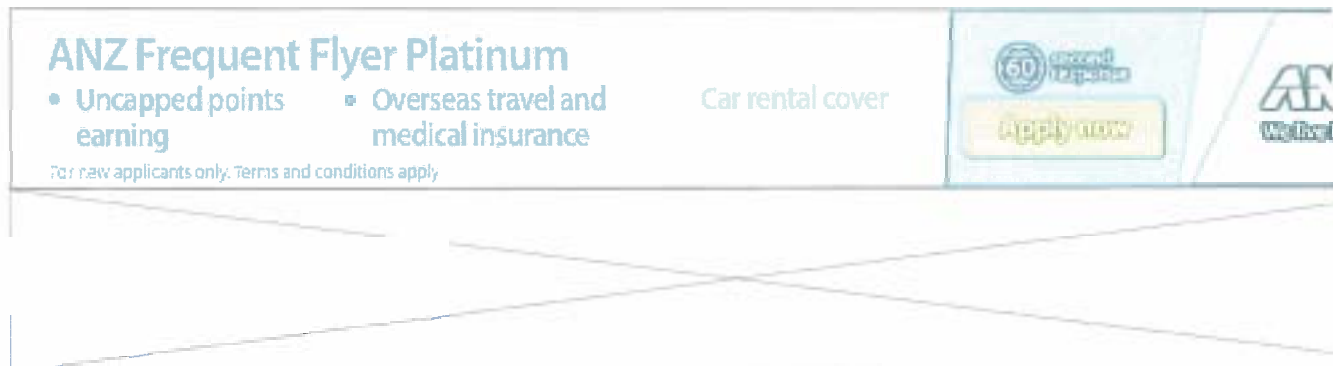


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## Fathers 'stereotyped' by Child Support Agency

Paul Bibby **WORKPLACE**

*August 26, 2010*

THE government watchdog responsible for overseeing child support payments has been unfairly focusing on parents who do not pay enough while ignoring those who are getting too much, the Commonwealth Ombudsman says.

In a report that might not be well received by some single mothers, the acting Ombudsman, Ron Brent, found that the Child Support Agency had at times been unduly influenced by stereotypes about fathers not meeting their obligations.

He found that, as a result of this and other factors, the agency had "not been even-handed" in its role as an investigator.

Those required to make payments - usually fathers - were made the subject of rigorous investigations including their property holdings, tax minimisation arrangements and involvement in complex corporate structures.

The review found that on some occasions these investigations were intrusive and insensitive - assuming that fathers deliberately rather than accidentally mis-represented their ability to pay child support.

In a number of cases the financial records of a father's new partner were demanded without sufficient explanation as to why they were needed and what they would be used for.

At the same time there were "very few investigations" into those who received payments - usually mothers - to see whether they were getting too much.

"The CSA needs to change its case selection procedures, to be more even-handed in its approach to the two parties," Mr Brent said. "It is also important that investigations are carried out with sensitivity and without implying that all investigated parents are trying to avoid child support obligations.

"I do not think that fathers have been victimised, but I can understand why they might have that impression."

While greater balance was needed, Mr Brent said it was right that more attention be paid to fathers because they were more likely to have complex financial arrangements where errors were more common.

He also said that up until recently, government policy had in fact encouraged the agency to focus on fathers rather than mothers.

Elsbeth McInnes, a policy adviser to the National Council for Single Mothers and Their Children, said she did not believe the Child Support Agency applied a gender filter to its investigations.

"I think the filter is the law," Dr McInnes said.

#### Our note of NT Office Status of Family

"The filter is not the law alone but includes two other concurrent factors. of the case facts and a legislated due process by The Public Service which ensures impartiality of relationship between case facts and legislation. All three forms the duty of the Public Servant to make an impartial and wholly lawful determination."

The Ombudsman has noted but not stated clearly 'serial' failure of officers to not comply with legal due process described otherwise as 'stereotyping' is indeed one in the same unlawful conducts. To unlawfully achieve 'women win' outcomes.

The impartiality of the officer is essential to obtain the 'legislated' outcome. Stereotyping fathers ensures it is not the legislated outcome."

Robert E Kennedy     Coordinator