



Australian Government

# Fair Work OMBUDSMAN

## Workplace Rights Week

**20-24 April 2009**

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### Summary

This report provides a summary of the Workplace Ombudsman's national Workplace Rights Week which was conducted between 20 and 24 April 2009 across Australia by all metropolitan and regional offices.

We designed Workplace Rights Week as an alternative approach to improving compliance with the *Workplace Relations Act 1996* by raising awareness about our role as the Workplace Ombudsman.

Our Workplace Rights Week program included over 50 activities around Australia and involved every Workplace Inspector.

Key results from the activities of the week include:

- Inspectors undertook 1587 educational visits nationally.
- Twenty four shopping centre information booths, servicing over 1,000 people.
- Twenty four presentations, addressing over 360 attendees.

The week attracted considerable media interest with 47 newspaper articles and 16 radio interviews and one television interview in response to our 22 media releases.

Between 13 April and 1 May we had a total of 1146 hits to our dedicated Workplace Rights Week website including the program of events and media release web pages.

Varieties of industries were involved in Workplace Rights Week activities including; retail, hospitality, accounting/finance and HR/employment agencies.

In Tasmania our specific focus was on high school students. The presentations effectively raised awareness amongst students and resulted in additional bookings of educational presentations.

It was encouraging to see the support that was shown by several stakeholders. For example in Kalgoorlie, the Goldfields Small Business Centre agreed to facilitate both the organisation and promotion of a local event via their networks which resulted in a huge attendance.

A positive outcome from the week has been the number of follow up calls our inspectors have received from employers and employees as a result of the week's activities.

## **Background to the campaign**

The Workplace Ombudsman currently undertakes four national campaigns each year targeting those industries/demographics where there is likely to be a high incidence of non compliance with the *Workplace Relations Act 1996*. The usual model for our national campaigns includes stakeholder engagement followed by an educative phase and a compliance audit phase.

We also regularly conduct various communication campaigns for example, the ‘Don’t Get Ripped Off’ campaign directed at students to reach those in the community that are difficult to reach via the audit campaign strategy.

Through Workplace Rights Week, we designed an innovative approach to reach the Australian community with the aim of improving compliance with the *Workplace Relations Act 1996*, by raising awareness and understanding on the role of the Workplace Ombudsman.

## **Campaign aim and objectives**

Our aim with Workplace Rights Week was to improve compliance by educating the Australian community about their rights and responsibilities under the *Workplace Relations Act 1996* and raising awareness about our role.

Our specific objectives were to:

- Incorporate an Australia wide program of activities to engage regional as well as metropolitan employers and employees.
- Achieve stakeholder participation in Workplace Rights Week activities.
- Attract positive media interest.
- Focus on new employers and vulnerable workers to help them understand their rights and obligations under federal workplace relations law, and to inform them on how to contact the WO for information and assistance.

## **Campaign strategy**

Every Workplace Inspectors around Australia was encouraged to be involved in one or several Workplace Rights week educative activities. These included the following:

- Visiting employers’ premises to provide educational information.
- Attending a shopping centres booth.
- Presenting an information session to business and other relevant client groups.
- Meeting with employer’s one to one as necessary.

### ***Educational Visits***

The purpose of the visits to employer’s premises was mainly educational and we provided self audit checklists and information packs to employers.

Our workplace inspectors took the opportunity to sight employers’ records and in the event that the workplace inspector identified a minor breach of the Regulations they

encouraged the employer to voluntarily rectify the matter and return a signed compliance commitment form within 14 days.

In the event that the Workplace Inspector suspected a major breach of the Regulations or Act which could not be ignored, they issued a formal request for records on return to the office and the matter would then be investigated in the normal way.

Tasmania conducted a mail-out inviting a number of businesses to send in time and wage records for a workplace inspector to check rather than undertake the educational visits.

### ***Shopping centre booths***

The purpose of the shopping centre booths was to provide the Australian community with information about the *Workplace Relations Act 1996*, and to raise awareness on the role of the Workplace Ombudsman, as well as the assistance available to both employers and employees.

Our Workplace Inspectors were available at the booths to respond to questions and interested public members were provided with a brochure on employer and employee workplace rights and obligations, including details on where to go for further information.

### ***Information forums***

The purpose of the information forums was to provide information about the *Workplace Relations Act 1996* and to raise awareness of our role to targeted audiences. For example, our regional offices in Toowoomba and Kalgoorlie ran sessions for local businesses and our Tasmanian offices focused on presenting sessions for high school students in local colleges.

## **Conclusion**

Workplace Rights Week was enthusiastically received by our staff, stakeholders, employers, employees and the Australian community.

It highlighted the benefits of an educational strategy to help us achieve our ultimate vision of 'creating fairer Australian workplaces'.

Most importantly, the week successfully raised our profile across Australia and provided the opening to work in partnership with the Australian community to promote fairness and ensure justice in workplaces.