

Regional workers back-paid over \$330,000

13 June 2019

The Fair Work Ombudsman has recovered \$331,386 in wages for 725 underpaid workers after conducting surprise audits in Albury-Wodonga, Ballarat and Wollongong.

Fair Work Inspectors targeted regions based on the high population of university students and large number of anonymous reports received from local workers.

In total, 489 businesses were audited, including take-away food outlets, cafes and restaurants, retail businesses, pubs and bars.

Nearly half of the businesses (47 per cent) audited across the regions were not compliant with Australian workplace laws.

The most common breach identified was businesses not paying their staff correctly, either by underpaying the minimum hourly wage or not paying correct penalty rates. Other breaches included businesses not providing staff with proper pay slips and failing to comply with record-keeping requirements.

Over half (55 percent) of the total money recovered during the audits came from hospitality businesses, with 67 employers back-paying \$181,557 to 573 employees.

Overall compliance rates for the regions varied, with 59 percent of businesses in Albury-Wodonga fully compliant with workplace laws; 54 per cent in Ballarat; and 38 per cent in Wollongong.

Fair Work Ombudsman Sandra Parker said the findings highlighted that young workers are particularly vulnerable to receiving below minimum wages and conditions.

"Like many workers in the hospitality industry, young workers in these regions were potentially vulnerable due to their age, visa status and reliance on local jobs to support themselves," Ms Parker said.

"Australia's minimum pay rates are not negotiable, and employers in the fast food, restaurant and café sector need to actively check that they are paying their staff correctly before we visit their business."

"We are committed to improving workplace compliance in the hospitality industry, and we have a range of free tools to help both employers and workers," Ms Parker said.

In response to the breaches, the FWO issued 35 cautions (Formal Cautions), 37 on-the-spot fines (Infringement Notices) and nine compliance notices. Wage back payments made by businesses ranged from \$7.26 up to \$40,434.69.

Information for the fast food, restaurant and café sector is available at www.fairwork.gov.au/frac (<http://www.fairwork.gov.au/frac>) . The FWO has a range of resources available to help employers, including the [Small Business Showcase](https://www.fairwork.gov.au/small-business-showcase) (<https://www.fairwork.gov.au/small-business-showcase>) .

Employers and employees can visit www.fairwork.gov.au or call the Fair Work Infoline on 13 13 94 for free advice and assistance about their rights and obligations in the workplace. A free interpreter service is available on 13 14 50.

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