

Campaigns in regional Victoria recover more than \$620,000 for hundreds of workers

5 April 2018

The Fair Work Ombudsman's proactive compliance and education campaigns in Victoria's Dandenong and Warrnambool – Otway Ranges regions have seen 350 workers back-paid a total of \$624,332 in owed wages and entitlements.

Fair Work inspectors audited the time and wage records of over 500 businesses across the two regions for compliance with workplace laws, uncovering a total of 284 breaches.

In the Dandenong region, 42 per cent of the 253 businesses audited were found to be non-compliant with workplace laws:

- Twenty-three per cent of businesses were found to be non-compliant with record-keeping and pay slip requirements, while 26 per cent were not paying their employees correctly.
- Fair Work inspectors recovered \$428,676 in wages and entitlements for 185 workers in the region.
The overall non-compliance rate in Warrnambool – Otway Ranges was similarly high at 41 per cent:
- Of the 251 businesses audited in the region, 21 per cent businesses were non-compliant with record-keeping and pay slip requirements and 28 per cent were not paying their employees correctly.
- Two hundred employees were back-paid a total of \$195,656 as a result of the audit.

Across the two regions, 31 formal cautions, 15 infringement notices (on-the-spot fines) and 9 compliance notices were issued.

In one instance, a grocery business was issued with a compliance notice for failing to meet the minimum base rates and penalty rates under the relevant Award. In line with the compliance notice, the employer back-paid a total of \$14,455 owed to four casual workers.

The Dandenong campaign also led to an Enforceable Undertaking (<https://www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/news-and-media-releases/2016-media-releases/december-2016/roo-oz-sheetmetal-eu-mr-20161202>) between the Fair Work Ombudsman and a sheet metal manufacturer, after the business was found to have underpaid sixteen casual employees from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Across both regions, compliance rates were higher amongst businesses with 15 or more employees as compared to small businesses, highlighting the importance of the Fair Work Ombudsman's continuing focus on providing advice and assistance to small businesses who often lack ready access to professional support.

Acting Fair Work Ombudsman Kristen Hannah says that the regulator seeks to focus its proactive campaigns towards areas where workers may face specific vulnerabilities, or where regions may be experiencing growth or other changes in employment conditions.

The Warrnambool – Otway Ranges region saw strong growth in certain industries despite an overall reduction in employment numbers, indicating possible significant labour movement between industries.

Meanwhile the Dandenong region is home to a potentially vulnerable workforce with a high proportion of people from non-English speaking backgrounds: 58.2 per cent compared to the Victorian state average of 23.1 per cent.

Ms Hannah says that language difficulties can pose a significant barrier to both employers and workers being aware of and complying with their workplace rights and obligations.

"Our proactive compliance and education activities are essential in reaching workers and businesses who require assistance and providing them with the information and advice they need," Ms Hannah says.

"As well as recovering a significant amount in back-pay for hundreds of workers, these campaigns have better equipped businesses in both regions to ensure they are compliant with workplace laws in the future.

"The Fair Work Ombudsman will continue to follow up with businesses in these regions, and non-compliant employers are now on notice that there are no excuses for further breaches."

Employers and employees seeking assistance can visit www.fairwork.gov.au or call the Fair Work Infoline on 13 13 94. Small businesses can opt for priority service by following the prompts. An interpreter service is available on 13 14 50.

The Fair Work Ombudsman's popular Anonymous Report function is available in 16 languages other than English, enabling non-English speakers to report potential workplace breaches in their own language, without being identified. The tool can be accessed at www.fairwork.gov.au/inlanguageanonymousreport (<http://www.fairwork.gov.au/inlanguageanonymousreport>) .

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Read the [Auditing Victoria - Dandenong, Warrnambool and Otway Ranges Campaign Report](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/reports/auditing-victoria-dandenong-warrnambool-and-otway-ranges-campaign-report/default) (www.fairwork.gov.au/reports/auditing-victoria-dandenong-warrnambool-and-otway-ranges-campaign-report/default) (PDF 1.1MB) (<https://www.fairwork.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/1279/victoria-dandenong-warrnambool-and-otway-report.pdf.aspx>)

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Page reference No: 8231

Contact us

Fair Work Online: www.fairwork.gov.au

Fair Work Infoline: 13 13 94

Need language help?

Contact the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) on 13 14 50

Hearing & speech assistance

Call through the National Relay Service (NRS):

For TTY: 13 36 77. Ask for the Fair Work Infoline 13 13 94

Speak & Listen: 1300 555 727. Ask for the Fair Work Infoline 13 13 94

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