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Coalition forced to accept Paid Parental Leave scheme, ending decades of opposition

Australian families will be relieved by Tony Abbott's decision to drop his long-held opposition to a universal paid parental leave scheme which will provide 18 weeks support for working mums from the start of 2011, say unions.

"It's been a long road, a 30-year campaign for unions and thousands of women who have had to campaign against the entrenched opposition of politicians such as Tony Abbott, who famously vowed such a scheme would be implemented over his dead body," said ACTU President Sharan Burrow.

"It is a credit to all who have fought for this important reform that the Coalition parties have finally been forced to recognise the needs and expectations of women and the pressures of modern family life."

Ms Burrow says the Mr Abbott's backdown has shown the Opposition's promotion of a rival scheme as nothing more than a hollow, unworkable promise.

"Tony Abbott's scheme was nothing more than pie-in-the-sky. He knew he would never be able to deliver a plan funded by a giant tax on business.

"Yet he thought nothing of leading the public up the garden path on this issue, " said Ms Burrow.

The ACTU says there is still deep concern that the federal Coalition still plans to thwart the paid parental leave scheme when it is introduced next year.

"Tony Abbott has made it clear in his response to the Budget that he would scrap the funding set aside by the federal government to implement the scheme and ensure employer compliance.

"This would set the scheme up to fail. Mr Abbott's commitment to making sure this scheme gets off the ground has to be questioned," said Ms Burrow.

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