



Mark Latham MP with son, Oliver, in Parliament House

**FATHERHOOD FOUNDATION
LAUNCH OF THE 12 PT PLAN
26 JUNE 2003**

Note: Copies of The 12pt Plan to support and strengthen Australian fathers were handed out to all parliamentarians and media so they could study the policy document produced by the Fathering Forum on the 10th of February, 2003, while the launch was in progress.

WARWICK MARSH: Firstly, I just want to say thank you to all the media. We have got some wonderful guys here, and camera people, and it's a big thank you for coming along and supporting this event. Today is the official launch of The 12pt Plan. What is The 12pt Plan? Well, it is a 12 Point Plan to restore fatherhood in this nation. The last week-and-a-half we have seen headlines as Dads we've been waiting for, for years and years and years. So, we are very excited to be here today. I have got some wonderful people to share some further points of view. I haven't asked them to agree with us, I've just asked them to tell us what they think and perhaps the way forward.

This is really only the beginning of a debate that we need to start to think about over the next 10-20 years. We need to encourage Dads in a way that they have never been encouraged before. We have our 12 Point Plan here and it is available on our website, fathersonline.org. There is also a colour version online if you want to pull it down to have a good look. You can also get more information from fathersonline.org.

Who is the Fatherhood Foundation? We are a very young organisation based in Wollongong, a good working class town. I asked Michael Organ, Wollongong's Green representative to come along, but he couldn't make it, because he had a speech in the House of Reps. The Fatherhood Foundation's dream is to help Dads be better Dads. Australia needs Dads like it's never needed them before. We have a situation -- I guess it's been promoted and advanced by the problems in our Family Law, therefore, the move towards shared parenting we believe is a very good move - it being point 6 on our 12 Point Plan.

But we believe that the issue of fatherlessness is far deeper. I have got an Aboriginal friend of mine who has been a great inspiration to me across here on my right-hand side, Ronnie Williams. We first met in the depths of Kalgoorlie. I'm actually a musician. I am a songwriter. I'm not really very much of a politician or a public speaker, but I have a deep passion for this nation and I have been travelling across this nation going to gaols and schools and far away places and meeting lots of people. There's a deep fatherhood wound in this nation. Ronnie Williams told me one day, he said, 'You know, Warwick, why do we greet each other in the pubs and say "How are you going, you old bastard?"' It's a most unusual greeting.

Of course, the USA Army when they came across in the Second World War found it very incongruous because it really is quite an insult in America, but here in Australia it's almost a form of great love and acceptance. I put it to you that perhaps that is an indication of the deep wound in our country's history, going back to our arrival as convicts, it wasn't ever Father England but it was Mother England and, of course, we were in many ways rejected. But I've got some good news, there are some wonderful Dads out there in Australia doing some wonderful things and there are all sorts of great people in this Parliament. I feel it's very important for me to honour people.

We have got Senator Len Harris here today. He first brought forward the Bill for Shared Parents and I want to honour him in that. We have also got a lot of people that perhaps aren't here today -- Chris Pyne from the Liberal Party who has been a pretty awesome supporter of fatherhood and, of course, I want to congratulate Mr John Howard for his stand. It's been a wonderful week, as I said before, for Dads. But Ken Ticehurst has

been working pretty hard especially behind the scenes, and we've got Mr Ross Cameron, of course, who has done a great job and it is great to have you here, Ross. We appreciate your timely visit.

There are so many people to thank and I have been inspired by Mark Latham and Larry Anthony and many others here in their passion to encourage Dads and to really better our children. I could say a lot of things here today. There is a lot of good stuff here in The 12pt Plan. Feel free to read it. Maybe I can read just a couple of quick things from the 12 point plan before I hand over to Larry Anthony, because he is on the go this morning.

'The quality of the relationships between mothers and fathers and their children will ultimately determine the destiny of Australia.' I will say it one more time: 'The quality of the relationships between mothers and fathers and their children will ultimately determine the destiny of Australia.'...A loving father, mother and their children is the best way to nurture and educate and protect children.' The 12pt Plan is the first of many proposals to promote discussion and contribute toward a coordinated national solution to turn the tide of fatherlessness and curb the rise of divorce in Australia. This is really just a starting point. We don't believe it's a final result, but it is certainly a start. I would like to finish with a quote from Prof Warren Farrell, a very respected author from the United States, who's prediction in a book that was written about two years ago with his 'Top 10 predictions for the 21st century', this is his No.1 prediction : **'Fathers' issues will be to the early 21st Century what women's issues were in the late 20th Century. Fathers will have greater success at taking joint and primary**

custody. Denial of visitation will be treated more seriously. More men will ask for paternity tests. Single Dads will increasingly work out of their home and will continue to be less likely than women to receive child support either from the mother or the government, even when he gets sole custody of the children. Single Dads will become between 25 and 30 per cent of single parents by 2015. For the first time in history the sexes have an opportunity to redefine love to create not a women's movement blaming men or a men's movement blaming women, but a gender transition movement. In the past we have been challenged by a paradox. Political movements have been led by mostly unhealthy people, but few healthy changes have occurred without political movements. In the future we are challenged with the possibility of the movement producing healthy change, being led by mostly healthy people. This will happen only if men do their homework, study their internal worlds, have the courage to take their perspectives to the external world and invite women to join them. Men can't say what men don't know and women can't hear what men don't say.'(Farrell, W; © 2001; pg 321)

That is the title of the book. I think it is very poetic. **'Women can't hear what men don't say'** and, of course, the reverse is the truth. So, it's great to have you all here. I am honoured to have some wonderful people here. Larry Anthony, do you want to take over from here.

LARRY ANTHONY: Thank you, Warwick, and to my other Parliamentary colleagues. Can I just first of all congratulate your group? I think it's very timely, that we need to focus more on the role of fatherhood, and some of the announcements that the government made this week in particular, coincide with some of your recommendations. I think it's very important that we have a public discussion, particularly on the issues regarding Family Law, the issues of exploring joint custody, and that's why we've put it to a Parliamentary Committee.

It's good to see Mark Latham here and Ross Cameron and Ken Ticehurst and others from across the Parliament to debate on some of these fundamental issues. What we are seeing in this country is that 55,000 children every year are being separated from their parents through divorce. I think we do have to start looking at the role, particularly that men play, particularly when there is a marriage separation. We need to look at the issues of contact, and particularly in the area of the Child Support Formula, again, which will be discussed by this Committee, but most importantly it is starting I think, to bring equilibrium so if we can either keep marriages together or, if there is a separation, make sure there is a male role figure in those children's lives, particularly when it comes to young boys.

I personally believe, research tells us, and commonsense tells us, that unless there are mitigating circumstances, where there is more contact encouraged by the father with their children then it's a better outcome for those kids. It's quite interesting today, reading the Australian, the number of surveys coming out demonstrating where there is adequate contact, not only is maintenance paid but it gives a much more balanced outcome for

the child, which is my principal concern, but also it's a good outcome for the parents. So, I welcome these initiatives. I think the pendulum is turning. We need to have a sensible, balanced debate and ultimately it is the welfare of the children but also giving fathers a greater role so they will know their children. Good on you, Warwick. Good luck with your group and I'm glad to see that we've got a bi-partisan support here.

WARWICK MARSH: It's wonderful, Larry. I appreciate your coming in. I know you've got a pretty tight schedule for the day. You should probably be at five different places at once, but we appreciate your coming. Senator Paul Calvert, has he arrived yet? No.

SPEAKER: No, he sends his apologies.

WARWICK MARSH: It really is very exciting for me to have Mark Latham to launch this 12 Point Plan. I am sure he probably doesn't agree with everything but what I love about Mark is he is literally living what he says in regards to being a Dad. I was down at his office and he was just showing me some of his photos. He has got a great photo if you see it of him holding his baby in Parliament. When I saw that I thought 'This is what it's all about. It's about fathers taking that interest in their children to actually involve them in their work, not leave them at home but involve them in their work and, as I understand, Mr Latham has that privilege of being the first Dad to bring a baby into Parliament.

There was a recent discussion about breast feeding down in the Victorian Parliament. I am sure that Mark is not going to go into competition in this regard, but certainly he has won the competition as far as practical fathering. Let's say one more thing about Mark, I hope you don't mind,

Mark, that again I was just talking about this whole issue of fatherhood. Really it comes down to little things like eating together, playing together, having fun together.

Mark has got I think two sons now, the oldest is --

MARK LATHAM: Two-and-a-half --

WARWICK MARSH: The youngest is --

MARK LATHAM: Six months.

WARWICK MARSH: Mark gets his Dr Seuss books out every night when he is home, which is only half of the year, so he's a busy man, and he pulls those books out, he puts his children there -- one arm there and one arm there -- and he reads them Dr Seuss. That's what I call a very dedicated father. So, without any further ado, Mr Mark Latham, thank you very much.

MARK LATHAM: Thanks, Warwick, and colleagues here today. I'm very supportive of the work of the Fathering Forum in putting a spotlight on men's issues, particularly the importance of fatherhood in our society. I come at this not just as a father but also as a representative in my electorate of Werriwa in South West Sydney. One of the things that has worried me as long as I've been the member is, it is possible for boys to grow up to manhood without other male influences in their lives. No men living in the home, so few men teaching in our schools, the decline of some of the sporting and traditional male activities. You see boys growing up without male role models in their lives, without mentors and I

think it does contribute to many of the youth issues that we find amongst teenagers. It is not the best environment in which boys should grow up in, and anything we can do to develop policies or examples of effective mentoring and male role modelling I think is very useful.

I think one of the best things out of the Parliament in recent times is the report of the Parliamentary Committee on Education, looking at the issue of how we get more men into our schools, particularly primary schools, where they can act as role models for the boys. So, there are Parliamentary reports and issues that have been advanced. That's good. I think it is also great that we have had a successful National Fathering Forum in Parliament House back in February and that this 12 Pt Plan is being launched today and these issues are important in my electorate.

They are important right around the country. I think one of the things that all men are going through, to be quite honest about it, is this whole question of the changing nature of male identity. Traditionally in our society the male identity has been based on dominance in the workplace and, to some extent, dominance in the home, in the family environment, and because of the welcome and improved role and rights of women over the last 20 or 30 years, those relationships, those sources of identity have changed, and now many men are trying to sort out 'What does this mean for the future? How do I express myself? How do I relate to other people? How do I get that sense of belonging to society?' that is critical to good citizenship and a good life.

I think the changing nature of male identity needs to be debated. It needs to be thought about. It needs to be considered here in the Parliament and in all public forums, because men are going through this sense of

confusion and hearing information, hearing other men talk about it. I think is very useful as well as thinking about public policy changes in a constructive way. So, for my electorate, I think for all men with these issues about male identity, and I must say as a father, one of the great joys of my life was to become a Dad. When I see my two-and-a-half year old son Oliver follow me around the garden, if I weed he wants to weed, if I get in the car he wants to get in the car -- you just understand instinctively that the father has such a big impact on the son.

If you can make it a positive impact and have Dads available as much as possible in all families to provide that role modelling, I think it is absolutely critical to the success and normality of our society, the sense of belonging, the sense of having identity and confidence about who we are, what we do in life -- that father-son relationship is absolutely essential to those elements of our society.

Warwick was kind enough to mention reading to our children. I think as we grapple with these issues about male identity -- fatherhood is one of the things that can really fill the gap -- being good fathers, being proud about fatherhood is one of the things that is very important to the identity of men in our society. I don't see this as a zero sum debate. I think Warwick made a great point. We don't want a men's movement that blames women; we want a men's movement that works with men and women to develop better identity, better relationships, a stronger fathering role in our society and to develop win-win outcomes, where as a society across both genders we can make advances and make successful changes. So, I'm honoured to be here today, honoured to launch The 12pt Plan and I wish the Fathering Forum every success in the future.

It's great to have a group that is involved in the Parliamentary discussions, lobbying, talking to people about these critical issues. It's timely, it's important and I lend it as much support as I can. Congratulations, Warwick.

WARWICK MARSH: Awesome, Mark; I really appreciate your attendance and your help. It has been a great encouragement to me personally to find a Parliamentarian who is so committed to his children. Of course, I know that many Parliamentarians are. I just also want to thank a few others I have forgotten to thank -- Senator Paul Calvert who can't be here today. Without his help we wouldn't be here today, so it's important to honour him, because really it's all about restoring honour and respect as fathers. It is really wonderful to have Senator Brian Harradine here. We appreciate that.

SENATOR HARRADINE: I'm very happy to be here.

WARWICK MARSH: We have also got Ross Cameron. With your permission we haven't heard from Paul Calvert. I'm very conscious of your time, ladies and gentlemen from the Press. Can we hear a little bit from Ross, for two or three minutes?

ROSS CAMERON: I will take just two minutes. I am here firstly because, as a father I recognise that I need to hear the message. I am here for my own benefit along with Senator Guy Barnett who I see has joined us. The only thing I would say in terms of the genesis of this thing, there is a guy I would like to acknowledge -- I was here in Canberra with Warwick (in 1998) and there were about 30 people in a room talking about the country's problems. The question arose: what is

the single biggest problem Australia faces and what problem if we solved it would have the biggest impact on the quality of life of Australians?

This guy here, Ron Williams, stood up in the room and gave about a 30 second reflection. It was a kind of epiphany where he said 'In my opinion, the most pressing and urgent problem we have to solve as a nation is the absent father -- fatherlessness.' You could feel around the room everybody felt, 'This resonates with me.' It was at that moment that Warwick said, 'I'm going to do something about this.' So, really, it was an Aboriginal elder and Pastor who brought a sort of prophetic word here in Canberra that means all of us are here today. So, as Parliamentary Secretary, I am thrilled the Government has just renewed nearly \$20 million in funding to the Men and Family Relationships Programme, 50 programmes around the country.

As Mark has said, this has got to be a collaboration. This is not about the politics of 'us against them', it's about working together. I think, I feel a great sense of hope about this. So often in Parliament I feel like we are announcing progress, writing press releases, but it is not speaking to some deep need. Today I have a great sense of hope and optimism and I'm thrilled to be here.

WARWICK MARSH: I know you are very busy -- are there any questions? Field them as you feel.

QUESTION: Mark, I am talking about the relationship between father and son, but what about the relationship between father and daughter. Is it equally as critical that young girls have a good relationship with their Dads as well?

MARK LATHAM: Yes, of course. I suppose I emphasise father and son because that's my own personal experience. Hopefully I'll have a daughter one day as well and discover those joys. Yes, that is critical. It is the fathering role that is vital, men being proud of fatherhood, using it as one of the great sources of inspiration and emotion in our lives and doing everything we can to make it a success. I'm not too sure -- I'm just imagining this, thinking of my father and grandfather, men traditionally have put as much emphasis on fatherhood as we can do now. I think that dominant role in the workplace, dominant role in the home -- that fatherhood wasn't as burning a passion as it can be today and to use it as a source of confidence and inspiration in our lives is very important, whether it is fathering sons or daughters.

QUESTION: You also spoke about some of the problems that you face when they don't have a male role model in their lives. Can you give us an example of what some of those problems are? Are kids turning more to drugs, are they suffering stress? What sort of problems are they having?

ENDS