

***Speech by Elizabeth Broderick, Sex Discrimination Commissioner and Commissioner responsible for Age Discrimination for the launch of domestic violence clauses – UNSW 15 April 2010***

As I have travelled across Australia, talking to thousands of women and men, I have become more and more convinced that building women's economic security is vital to achieving gender equality in this country. The primary way the majority of us lay the foundations of our economic security is through participation in paid work. We must develop better workplace responses to domestic and family violence to ensure that women can stay attached to the workforce. Doing this will mean three things. Firstly, we will protect women's financial security in the immediate term – women will be less likely to lose their job in a period of crisis. Secondly, if we can keep women attached to the labour market, we will better protect their economic security in the longer term – they will be less likely to live in poverty in their twilight years. But thirdly, and most importantly from an employer's perspective, individual businesses will be better able to prevent the unnecessary loss of talented staff. Provisions such as additional special leave and security measures, as proposed by the PSA/CPSU at UNSW, will go a long way towards supporting women to remain attached to their workplace. Moreover, enshrining these sorts of arrangements within the enterprise agreement means that they become a workplace entitlement – a regular part of the employment terms and conditions. That means that they won't be discretionary or vulnerable to revocation. It recognises the fact that anyone who experiences domestic or family violence needs the support of their workplace to recover, to settle, to organise children, to attend doctor's appointments, court dates and so on. Making this understanding and support explicit means that those who need it, won't have to struggle to take it. I hope that what we are seeing today is the beginning of a new language and a new model for committed employers. I look forward to being able to share this with all the employers I meet and the international human rights community more broadly.