

Fair Work Ombudsman recovers \$470,000 for 700 food services workers

20 July 2009

More than 700 food services workers throughout Australia will be backpaid \$470,000 following a national campaign to uphold their workplace rights.

The money – an average of \$671 per employee – is being progressively reimbursed after the Fair Work Ombudsman found they were underpaid.

A six-month campaign has targeted take-away food outlets, supermarkets, grocery stores, bread and cake shops, meat, fish and poultry distributors and dairy manufacturers.

Of 481 employers randomly audited by inspectors, 29 per cent were found to be underpaying 714 staff a total of \$469,502.

The largest recoveries are in NSW (\$203,919) and Victoria (\$140,975) followed by Queensland (\$42,781), Northern Territory (\$38,664), Western Australia (\$28,760), South Australia (\$9188) and Tasmania (\$5215).

In March, the former Workplace Ombudsman recovered \$717,000 for 2170 hospitality workers and in January \$540,000 for 1500 young workers under 24.

Fair Work Ombudsman Executive Director Michael Campbell says he is encouraged that 278 – or 58 per cent – of food service businesses scrutinised so far are compliant with national workplace law.

Mr Campbell says it is also pleasing that all employers found to be in breach have resolved their issues voluntarily after discussions with Fair Work inspectors.

While monitoring compliance with workplace law and investigating breaches, the Fair Work Ombudsman also aims to promote harmonious, productive and co-operative Australian workplaces.

The targeted campaign was conducted between December, 2008 and May, 2009, following a mail-out to 18,000 food service businesses nation-wide.

The biggest underpayments were in the take-away food sector, where \$227,946 is to be reimbursed to 221 workers.

Compliance rates in take-away food outlets audited by the FWO varied from 36 per cent in NSW to a high 72 per cent in Western Australia.

A total of \$71,126 is being recouped for 88 bread and cake shop employees. The FWO found that of the stores audited, compliance varied from 22 per cent in SA to 67 per cent in Victoria.

Other recoveries are:

- \$47,548 for 12 workers at the Sydney markets
- \$47,278 for 107 workers in the meat, fish and poultry sector
- \$38,664 for 195 grocery and supermarket staff
- \$26,448 for 57 employees in the specialised food sector, and
- \$10,492 for 34 workers in dairy manufacturing.

The campaign identified 14 of 23 butchers in Tasmania in breach of workplace law.

In the Northern Territory, 18 of 34 grocers and supermarkets were found to have breaches, 13 of them relating to staff underpayments.

The campaign is yet to be closed, with a further 136 investigations still under way.

Mr Campbell says targeted campaigns – which now account for one in five of the Fair Work Ombudsman's investigations – are an important mechanism for informing and educating various sectors.

"They provide a good opportunity to talk to employers about their legal obligations to staff and for us to generate increased awareness among employees of their workplace rights," he said.

Workers and employers alike can contact the FWO Infoline on 13 13 94 or visit www.fwo.gov.au for assistance.

Read the [National Food Services campaign report \(PDF 420.7KB\)](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/714/National-Food-Services-Campaign-Report-July-2009.pdf.aspx) (www.fairwork.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/714/National-Food-Services-Campaign-Report-July-2009.pdf.aspx)

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