

Three-year milestone for Fair Work Ombudsman

29 October 2012

Almost 70,000 visitors a week sought free educational information and advice from the Fair Work Ombudsman's website in 2011-12.

The agency's third annual report reveals the flow of Online visitors rose 51 per cent to 3.6 million in total over the past financial year.

More than one million fact sheets, templates and best practice guides highlighting workplace rights and responsibilities were downloaded from www.fairwork.gov.au.

An improved PayCheck Plus wage calculator was used over 497,000 times and a new Online Leave Calculator had more than 84,800 visits in its first five months.

Agency staff also provided in excess of 772,400 tailored responses to calls, web chats, email and the post through the Fair Work Infoline, down in part because more people used voice-response information and Online self-help tools.

Fair Work Ombudsman Nicholas Wilson says the Agency continued to find better ways for Australians to be aware of their workplace rights and obligations.

"In the past year, we have been working to reframe our services in a way that helps more people, more significantly," Mr Wilson says.

"The more time we can direct towards industries or regions with greater compliance issues or vulnerable employees, the closer we can align our services to our goal of promoting harmonious, productive and cooperative workplaces.

"That is why we introduced an education phase before every wage audit campaign and strengthened our culture of voluntary complaint resolution.

"It is also why we trialled a new mediation program, with 83 per cent of 608 workplace disputes resolved in first four months of the 12-month pilot.

"The number of complaints finalised through Assisted Voluntary Resolution, where inspectors work directly with employees and employers to reach a fair and acceptable result without formal investigation, rose 19 per cent to over 9750."

Mr Wilson added: "Of the 28,412 complaints that we finalised, only 51 proceeded to court.

"And of the \$39.8 million we recovered for almost 18,500 underpaid workers, over 55 per cent was through voluntary compliance and just \$379,416 was recovered through the courts."

In 2011-12, the Fair Work Ombudsman also:

- Recovered \$6.2 million of the unpaid wages for 6574 workers through four national and 22 state/territory targeted audit campaigns;
- Made over 12,000 educational visits to Australian workplaces with state partner agencies; and
- Provided assistance and advice at 31 targeted events attended by over 200,000 people.

Mr Wilson added: "Our practice, processes and culture are to work constructively with everyone who approaches us.

"While litigation is used sparingly and carefully, we don't shy away from taking action against employers who engage in serious, wilful and repeated non-compliance," he said.

"However, our goal is to change long-term behaviour by providing tailored information about what people need to pay, or be paid.

"In 2011-12, we launched a pilot National Franchise Program to provide advice to eight franchises in the fast-food, real estate, pharmacy, home care, hair and beauty and banking and finance industries, representing over 39,000 employees.

"The Agency also tackled emerging issues releasing a major report into sham contracting and commissioning research into unpaid work trials and phoenixing."

In 2011-12, the Fair Work Ombudsman was recognised nationally for its leadership across a range of issues, through:

- The Legal Team receiving the NSW Law Society's Excellence in Government Legal Service Award for its innovative use of

in-house lawyers;

- The Group Manager of Corporate and Strategic Development, Ms Su Kearns, being named the Australian Human Resources Institute's D ave Ulrich Human Resources Leader of the Year;
- Becoming a finalist in the Sir Ken Robinson Award for Workplace Flexibility at the Australian Human Resources Institute National Awards; and
- Receiving a Commendation Award at the Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Public Sector Management in recognition of the success of the National Employer Program.

Mr Wilson thanked the many thousands of employers and employees who worked collaboratively with the Agency in 2011-12.

"For our part, we will continue to release capacity to direct our services to where they are most needed," he said.

A copy of the Fair Work Ombudsman's 2011-12 Annual Report is available at www.fairwork.gov.au.

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