

Australia's industrial relations timeline

This timeline outlines a brief history of workplace relations law in Australia.

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Current - 2009

2018 – [Fair Work Amendment \(Family and Domestic Violence Leave\) Act 2018](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/news-and-media-releases/website-news/new-family-and-domestic-violence-leave-entitlement) (www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/news-and-media-releases/website-news/new-family-and-domestic-violence-leave-entitlement)

- Amendment to the Fair Work Act 2009 (FW Act), which took effect in December 2018, adding an entitlement to unpaid family and domestic violence leave in the National Employment Standards (NES).

2018 – Fair Work Ombudsman appointed

- [Sandra Parker](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/key-people/sandra-parker-the-fair-work-ombudsman) (www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/key-people/sandra-parker-the-fair-work-ombudsman) appointed as the Fair Work Ombudsman on 15 July 2018.

2017 – [Fair Work Amendment \(Protecting Vulnerable Workers\) Act 2017](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/news-and-media-releases/website-news/changes-to-help-protect-vulnerable-workers) (www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/news-and-media-releases/website-news/changes-to-help-protect-vulnerable-workers) and [Fair Work Amendment \(Corrupting Benefits\) Act 2017](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/legislation/the-fair-work-system/corrupting-benefits-reform) (www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/legislation/the-fair-work-system/corrupting-benefits-reform)

- Amendments to the Fair Work Act 2009 (FW Act), which came into force in September 2017, with provisions aimed at protecting vulnerable workers and promoting better governance of registered organisations.

2017 – Registered Organisations Commission established

- The [Registered Organisations Commission](http://www.roc.gov.au/) (<http://www.roc.gov.au/>), the independent regulator of unions and employer associations, established by the [Fair Work \(Registered Organisations\) Act 2009](https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2017C00147) (<https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2017C00147>).

2017 – Australian Building and Construction Commission established

- The [Australian Building and Construction Commission](https://www.abcc.gov.au/) (<https://www.abcc.gov.au/>) started operating, transitioning from Fair Work Building and Construction.

2016 – [Norfolk Island reform](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/legislation/norfolk-island) (www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/legislation/norfolk-island)

- Commonwealth laws (including the FW Act) extended to Norfolk Island by the Territories Legislation Amendment Act 2016. Norfolk Island to transition to the FW Act in 3 stages, from 1 July 2016 until 1 July 2018.

2016 - [Road Safety Remuneration System](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/legislation/road-safety-remuneration-system/default) (www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/legislation/road-safety-remuneration-system/default) repealed

- Road Safety Remuneration Tribunal (including Orders made under the Road Safety Remuneration Act 2012) repealed by Road Safety Remuneration Repeal Act 2016.

2014 – The end of transitional arrangements in modern awards (see Transitional arrangements created to introduce modern awards below)

2013 – Fair Work Ombudsman appointed

- Natalie James appointed as the Fair Work Ombudsman on 15 July 2013.

2013 – Fair Work Commission

- Fair Work Australia renamed the Fair Work Commission on 1 January 2013.

2012 - [Road Safety Remuneration System \(www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/legislation/road-safety-remuneration-system/default\)](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/legislation/road-safety-remuneration-system/default) created

- The Road Safety Remuneration Tribunal established by the Road Safety Remuneration Act 2012.

2009 – Fair Work Act 2009

- The FW Act commenced on 1 July 2009.

2009 – The Office of the Fair Work Ombudsman

- The Office of the Fair Work Ombudsman created from the former agency, the Workplace Ombudsman.
- Nicholas Wilson appointed as the Fair Work Ombudsman from 1 July 2009 until April 2013.

2009 – Fair Work Building and Construction

- Fair Work Building and Construction formed and replaced the Australian Building and Construction Commission.

2009 – Australian states handed industrial relations powers to the Australian Government

- The majority of the Australian States, with the exception of Western Australia, handed over their industrial relations powers to the Commonwealth Government. Most states kept their industrial relations powers over their own public service and agencies.

2009 – Fair Work Australia

- Fair Work Australia was formed and replaced the Australian Industrial Relations Commission.

2009 – Transitional arrangements for modern awards

- The Australian Industrial Relations Commission added transitional arrangements to the majority of modern awards that would cover most workplaces from 1 January 2010.
- New pay rates, penalties and loadings phased over 4 years until the full modern award rates applied from 1 July 2014.

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2008 – 1996

2008 – Award modernisation

- The Australian Industrial Relations Commission started updating and modernising awards. It replaced 1560 state and federal awards with 122 modern awards. The process was completed by December 2009.

2006 – Workplace Relations Amendment (Work Choices) Act 2005

- The federal industrial relations system expanded.
- Many employers and employees previously covered by state industrial relations systems were covered by the federal system.

1996 – Workplace Relations Act 1996

- Workplace Relations Act 1996 started on 25 November 1996.
- Victoria moved into the national workplace relations system.

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1993 – Industrial Relations Reform Act 1993

- The Industrial Relations Reform Act 1993 allowed workplace disputes to be settled by [enterprise bargaining \(www.fairwork.gov.au/Dictionary.aspx?TermID=2152\)](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/Dictionary.aspx?TermID=2152) between employers and unions in the workplace. If the dispute was not settled, the Australian Industrial Relations Commission could settle it.

1988 – Australian Industrial Relations Commission

- The Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission was renamed the Australian Industrial Relations Commission.

1979 – Unpaid maternity leave was introduced

- 12 months of unpaid maternity leave was introduced into federal awards.

1973 – Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission

- The Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission was renamed the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission.

1972 – Equal pay decision

- The Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission's equal pay decision established the right for equal pay for work of equal value. The separate minimum wage for women was removed and from then on any decisions set the same basic rate for men and women.

1966-68 – Equal pay for Aboriginal pastoral workers

- The Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission decided that Aboriginal pastoral workers [☞](http://indigenous-rights.net.au/civil_rights/equal_wages,_1963-66) (http://indigenous-rights.net.au/civil_rights/equal_wages,_1963-66) were to be paid the same minimum wage as white pastoral workers.

1956 – New Arbitration Commission and Industrial Relations Court

- The High Court ruled the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration was unconstitutional.
- The Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration became the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission and was only responsible for making or changing awards. The new and separate court was named the Industrial Relations Court.

WWII – Women's wages were increased to 75% of men's basic wage

- Regulations set during World War II increased the female minimum wage to 75% of a male's wage. This was adopted by the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration as the new standard in 1949-50.

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1935 – One weeks paid leave introduced into awards

- From 1935 to the 1970's, paid sick leave and annual leave were gradually introduced into federal awards until 10 days sick leave and 4 weeks annual leave became standard.

1927 – 44 hour standard week

- The standard week was reduced to 40 hours in 1947. The 38 hour working week was introduced in 1983.

1908 – First minimum wage set

- The Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration set the first minimum wage.
- The minimum wage was based on the Harvester Case [☞](https://www.fwc.gov.au/waltzing-matilda-and-the-sunshine-harvester-factory/historical-material/harvester-case) (<https://www.fwc.gov.au/waltzing-matilda-and-the-sunshine-harvester-factory/historical-material/harvester-case>) . This landmark decision of 1907 set a basic living wage for workers The basic wage was an amount to allow a man to support a family of 5.

1906 – First entitlement to annual leave

- The federal maritime award gave 10 days paid annual leave.

1907 – First entitlement to sick leave

- Under the Shearers' Award a worker could only be absent from work if he was unwell.

1904 – Conciliation and Arbitration Act 1904

- Australian industrial relations system begins
- Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration created to settle disputes between employees, unions and employers. This is the first body of its kind in the world. When it ruled to settle a dispute, the decision was known as an award.

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You might also be interested in

- An overview of Australia's industrial relations system: [Waltzing Matilda and the Sunshine Harvester Factory ☞](https://www.fwc.gov.au/documents/documents/education/resources/Waltzing_Matilda.pdf) (https://www.fwc.gov.au/documents/documents/education/resources/Waltzing_Matilda.pdf)
- [Legislation \(www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/legislation/legislation\)](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/legislation/legislation)

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