



AUSTRALIAN HOTELS ASSOCIATION

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MEDIA RELEASE

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RELATIONSHIPS NOT RULES MUST UNDERPIN MODERN WORKPLACES

The head of a leading industry association has called on all Australians to make up their own minds if new workplace relations laws create fair and flexible workplaces and protect their interests.

The call comes as unions launch a new media campaign and legal representatives from business and trade unions meet in Canberra to commence a review of the draft legislation.

AHA National Chief Executive Officer, Bill Healey said: "Modern workplaces must be regulated in a way that promotes innovation, maintains business viability and meets the diverse needs of individual workers.

"The new laws will seek to establish a single national workplace relations system that will provide the legal, policy and cultural framework to govern workplaces operating in a service economy.

"The new system has to provide fairness and flexibility across all Australian workplaces, ranging from global mining corporations, national retailers and the 2 million small and medium-sized businesses that provide the foundations of the Australian service economy."

The new legislation is the next step in a process which commenced under the Hawke/Keating governments to transform the legalistic, centralised, occupationally-based industrial relations system established at the beginning of the last century to one responsive to the needs of a modern, global economy.

"People today want to work constructively with their colleagues and develop effective relationships," Mr Healey said.

"They look for flexibility and the capacity for self-expression in their workplaces. Leaders in a service economy must build consensus and establish an environment where people can achieve shared goals. They should promote collaboration, rather than conflict, and focus on relationships, rather than rigid rules.

"Finding quality staff is and will remain a key business challenge for the next few decades. Despite the current economic slowdown, we know that the workforce of the future will be more diverse and consist of a greater number of older workers, parents, people with disabilities, Indigenous Australians and people wanting to work part-time.

"The new laws must continue the move away from the old 'one-size-fits-all model'. They should encourage people at the enterprise level to negotiate the terms and conditions of employment based on the capacity of the business and the needs of workers.

"We need to accept that now more than ever, individuals have a desire and the capacity to manage their own lives. People are far more inclined to move from one job to another, especially if they do not believe their current position is meeting their needs and contributing to the development of portable skills and experience. The new laws must cater for this new workplace reality.

"Many of the essential elements of a fair safety net already exist in Australia. We have a high minimum wage, access to free universal health care, affordable tertiary education, a generous social welfare system by OECD standards and a well established retirement savings scheme. This safety net will be enhanced by a clearer set of base level entitlements through the 10 National Employment Standards (NES) and modern awards.

"Fair Work Australia will provide a cost-effective dispute resolution process and promote good faith bargaining by providing information to, and developing the skills of, managers and their staff."

This new environment provides a challenge for the trade union movement whose traditional strength is based on representing a majority of workers across most economic activities. Union membership has declined to just 14% of the private sector workforce and this is predominantly in industries linked to the Industrial Age. If the union movement cannot adept to the emerging new economy, it will end up a niche player representing a declining number of workers quarantined within a particular set of industries.

Mr Healey said: "The new system will seek to ensure workers and employers create an environment where their individual and collective needs are recognised and pursued. This should be through collective bargaining, but must not automatically require the involvement of external parties, such as employee and employer organisations.

"The next round of reform is critical for the future of our country and needs to challenge some of the fundamental elements of the current system.

"The debate is too important to be left to the traditional 'IR Club' and special interest groups. We must build on the reforms of the last 20 years and not turn the clock back.

"I am confident that the package of reforms will empower business owners and workers to create more productive, flexible and fairer workplaces."

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The Australian Hotels Association (AHA) is the pre-eminent tourism and hospitality industry organisation in Australia. It has around 5000 members operating general and accommodation hotels. It has a national office and branches in each State and Territory. It also has a discrete branch to represent the interests of its accommodation members that covers four and five-star properties.