



# Fashionably late in a land of plenty

By Jessica Wright

Jasmina Higham is among a growing number of Australian women who are delaying having children until they are financially and emotionally secure.

Having given birth to her first child Calder last month, Mrs Higham, 29, said the decision to have children was a measured one.

"We've been married for four years in January and we wanted to have a little time for ourselves to let the marriage grow before we started a family. We wanted to be established in our careers as well, to have our finances in order," she said.

Figures issued by the Australian Bureau of Statistics yesterday showed Australia recorded its second-highest number of registered births in 2006, with more women leaving motherhood until later in

life.

There were 265,900 new births in Australia for 2006, taking the total fertility rate to 1.81 babies per woman, up from 1.79 in 2005. It is the second-largest number of births since 1971 when 276,400 were recorded.

The increase was largely attributed to a higher number of births for women aged 30 to 39 years.

Mrs Higham was older than her mother when embarking on motherhood, a trend common in her peer group.

"Thirty to 39 seems fine to me. It's still young; these days your 20s are your teens, everything is shuffled back. My friends are all starting to have their first babies and they are in their late 20s and early 30s. It's normal," she said.

Bureau spokesman Matthew Montgomery said figures for the ACT

were in line with a national trend, with 4500 births in 2006, the highest since 1991.

"What we have seen in the last five years is the numbers of births has started to creep up from a low of 3900 in 2001. The figures are reflected by what we are seeing nationwide, a trend of fertility rates on the rise," he said.

Acting Chief Minister Katy Gallagher said the increase in births was welcome news for the nation's capital.

"The recent increase in births per women is a positive for the ACT. In part it reflects the strength of the ACT economy with fertility rates generally increasing when people feel comfortable about their financial future," she said.

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**DECISION:** Jasmina Higham, of Captains Flat, with four-week-old Calder, reflects a growing trend of women deciding on motherhood later in life. Picture: KARLEEN WILLIAMS



# Fashion is to be late in a land of plenty

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"It's unclear at this time though whether the upwards trend reflects a broader shift in social attitudes or is an echo of the baby boomer generation and the propensity of women to delay having children."

While the median age nationwide of mothers who gave birth in 2006 was 30.8 years, the women of the ACT were among the oldest mothers giving birth, with a median age of 31.4.

The nationwide figure is the highest recorded.

The results of the ABS survey were issued on the same day it was revealed 55 per cent of women do not believe the level of support for women with children has progressed in the past 10 years

under the Howard Government.

According to The Heat Group, a leading marketer to women, the study also found 25 per cent of women surveyed would happily have a third child if the Government recognised the critical need for support.

Additionally, 42 per cent of women in the 18-40 age bracket would have another child if the baby bonus was raised to \$10,000 a child.

The Heat Group managing director Gillian Franklin said the survey showed that 67 per cent of women reported they intended going back to work after having children, and 30 per cent of those had absolutely no choice in the matter as they needed the money.

"But the realities of going back to work are not so rosy either. A

massive 91 per cent of women say they were sidelined after taking maternity leave and 43 per cent say they were severely disadvantaged," she said.

"Families should be able to make decisions about the number of children they produce based on personal preferences and not because they don't have the level of support from government."

The Greens have vowed to fight for 18 weeks' paid leave for mothers, as they aim to take the balance of power in the Senate at the election. They will pressure the government elected on November 24 on women's issues, particularly in the workplace where it says women are falling behind because of WorkChoices. **with AAP**