

Women and WorkChoices

How federal workplace laws impact on women

The recently released report of the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission (QIRC) inquiry into WorkChoices found that the federal laws will adversely impact on the pursuit of gender pay equity.

Submissions to the inquiry highlighted the role the award system played in supporting the wages and employment conditions of women workers, including provisions supporting greater work-life balance and greater female participation in the workforce, before WorkChoices.

Leading industrial relations experts tell us that women are losing pay, conditions, bargaining power and any chance of equal pay thanks to WorkChoices.

That's why the Queensland Government is initiating a new pay equity inquiry. The inquiry, to be conducted by the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission, will consider ways to advance gender pay equity in light of WorkChoices and review the outcomes and impact of an earlier Queensland Pay Equity Inquiry conducted in 2000–01.

Already Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs) are widening the gap between men's and women's earnings. The World Economic Forum does not rate Australia as a leader on pay equity, with countries like Sri Lanka, the Philippines, New Zealand and Spain ahead of Australia.

Women have the most to lose under WorkChoices because they have been more reliant on awards. They are now likely to be without individual market bargaining power and the collective protection that awards provided.

Women also have more to lose from the loss of unionism and in moving to individual contracts.

And when women lose, so do their children, families and community.

Pay equity is an important social and economic public issue and is recognised by the International Labour Organisation as a human and labour rights issue. There are distinct economic advantages in the equitable and increased workforce participation of women, more so in an environment characterised by national skills and labour shortages, lower population growth and an ageing population.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimates suggest that women earn, on average, less than 85 per cent of the wages received by men.

ABS figures show working women on AWAs earn less than women on collective agreements – up to \$4.70 less an hour.

ABS data also shows that women covered by collective agreements have an hourly wage rate that is 11 per cent above women on individual agreements. Women on AWAs earn only 70 per cent of the average earnings of men on AWAs.

If nothing is done to address these concerns, the situation for women workers under WorkChoices will be critical. That's why the Queensland Government opposes WorkChoices and why it backs jobs plans that help women.

Its *Skilling Queenslanders for Work* program replaces the successful *Breaking the Unemployment Cycle* program this July. *Breaking the Unemployment Cycle* assisted 55,000 unemployed women with more than 41,000 undertaking community employment programs and, of those surveyed to date, almost 65 per cent found employment. 14,000 women also undertook a First Start traineeship of which 90 per cent found employment.

More than 90 per cent of participants in the *Back to Work: Parents and Carers program* are women, which has provided nearly \$4 million for employment assistance, training, child care, transport and wage subsidies for those entering the workforce.

The Department of Employment and Industrial Relations is currently working with the Australian Industry Group (AIG) to assist women into non-traditional industry areas.

The Queensland Government encourages individuals and organisations throughout Queensland to make submissions to the Pay Equity Inquiry. To obtain further information, phone the Industrial Registrar on 3227 8060.

In the workplace

Knowing your rights and responsibilities at work will help you to feel more confident.

As a worker, you should expect to be treated fairly, be paid the proper wage, feel safe, and have access to fair employment conditions, proper training and appropriate leave entitlements.*

If your employer is a company, WorkChoices may apply at your workplace. To find out more information about how these laws impact on you at work, contact the Fair Go Queensland Advisory Service on 1300 737 841 or visit www.deir.qld.gov.au

Information contained in this flyer is relevant to workers covered by the Queensland Government's industrial relations laws.

*Please note. Casual employees are not eligible for most leave entitlements.

Before you start work!

It's important to know what to expect and what is expected of you, so ask your employer about conditions of employment.

Find out:

- the name of the award or agreement which covers the job you do
- your rate of pay
- when you're expected to work and for how long
- if the job is full-time, part-time or casual
- the length of your probationary period
- your leave entitlements
- meal and rest breaks
- if there are record keeping requirements such as timesheets
- the name of your workplace health and safety officer
- who to notify if you're absent from work
- the procedure if you have an issue about safety, discrimination or employment conditions.

For more information on your rights and responsibilities visit www.deir.qld.gov.au

Now it's time to start!

Just remember, like your employer, you have legal obligations toward the people you work with. Follow these simple tips and your job will be enjoyable.

- arrive at work on time
- dress suitably for the job, including safety gear if required
- always work to the best of your ability when at work
- act respectfully
- take care of your employer's property
- follow reasonable and lawful instructions given by your boss
- obey safety rules
- ask for help when you need it
- know what your boss expects if you can't attend work
- don't discriminate or harass other people in the workplace
- don't act in a way that puts you or others at risk

You have rights!

You should be entitled to:

- be paid the right wage at least monthly and receive a payslip for the job you do
- be protected from unfair dismissal**
- sick, long service, annual & family leave, and public holidays*
- a discrimination-free workplace
- be treated with respect regardless of age, race or religion
- join (or not join) a union or association of your choice
- not have any money deducted from wages without your written permission.

* Casual employees are not eligible for most leave entitlements.

** Employees during their probationary period and short-term casual employees may be excluded from unfair dismissal. Under federal legislation, employees in workplaces with 100 or fewer staff are exempt from unfair dismissal.

Information in this brochure is current at March 2007. Check your current entitlements on our website www.deir.qld.gov.au

A fair go!

If you feel you have been treated or dismissed unfairly at work, the Queensland Government has established the Fair Go Queensland Advisory Service.

This service is operated by experts from the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations who are available to help with queries about unfair dismissals, wages and conditions, awards and agreements, industrial disputes and dispute resolution.

Call 1300 737 841

And you should feel safe

You have the right to work in safe working conditions, even if you are on work experience and not being paid.

You should receive an induction once you start work, explaining the health and safety features of the workplace, followed by regular instruction and supervision on the correct way to do your job. If you are concerned about your safety at work, you have a right to raise health and safety issues with your supervisor, your health and safety representative or Workplace Health and Safety Queensland.

Safety in the workplace is not just up to your employer. You have responsibilities to look after your own health and safety, and not put others at risk. If you don't understand safety procedures in your workplace, then ask a supervisor.

Need to know more?

Department of Employment and Industrial Relations (Wageline)

Wageline is an advisory service which provides information on awards, pay rates and general employment conditions.

Call 1300 369 945 or visit www.wageline.qld.gov.au

Department of Employment and Industrial Relations (Fair Go Queensland Advisory Service)

Fair Go Queensland Advisory Service provides information on the new WorkChoices laws and the impact of the changes.

Call 1300 737 841 or visit www.deir.qld.gov.au

Department of Employment and Industrial Relations (Workplace Health and Safety Queensland)

Contact Workplace Health and Safety Queensland's Infoline which provides advice on health and safety in the workplace.

Call 1300 369 915 or visit www.deir.qld.gov.au

Anti-discrimination Commission

The commission can provide information and deal with complaints such as discrimination, sexual harassment or victimisation at work.

Call 1300 130 670

If you're a member of a union you can contact them directly, or if you wish to join a union, contact the following organisations.

Queensland Council of Unions (07) 3846 2468 or visit www.qcu.asn.au

Australian Workers Union (07) 3221 8844 or visit www.awu.net.au

Telephone Interpreter 13 14 50 or visit www.deir.qld.gov.au

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Department of
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