

## **Politicians 'dropping the ball' on child custody reform**

Press Release: 05/05/2004

On March the 22<sup>nd</sup> 2004, fathers4equality (an Australian Civil Rights lobby group) distributed a questionnaire canvassing the views of 237 Australian federal parliamentarians on child custody law reform.

This survey reflected the growing world-wide trend by single father's groups to become more politically active and aware, and to take a pro-active stand in the face of frustrating resistance to equity-based family law changes.

The purpose of this survey was to clearly document the views of individual politicians and parties for the benefit of non-custodial parents, in the interests of democracy and transparent government.

### **Overview of Responses of the major parties**

**Liberal Party:** Was the most sympathetic party and most willing to correspond further. It is quite evident that backbenchers in the Liberal Party have a strong belief in the principle of gender equality within family court proceedings (and they offer strong support for rebuttable 50/50 joint physical custody). But the lack of Ministerial responses made it difficult to gauge the official views of Cabinet.

Considering however that Cabinet is now apparently supporting a family law tribunal based on the widely-condemned Kay Hull Child Custody report, it seems that the Liberal Party is ignoring the views of its vocal backbenchers, and more importantly are clearly ignoring the overwhelming views of the electorate (as evidenced by numerous polls).

Comment: Good original intentions, but increasingly demonstrating a willingness to appease vocal and well-funded minority groups (the feminists in this instance), ahead of the coming election.

**Rating: 5 out of 10**

**The Nationals:** Surprisingly weak response to the survey considering the fact that Kay Hull was the chairperson of the Child Custody committee, and the well documented family/child-centric views of both Larry Anthony and John Anderson.

Overall, the Nationals have been ineffective advocates for the rights of non-custodial parents and children of separated families, and are clearly seen to have "dropped the ball" on this very important issue.

Comment: Perceived not to have the resolve or influence to deliver equity based family law changes. This was reflected by their minimalist and unenthusiastic response to the survey.

**Rating: 3 out of 10**

**Labor Party:** Have raised the bar by putting the issue of male role models firmly on the agenda. However, the ALP supplied only a very modest number of responses to the survey. All responses were strong on rhetoric, but extremely non-committal, and far from convincing.

The ALP seemed to be more enthusiastic about 'forcing' non-custodial

parents to pay child support, rather than addressing the core issues of abuse within the system, which has forced many fathers out of the lives of their children.

Comment: The ALP responders had a distinct habit of refusing to answer straight forward questions, "because the issue is very complex". Based on the responses, it seems very likely that the ALP does not support the principle of gender-equality within family court proceedings, and is clearly not in favour of rebuttable 50/50 joint physical custody.

**Rating: 1 out of 10**

**The Greens:** Have only generally responded but have shown a willingness to correspond further. They have however so far kept an open mind on this issue, and it seems that they have yet to decide where they stand. As such, they did not answer the questions on the survey.

Comment: The Greens are traditionally perceived to be disinterested in civil rights issues (that involve men), so the mere fact that they responded in a general sense was unexpected. However, there is still a lot of cynicism surrounding where the Greens truly stand, so further comment is withheld pending further commentary from them.

**Rating: Awaiting further commentary**

**The Democrats:** Have refused to respond at any level on this issue.

Further to this, every single email sent for the purposes of this questionnaire, with the subject title containing a reference to 'single father's', was deleted by every parliamentary member of this party, without ever being read (including Meg Lees).

Comment: The perception that the Democrats are anti-father seems to be confirmed by their disinterest in single father related issues on every level.

**Rating: 0 out of 10**

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