

Media Release

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CFMEU presentation to Productivity Commission calls for action to improve women's access to construction, mining industries

CFMEU National Secretary John Sutton will today tell a hearing of the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Maternity and Paternity Leave that skills shortages in industries the union represents can be addressed by measures to encourage more women into these industries.

"In the past the construction and mining industries have been rightly considered dangerous and physically arduous ways to earn a living. Consequently, many people thought this work was arguably best done by men, who had the physical strength needed to mine for coal or build a building," Mr. Sutton said.

"However reality has outpaced perception and today many building and mining trades involve a level of mechanization that in reality make them easily accessible for women."

"You do not have to be physically strong to drive a crane and you do not have to be physically strong to operate much of the high-tech equipment used in the modern mining industry."

Mr. Sutton will tell the Productivity Commission's Melbourne hearing that women constitute the greatest untapped resource in the Australian labour market and that the solution to improving female workforce participation included not just paid maternity and paternity leave schemes but a lasting solution to the childcare crisis facing many families and a national effort to provide skills training for women in the construction and mining trades.

"Industry, unions and government should co-operate in research initiatives targeted at encouraging women into these industries."

"Construction and mining together employs nearly a million Australians, over 10% of the workforce. Cordoning off such a large proportion of the workforce, as it has traditionally been, represents a huge and unsustainable impediment to lifting women's participation in the workforce more broadly," he said.

"The big business solution to the skills crisis in key Australian industries is to import temporary migrant labour into this country. But the solution to the crisis is actually much closer to home; - equipping young women with the skills and know-how to be able to have meaningful careers in industries which in truth are quite accessible to women if parental leave and childcare solutions can be found and outdated stereotypes overcome."

"That way we train our own whilst avoiding the abuses that have made temporary migration programs such as the 457 visa scheme notorious around Australia and the world," Mr Sutton said.