

Embargoed to 6am, Friday, 1 October 2010

National paid parental leave scheme now only three months away; applications start today

Today marks an important milestone on the path to delivering a national paid parental leave scheme next year, say unions.

It is the first day that expectant parents can make an application to the Family Assistance Office for coverage from the paid parental leave scheme, which begins on 1 January.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said Australia will soon be joining the rest of the developed world in having a universal paid parental leave scheme for all new families.

The Government scheme provides all parents of babies born after 1 January, 2011, with payment of \$10,258.20 for 18 weeks leave.

Unions also welcome the Government's proposal to make available paid secondary carers (or paternity) leave from July 2012.

Ms Kearney said the new national standard would be great for families and new borns and help the economy by encouraging a higher participation by women in the prime of their working lives.

"The national paid parental leave scheme is long overdue," Ms Kearney said.

"It has been a source of much international embarrassment that in a country as wealthy as Australia, two-thirds of women who have a baby currently get no paid parental leave.

"Parents have been forced to make a choice between have a child and paying the bills.

"It is thanks to a 30 year campaign by unions and community groups that the Labor Government's 18 week scheme is now just around the corner after a 30 year campaign by unions and community groups.

I would encourage all expectant parents who are awaiting a birth after 1 January to get their applications in now to take advantage of the new scheme."

Ms Kearney said the scheme laid a solid foundation on which unions intend to build towards the goal of full income replacement for six months of paid leave for all new working mothers.

Some employers already provide this entitlement, and through collective bargaining unions will seek to top up the government scheme to extend it to all workers.

Media contact:

Mark Phillips ph (03) 8676 7266 or 0422 009 011; mphillips@actu.org.au