

Fair Work Ombudsman's second report card

21 October 2011

More than 2.4 million visitors sought information, assistance and advice from the Fair Work Ombudsman website last financial year.

The website - www.fairwork.gov.au - delivers a range of free Online self-service tools and resources that can be accessed 24 hours a day.

The Fair Work Infoline - open from 8 am to 6 pm weekdays - also provided help to more than 825,000 callers, the Agency's 2010-11 annual report reveals.

The popularity of an Online Live Chat service increased by 55 per cent, up to almost 55,000 sessions from the 35,400 the previous year.

Email and postal requests for assistance were also up significantly, rising 61 per cent from 22,500 to 36,400.

Fair Work inspectors completed more than 22,000 educational visits to employers in 2010-11 and provided businesses with more than 32,000 education packs.

A key educational initiative saw the development of new resources in partnership with some of Australia's leading employer organisations.

A Shared Industry Assistance Project provided grants totalling \$2.5 million to employer and industry groups to educate employers, particularly those running small businesses, about changes to Modern Awards.

The grants provided for the development of more than 380 individual education products, more than 50 seminars across regional and metropolitan Australia and the availability of 15 Fair Work liaison officers through industry associations.

Additionally, the Fair Work Ombudsman:

- Finalised 22,523 complaints, recovering \$21.3 million in underpaid entitlements for 9747 employees,
- Undertook four national and 28 regional campaigns, recovering a further \$4.7 million for another 7613 underpaid employees,
- Achieved Court-ordered penalties of more than \$2.1 million in 40 litigation matters finalised in 2010-11, and
- Supported 31 large national enterprises, collectively employing more than 209,000 staff, to provide fairer, compliant workplaces.

"Our work promotes harmonious, productive and co-operative workplace relations," Fair Work Ombudsman Nicholas Wilson says.

"The advisory, auditing and compliance services we offer the community are pitched to ensure that as much as possible, Australians have the information they need to pay, or be paid, properly.

"My objective is to progressively re-orient the services in order to expend the greatest effort on the areas of greatest need, especially the employment of young, migrant and other vulnerable workers in workplaces which are not members of industry or employer organisations and the workforce is not unionised."

Mr Wilson says that when Fair Work inspectors identify a problem and contact a business, most employers check their records, realise a problem has occurred, and fix it immediately.

He says the Fair Work Ombudsman's Assisted Voluntary Resolution (AVR) team is now achieving resolution of about half its referrals within the first month.

The Fair Work Ombudsman is currently trialling the expanded use of mediation for low-level underpayment claims, and more than 30 staff have been trained as mediators.

"My motivation is to find ways to more quickly and more effectively bring a standard wage complaint to an end," Mr Wilson said, noting that most money recoveries are quite low, but traditional investigative methods are labour-intensive and time-consuming.

"I have also initiated work associated with building better understanding of workplace rights and obligations for workers in the procurement chains of large companies and the public sectors currently within our jurisdiction (Commonwealth, Victoria, ACT and NT).

"Information indicates attention to workplace relations compliance is sometimes given a low priority, or none at all, as procurement

decisions are made and implemented for low-paid workers, such as cleaners, security officers and call centre employees.

“My strategy of seeking positive engagement from large corporations and the public sector aims to use for positive effect the levers of procurement decisions.”

A copy of the Fair Work Ombudsman’s Annual Report is available at www.fairwork.gov.au.

www.fairwork.gov.au/Publications/Annual%20report/Fair-Work-Ombudsman-Annual-Report-2010-11.pdf
Fair Work Ombudsman Annual Report 2010-2011 (PDF 3.6MB) (www.fairwork.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/710/Fair-Work-Ombudsman-Annual-Report-2010-11.pdf.aspx)

www.fairwork.gov.au/Publications/Annual%20report/Fair-Work-Ombudsman-Annual-Report-2010-11.pdf
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