

Bass Coast retail and hospitality sectors targeted for educational visits

2 February 2010

The Fair Work Ombudsman has signalled plans to step up scrutiny of employers on Victoria's Bass Coast.

The regulator has put businesses at Wonthaggi and Phillip Island on notice that they will be subject to random audits.

A team of 13 inspectors from the Agency's Melbourne and Traralgon offices will converge on the region for three days from Monday, February 8.

They are expected to make surprise visits to about 150 businesses in the retail and hospitality industries.

Employers will be asked to open their books to inspectors so they can check if staff are being paid correctly.

The audits will focus on employers' record-keeping and pay slips to ensure they are complying with their legal obligations.

Fair Work inspectors will also provide information and advice to employers.

This includes two free seminars to be held during the campaign:

- 7pm, Monday Feb 8 – Council Chamber, McBride Ave, Wonthaggi, and
- 7pm Tuesday, Feb 9 – Cowes Cultural Centre, Thompson Ave, Cowes.

"These will be very much educational visits," says Fair Work Ombudsman Executive Director Michael Campbell.

"We can help explain changes like the recent introduction of the National Employment Standards (NES) and new Modern Awards.

"We are very serious about our job of building knowledge and fairer workplaces, and campaigns such as this one on the Bass Coast will help us to ensure the community understands its rights and obligations."

Mr Campbell says that in cases where records are not up to scratch or indicate workers are being underpaid, inspectors may launch a wider investigation.

"Where we find records are not adequate or identify other non-compliance issues, we will provide information and assistance to employers and ask that they voluntarily rectify any problems.

"In cases where they don't, or where we suspect deliberate underpayments or other serious breaches have occurred, we may launch a full audit which could lead to court proceedings."

The maximum penalty for a breach of workplace law is \$33,000.

Mr Campbell says the face-to-face visits aim to ensure Bass Coast employers understand their obligations to their employees.

"In regional areas, workers are often reluctant to complain about their terms and conditions of employment for fear they may put their job at risk," he said.

"Similarly, they worry that if they make a complaint, it could impact on their personal life, particularly in small communities.

"It is important regional workers understand there is an Agency they can turn to if they have workplace concerns. Complaints can be made confidentially and anonymously."

Mr Campbell says the Fair Work Ombudsman has a range of user friendly resources that can help employers comply with workplace laws and operate their business according to best practice.

Likewise, he says there are resources to assist employees understand their rights in the workplace.

Those seeking assistance should contact the Fair Work Infoline on 13 13 94 or visit www.fwo.gov.au. For translations call 13 14 50.

The Fair Work Ombudsman promotes harmonious, productive and co-operative workplaces. It also monitors compliance and investigates breaches of national workplace laws.

Bass Coast employers wishing to register for the seminars should contact Bass Coast Council economic development manager

Peter Francis on 5951 3316.

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