



**National Council of  
Women of New Zealand**  
Te Kaunihera  
Wahine O Aotearoa

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### Submission to the Department of Labour on the Work-Life Balance Project

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organisation representing 42 nationally organised societies. It has 33 branches throughout the country attended by representatives of those societies and some 150 other societies. The Council's function is to serve women, the family and the community at local, national and international levels through research, study, discussion and action.

Contributions to the compilation of this submission were sought from all the Branches by supplying them with packs of the project papers *Creating Solutions for Work-Life Balance*.

Because of the nature of our organisation, as stated above, the supplied response form was not appropriate. We ask that you accept in good faith the following comments.

#### **General Comments.**

The concept of work-life balance can be traced back many centuries of human history. Even Neanderthal man was known to devote time and energy to festive occasions. Anthropologists and sociologists find all known cultures, even subsistence ones, appreciated the need for recreation. To this we can add reflection and research, as humans become more and more curious about their universe

Too often the 'work ethic' obscures the need for investigation and discovery. Although creative genius can stem from poverty, so many of our greatest scientific advances are most unlikely to have occurred had menial tasks afforded no time to 'stop and stare' in the words of the poet. Copernicus, Newton, Darwin, Rutherford could command sources of income other than their own labour - a valuable lesson for today's world where technology should allow us more time by earning part of our personal income for us. Sadly the returns to modern capital are, to a large extent, appropriated by those privileged as owners i.e. a few wealthy families and individuals having access to greater and greater wealth.

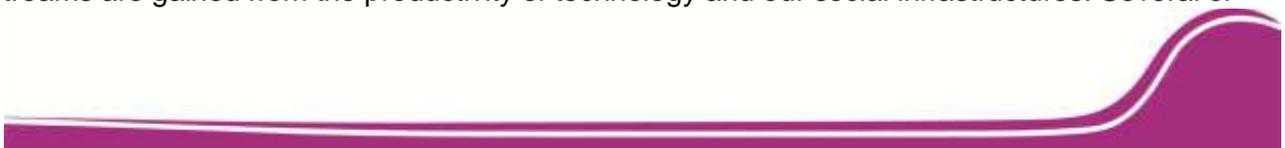
#### **Specific Comments**

While the discussion pack offers many useful ideas, there is a need for in-depth discussion on the way income from other than labour can afford people more time for non-work pursuits. As in the ***Action Plan for New Zealand Women*** the definition of 'work' remains very narrow, ignoring much of the activity taking place outside the home that actually enables society to function.

In recognition of the need to balance income generating activity with other non-paid pursuits the 1996 conference agreed

***That NCWNZ request the government to investigate the feasibility of introducing a universal basic income for all New Zealanders.***

There are many studies advocating more ownership of the factors of production so that income streams are gained from the productivity of technology and our social infrastructures. Several of





our members suggested the introduction of a shorter working week, such has been adopted in France. We recognise that stipulating the number of hours worked is impractical for many of the work-force, especially those engaged in agriculture, but the idea of making work less of a burden and more of an enjoyable, safe worthwhile vocation must be society's aim - whether our work is paid or voluntary.

This project proved of great interest to our members. Their comments are summarised under selected topics covered in the Resource pack.

1. **Employees** - members noted that while a growing number of women are choosing to be self-employed, either as individuals or in partnerships, most are working for wages and salaries. In too many cases their jobs are poorly paid and menial with unsociable hours. More fortunate employees find pleasure and identity in their work and do not see work and leisure as mutually exclusive.
2. **Families** - A frequent comment was the need for the return of the universal family benefit as an aid to choice of lifestyle. Members felt that incomes are needed not only for food, clothing or school fees, but for cultural enrichment, from music tuition to sports participation. Some members identified a need for some revival of domestic skills education for students.

NCWNZ also calls for more emphasis to be put on the role of volunteers who enrich family life by being Guide leaders, sports coaches, brass band tutors. A danger was perceived of parents, not just single parents, losing their sense of self worth because they are unable to provide the extras to their children, because of over work and/or lack on income generally. Members believed that encouragement is needed for more liaison with the wider family / whanau.

3. **Business** - NCWNZ queries the real need for today's longer shop-trading hours. Members saw a need for businesses to have the ability to say 'no' in order to balance business opportunities with those devoted to leisure pursuits. Positive comments were received about technology allowing more and more women to work from home, and so save time and scarce resources on transport.
4. **Rural** - Members stated that women's roles in farm productivity is now more valued than in the past but too many country schools are closing, causing the diminution of local community spirit.
5. **Older people** - Responses revealed that many find satisfaction in community volunteer work. There is some anxiety that voluntary work may suffer if older people are persuaded or compelled to stay in the work-force, especially if that meant taking up part-time jobs they do not enjoy. A timely reminder from one member was that a civilised society is judged by the way it treats its elderly.
6. **Youth** - NCWNZ feels younger women should not be made to feel guilty if they choose to stay at home with children rather than go out to work, but there is still apprehension about 'glass ceilings' hindering women who return to employment, especially professions, after time at home.



### **Conclusion**

Members expressed the over-riding urgent concern as being the need for a strong definition of 'work' to include both paid and unpaid activities. The challenge for Government is to establish a process to put a tangible value on voluntary 'work'. A universal basic income for all is seen as worth investigating.

NCWNZ members saw "choice" as the key to work/life balance - enabled by income other than through direct employment.

NCWNZ appreciates having had the opportunity to participate in this survey.

**Beryl Anderson**  
**National President**

**Heather M Smith**  
**Economics Standing Committee**