

**PRESS RELEASE**

**17 February 2017**

## **Committee finding fails women and doctors**

Women's advocates and health professionals have spoken out against a parliamentary committee's failure to support the urgent need for abortion decriminalisation in Queensland.

"To continue to deny women the legal right to make decisions about their own fertility and health is unfathomable, and unacceptable." said Renee Carr, Executive Director of Fair Agenda.

"The only person in a position to properly understand the best reproductive health care decision for a woman in her multitude of relevant life circumstances is the woman herself."

"The current laws are from the dark ages. Queensland women deserve for decriminalisation of their healthcare decisions to be a priority." Ms Carr added.

Amanda Bradley from Children by Choice added: "These laws are fundamentally broken. They impact on women's access to abortion services every single day.

"The situation is so absurd that we have women turning to us for financial assistance because current laws make it almost impossible to get the help they need at public hospitals.

"Almost half of the funds we've had to raise to help women in need cover their costs are for women who have already been subjected to sexual assault or domestic violence - that our parliament wants to subject them to this further trauma through the medical system is horrible."

"The overwhelming weight of evidence provided to the committee by medical professionals and expert bodies was to recommend the passing of this legislation. Those who drive policy on all other healthcare issues are clearly in support of decriminalisation. It should be passed."

Michael Moore, CEO of the Public Health Association of Australia said: "This is a healthcare issue, and should be dealt with like any other health matter. To have the Government interfering in a woman's right to make this or any other health care decision for herself is wildly inappropriate."

"The notion of applying the same approach to this medical procedure as we did a hundred years ago is ludicrous and inappropriate." he added.

Kath Kerr, Social Worker at Women's Legal Service Queensland added: "For a number of women who have turned to Women's Legal Service for help to escape their abusive partner, the current, out-dated laws are making it even more difficult to access the services they desperately need, including pregnancy termination options."

In response to recent reports that the LNP may prevent its MPs from casting a conscience vote, Ms Carr added:

“The majority of Queenslanders want abortion decriminalised. If not even a single LNP member is willing or able to vote to end the criminalisation of women’s health care decisions -- it begs the question, how well is the LNP representing Queenslanders on this issue?”

Young mother Karla Wareham-Deane added: “As a Queensland, a lawyer, a mother, and a woman, I’m horrified that we’re even debating this in 2017.”

## **MEDIA CONTACT**

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## **AVAILABLE FOR COMMENT**

Contact details available on request via 0435 597 976

- Renee Carr - Executive Director of Fair Agenda
- Amanda Bradley, Manager, Children By Choice - regarding access and provision of termination procedures in Qld
- Michael Moore, CEO of the Public Health Association of Australia - who can comment from a medical / public health perspective
- Kath Kerr, Social Worker at Women's Legal Service Queensland - on the importance of access to full reproductive healthcare for women trying to escape family violence
- Dr Heather McNamee, Cairns Doctor and abortion provider
- Professor Caroline de Costa, James Cook University - academic and doctor
- Karla Wareham-Deane - young Queensland mother and lawyer

## **About Fair Agenda**

Fair Agenda is a community of 35,000 Australians campaigning for a fair and equal future for women.

### Additional quotes from Michael Moore, Public Health Association

“The current laws are bad for women, and bad for our health system. Right now we have legislation that is blocking doctors from fulfilling their first duty - to provide the best possible patient care.”

“For the parliament to choose to continue criminalising women and their doctors in this way would be a shocking failure”.

“Our laws should recognise a woman’s right to control all aspects of her own health, including her fertility.”

### Additional quotes from Kate Kerr, Women’s Legal Service Queensland (signed off)

"All too often we see perpetrators of abuse limiting their partner's access to contraceptive and reproductive healthcare - and also using unwanted pregnancy as a way to try and trap their partner."

"Having access to all reproductive health care options can be vital for a woman who is trying to escape an abusive partner."

"For a woman who is facing emotional, financial and physical abuse - unwanted pregnancy can be devastating, and access to all reproductive health care options is critical for those who want to choose abortion to help them get safe from escalating violence and control."

"The last thing we want is to continue the current climate where women are forced to continue a pregnancy against their will because the access barriers to abortion are too great to overcome. For women experiencing domestic violence, they are then tied to an abusive partner forever as co-parents."

Additional quotes from young Queensland mother Karla Wareham-Deane

"The notion that politicians are still making this type of decision about Queensland women's fertility and reproductive healthcare is absurd.

"The only person who is ever going to be in a position to make a decision about her reproductive health is the woman in question. Our laws should be empowering her to make that decision, not criminalising her for doing so."