

FWO recovers \$580,000 in unpaid wages

24 May 2019

Nearly 1,000 workers in regional Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria have been back paid more than \$580,000 after Fair Work Inspectors uncovered widespread non-compliance with Australia's workplace laws.

Inspectors visited 1,385 businesses in Latrobe-Gippsland and Shepparton (Vic), Southern Highlands and Shoalhaven (NSW), and Wide Bay and Ipswich (Qld).

A cross-section of industries was targeted, with the accommodation, hospitality and retail sectors a particular focus for the ombudsman.

Inspectors found 22 per cent of all audited business failed to pay their employees correctly, 15 per cent were in breach of non-monetary obligations by not providing proper payslips or keeping proper employment records, and six per cent failed to both pay their employees correctly and meet their non-monetary obligations.

The FWO recovered an average of about \$600 per underpaid employee. The most common breach of workplace laws was underpayment of the minimum hourly rate, with inspectors also uncovering underpayment of overtime and penalty rates.

Fair Work Ombudsman Sandra Parker said the regulator targeted regions based on intelligence.

"Fair Work Inspectors targeted specific regions after employees contacted us for help, many of whom could be vulnerable to workplace exploitation due to their youth or visa status. It is unacceptable that almost half of the businesses we visited were simply unaware of their obligations under workplace laws and were not paying the lawful minimum hourly wage," Ms Parker said.

"The FWO will revisit these businesses as part of our ongoing national proactive compliance monitoring programs. Appropriate compliance and enforcement action will be used against employers who continue to breach workplace laws."

In addition to recovering lost wages, inspectors issued 39 cautions (Formal Cautions), warning employers about the consequences of continued non-compliance, and 27 on-the-spot fines, which involve penalties of \$5,960 for breaches of pay slip or record-keeping requirements.

"The Fair Work Ombudsman provides free assistance to employers so ignorance is never an excuse for underpaying your staff. This outcome is an important reminder to businesses that they must have robust processes in place to ensure they're complying with workplace laws. Any employers with concerns should contact us before we conduct a surprise visit to their premises," Ms Parker said.

The [Small Business Showcase \(www.fairwork.gov.au/small-business-showcase\)](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/small-business-showcase) makes it easier for small business owners to access resources on workplace laws, with information on hiring, paying and managing employees, handling employee requests and keeping accurate records.

Employees and employers 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 at work.

Background

These audits showed compliance rates with workplace laws were broadly similar across the regions:

- 52% in Shepparton (262 businesses audited)
- 59% in Latrobe-Gippsland (364 businesses audited)
- 55% in Southern Highlands & Shoalhaven (338 businesses audited)
- 57% in Ipswich (212 businesses audited)
- 63% in Wide Bay (209 businesses audited)

Download the [Combined Regional Campaigns Report \(DOCX 319KB\)](https://www.fairwork.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/557/combined-regional-campaigns-report.docx.aspx) (<https://www.fairwork.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/557/combined-regional-campaigns-report.docx.aspx>) (PDF 539.9KB) (<https://www.fairwork.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/557/combined-regional-campaigns-report.pdf.aspx>)

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Fair Work Online: www.fairwork.gov.au

Fair Work Infoline: 13 13 94

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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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