost Benefit Study. Requests for copies have been received by OSW from more than 100 of Australia's major businesses.

The study will also I believe be a valuable basis for your discussion at this Conference.

Whether employers seek to provide child care directly, in conjunction with other companies or through the National Child Care Strategy initiative, I am sure this Study will be an invaluable resource in their decision making.

I have great pleasure in launching it now.
