

Japanese wedding planners allegedly underpaid \$16,000 - company to face court

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The Fair Work Ombudsman has launched a prosecution against a wedding planning company, alleging it underpaid 14 Japanese nationals more than \$16,000.

Facing court is Austy Pty Ltd, which specialises in organising weddings for Japanese couples wanting to travel to Australia to get married.

Also facing court is the former manager of Austy's Gold Coast office, Kiyomi Maruoka, a Japanese national who resides on the Gold Coast.

Documents lodged in the Federal Magistrates Court allege Austy underpaid 11 Gold Coast-based employees \$8710 and three Perth-based employees \$7630 between December, 2008 and February, 2010.

It is alleged Ms Maruoka was involved in the Gold Coast underpayments.

The allegedly underpaid employees were Japanese women who were in Australia on student and working holiday visas. Most were aged in their 20s.

It will be alleged in court that the employees were classified as 'trainees' and paid 'trainee wages' despite not being registered with any training organisation.

It is alleged several of the employees were paid \$6 an hour for up to 14 weeks before being paid flat rates of \$10 to \$14 an hour, which represented an underpayment of the minimum hourly rate they were entitled to.

Fair Work inspectors discovered the alleged underpayments when they investigated worker complaints. They have since been rectified.

Fair Work Ombudsman Nicholas Wilson says Austy and Ms Maruoka had previously been advised that only workers registered with training organisations could be paid trainee wages.

"This was a key factor in the decision to launch a prosecution," he said.

Austy and Ms Maruoka were allegedly involved in several breaches of workplace laws. They face maximum penalties of \$33,000 per breach and \$6600 per breach respectively.

Employers or employees seeking assistance should contact the Fair Work Infoline on 13 13 94 or visit www.fairwork.gov.au. A free interpreter service is available on 13 14 50.

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