

We don't need more consultation, it's time to act on childcare ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Unbelievable! After a process which involved 468 initial submissions, a 90-page draft report, a 60-page technical modelling supplement, 455 post-draft submissions, 1100 brief comments via a website, eight public hearings in five cities which heard from 140 expert witnesses and three months to consider the final report of the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Childcare and Early Learning, all that Tony Abbott could say about Australia's childcare mess at the National Press Club is that they'll consult.

What the Productivity Commission was tasked to do was nigh on impossible when it was given its terms of reference by Joe Hockey at the end of 2013.

The consultation has already happened and now it's time for some action.

I've always had an image of a beleaguered commission with families screaming at it, "Fix the fact that childcare is too expensive and fix the fact that there isn't enough of it," while the government simultaneously screamed, "Fix the fact that childcare is costing us a gazillion and please, can you tell us why, although it's costing us a gazillion, families are still screaming about it?" Then when the commission came up with a draft report a bunch of experts in early childhood education and care told them that they got it wrong.

It was never going to be easy for the government to work out what to do with the final report of the inquiry, which needs to be tabled in Parliament by the end of March. But to take all that process, all those words and thoughts, all that effort and come out with nothing other than a promise to consult is crazy.

As expected, Abbott announced on Monday that his much maligned paid parental leave scheme was off the table. In a speech that was dubbed make-or-break, it is hard to see how taking an unimplemented and unfunded promise to do something out of the equation could do the trick. That's why many people expected a strong family package to be at least outlined.

Abbott did not even actually say that the money earmarked for the paid parental leave scheme would be redirected to childcare. He also didn't say anything about whether the levy on large companies that was going to fund that scheme would still be imposed.

So we have the promise of yet another consultation, as well as a vague promise to cut expenditure and simultaneously make childcare affordable. When questioned for more detail by a journalist at the very end of the questions, he only added that it will be based on the Productivity Commission and that Minister for Social Security Scott Morrison will consult regarding the childcare plan.

But the consultation has already happened and now it's time for some action.

Abbott announced that he would be having a review into the childcare system two days before winning the election. If he wants to keep his job, maybe it's time he started making some decisions and not just blaming the childcare problem on his predecessors. There is only so long that that excuse holds water, and after almost 18 months in the job, the leaks are beginning to become a torrent.

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Region: Australia and New Zealand ^[3]

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