

WA rejects 'culturally correct' child care ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Community Services Minister Robyn McSweeney has vowed to reject proposed national laws that threaten childcare centres with hefty fines for "culturally inappropriate" activities such as Easter egg hunts or Christmas tree decorating.

The childcare industry yesterday called for greater clarity of the Education and Care Services National Law Act, which also forbids "separating" children, stoking fears that sending them to the naughty corner could be outlawed.

States and Territories agreed in December 2009 to replace local laws with a national framework for early childhood education and care by January next year. Victoria passed the laws in October as the "host jurisdiction" which other States were expected to emulate.

But Mrs McSweeney said yesterday the regulations were "left-wing rubbish" and vowed to oppose them at next week's ministerial council on education, employment, training and youth affairs.

She said the laws could pave the way for centres to be fined \$50,000 for making children take part in cultural or religious activities or separating them for misbehaviour.

"WA just will not tolerate what the national regulation is asking for," she said. "There's nothing nicer than children decorating a Christmas tree or going on an Easter egg hunt. It's our culture.

"It's political correctness gone mad coming from the Feds and WA won't be part of that rubbish."

Mrs McSweeney said there was time for the laws to get a "commonsense base" before being adopted in WA but, if they were not, the State Government would draft its own "corresponding legislation".

WA Child Care Association executive officer Rachelle Tucker said the childcare sector was not consulted enough before the national framework was formulated.

"The problem with the new regulations is that they need be clarified because they can be up for interpretation," she said. "It needs to be clarified as to what is 'separation' because it can mean different things to different people."

-reprinted from The West Australian

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