



Ecological Sustainability - Social Justice - Peace and Non-violence - Grassroots Democracy

Federal Election Policy Positions - Single Mothers and their Children

The Greens welcome the ongoing advocacy and support provided by NCSMC, and acknowledge the contribution you have made to a number of Senate inquiries we have initiated and participated in. You will not be surprised to learn we unreservedly support your stated policy positions and look forward to continuing to work with you to advocate for the rights of single mothers and their children in the future.

The experience of women contacting our services and other non-government agencies is consistent with contemporary research. Single mother parents are at an increased risk of disadvantage in terms of employment, safety, housing, inadequate income and social participation. The current child poverty rate in Australia is 11% and we know that a child in a sole parent family is three times more likely to live in poverty.

However, poor outcomes are not a foregone conclusion if policy and support responses are well targeted.

1. Poverty

The Greens were the only political party to speak out when single parent pensioners were excluded for the first time ever from a rise in the aged and disability support pension rates. We called at the time for an increase in the PPS and NSA and maintain this position. Greens income support reform policy calls for a guaranteed adequate income for all, topped up with allowances and support for particular needs. We will implement these measures at the first opportunity, or at any time we hold government in our own right.

The Greens advocate family-friendly workplace laws and attempted to amend Fair Work to allow for greater workplace flexibility and security. We support 26 weeks paid parental leave and an effective child care entitlement. The \$300m Jobs Fund we negotiated in the stimulus package effectively produced more of the kind of community sector jobs that single parents need.

2. Child Support

The Greens strongly opposed the introduction of Welfare to Work and have introduced amendments and supported efforts to wind it back. We have welcomed increased resources for compliance, but believe much more needs to be done. A fairer system would be one where (when a child support determination is made) the CSA bears the risk of non-compliance by paying support up front and pursuing collection.

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The Greens have heard first hand the stories of many single mothers whose ex-partners got to extraordinary lengths to minimise or hide their taxable incomes. More resources are needed to pursue this fraud, and stricter provisions need to be enacted for those failing to declare income or put in a tax return. Monitoring of the actual level of care provided against that claimed is also needed, as evidence suggests a consistent pattern of over-estimation and under-achievement in shared care arrangements.

3. Family Law

The Greens warned at the time about the 'triple whammy' impacts of changes to child support and family law and the introduction of Welfare to Work. We opposed changes to Family Law that conflicted with the principle that the best interests of the child should be paramount, along with those that made it difficult for women to raise concerns about domestic violence where they might not be able to provide independent verification.

We support reversing the changes made to Family Law by the Howard Government and ensuring that the clear incontrovertible obligation in the Act is to guarantee the actual best interests of children. We recognise there remain significant issues in the family law system for women who have experienced family violence and we want to work with stakeholders, including the NCSMC, to develop stronger and more robust measures to guarantee women's safety.

4. Affordable Housing

The Greens acknowledge that unaffordable housing affects people disproportionately, with single parent families recognised as being in the highest risk of financial hardship in our community. The Greens acknowledge the significant barriers to home ownership faced by single parent families and will strongly advocate for increased funding to shared equity schemes and the means testing of the first home owner grant, so that government initiatives and subsidies for affordable home ownership are going to the right people.

We also recognise the dire situation for single mother families in the private rental and will urge the government to supply more affordable rental properties that are appropriate for single parent families. The Greens believe a national housing plan must be developed, which would include significantly increasing funding to public and community housing and provide more choice of tenure for all families. We seek to introduce a national target of 20% affordable and social housing.

We acknowledge many single mother headed families depend on the social housing system, and we have been critical of the long waiting lists and standards of housing provided in the past. The Greens strongly supported the Australian government's injection of funding for 19,200 new social housing dwellings under the federal stimulus package and we successfully negotiated that all new housing must be built to six star energy efficiency ratings. This means not only will the dwellings be more comfortable to live in, but less expensive to run. The Greens are the only political party that are seeking to ensure that all social housing is energy efficient and located close to public transport, employment and social services.

5. Social Inclusion

The Greens are the only party who opposed the introduction of national income management laws and have spoken up against the push towards 'conditional welfare' and increasingly onerous participation requirements. We believe that a commitment to social inclusion must cut across all areas of government policy and must be grounded in the meaningful participation of those affected in the decisions which impact upon their lives. We are extremely disappointed by the yawning gap between the rhetoric and the reality of social inclusion.

The Greens believe that all Australian children should have equal access to quality education and healthcare, a decent standard of living, and life opportunities to reach their full potential. We believe that access to community services that address the needs and aspirations of excluded groups (like single parents and their children) are fundamental to delivering on the promise of social inclusion and building a fairer, smarter, cleaner and Greener future.

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