Pregnant pause as Aussie mums wait for baby bonus

**Australian** hospitals are bracing for a baby boom in July as expectant mothers try to delay imminent births to take advantage of a new welfare payment, researchers said yesterday.

From July 1, a baby bonus paid to the parents for every new-born child will increase by A$1,000 (US$737.6) to A$4,000 (US$2,950).

Economists said that after the baby bonus was introduced in July 2004 about 700 births were delayed by a week to take advantage of the new payment.

Melbourne Business School economist Professor Joshua Gans and Australian National University colleague Andrew Leigh said that around 300 births were moved by more than two weeks.

Most of those births involved caesarean sections or induced deliveries, they said.

In a bid to overcome Australia's low fertility rate and ageing population, Prime Minister John Howard's conservative government has urged couples to have more children.

Treasurer Peter Costello suggested two years ago that Australian couples should have "one for mum, one for dad and one for the country."

Figures released this month showed that Australians were doing their patriotic duty, with the nation in the grip of a baby boom for the first time in 12 years.

Costello welcomed the latest trend but warned doctors and parents against doing anything that would endanger the health of mothers and their babies to take advantage of the new payment.

"Medical advice is that no one should delay the delivery of a child that would put either the mother or the child's health at risk," he told parliament yesterday.

"It seems that many Australians are taking up the challenge to have one for mum, one for dad and one for the country. That is a positive thing for Australia," he said.

Alarming however, researchers also found an analogous trend in death figures.

In 1979 Howard, then serving as treasurer, announced a plan to abolish taxes of up to 28 per cent on estates after death.

Gans and Leigh said in a research paper "Did the Death of Australian Inheritance Taxes Affect Deaths?" that as many as five people out of nine in their study who faced paying the tax managed to hold on for one more week in order to avoid it.

"There is an incredible ability within the human spirit that denies logic and physiology," Pastor Renton McRae, of the Lifestream Christian Fellowship, told The Sydney Morning Herald newspaper after Gans' and Leigh's study was released.

*Source: China Daily*

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