

50,000 callers seek Helpline assistance

26 March 2014

The Fair Work Ombudsman's small business helpline has responded to more than 50,000 calls from small business operators since it was launched in December.

The priority service was created to provide reliable and credible information to the small business sector in recognition that many small business people are time-poor.

"Small business operators engage in a wide variety of tasks every day, and sometimes they need extra assistance with payroll and human resources issues that arise in their workplace," Fair Work Ombudsman Natalie James said today.

She said 3000 calls a week was a positive response to the initiative.

Ms James says most of the callers had sought advice on wages, employee leave entitlements and dismissal processes.

"Small businesses often don't have the benefit of in-house human resources and payroll staff, so we place a high priority on assisting them to get the information and advice they need as easily as possible," she said.

"I acknowledge small business people are juggling a multitude of tasks - and this helpline allows them to get the information they need in a fast and convenient way.

"This is a priority service that has been designed to help people who want to do the right thing. It is an education and advisory service, not a compliance tool."

Ms James says her Agency has expanded - and will continue to expand - its suite of free tools and resources to assist businesses ensure they are getting things right.

A guide to hiring new employees has recently been produced to aid small business operators with straight-forward advice about recruiting staff.

It gives plain-English advice about the best way to employ new workers and outlines workplace obligations in simple terms.

"We want to assist small business recruit the right people and grow their business by understanding the process of hiring staff," Ms James said.

The guide, which has step-by-step processes and best practice recruitment tips, can be downloaded at www.fairwork.gov.au/hiring (www.fairwork.gov.au/find-help-for/small-business/hiring-employees) .

The resource is complemented by a free interactive online learning course employers can use to improve their skills in hiring and inducting new staff.

The course includes an interactive tool to help employers build a profile of the employee they want to hire and a video activity to help them practice their interview skills.

The course is available at the Online Learning Centre on the Fair Work Ombudsman's website at www.fairwork.gov.au/learning (www.fairwork.gov.au/how-we-will-help/online-training/default) .

Feedback was sought from a number of representative bodies and business groups when creating the guide and online learning course.

"We're serious about getting input from those who are part of the small business community, and tailoring our services to be of genuine help in day-to-day operations, so consultation is a really important part of our work," Ms James said.

The Fair Work Ombudsman has a particular focus on assisting small businesses to understand and meet their obligations to employees.

In March, the Fair Work Ombudsman met with members of the small business community at a Roundtable in Melbourne to discuss how the Fair Work agencies can better assist small business.

The discussion was co-hosted by the Fair Work Ombudsman, Fair Work Commission General Manager Bernadette O'Neill and Director of Fair Work Building and Construction, Nigel Hadgkiss.

The Commonwealth Small Business Minister, the Hon. Bruce Billson, also attended the forum, spoke to participants and fielded questions.

Ms James says the aim of the Roundtable was to hear first-hand how the small business community could be further supported to make their interactions with workplace laws as straightforward as possible.

The Fair Work Ombudsman has recently established a dedicated Small Business Strategy Team that has been tasked with responding to the needs of small businesses.

A dedicated webpage for small business, including free tools and resources, is available at www.fairwork.gov.au/smallbusiness (www.fairwork.gov.au/find-help-for/small-business/default) .

Employers and employees seeking further information and advice can visit the website or call the Fair Work Infoline on 13 13 94. A free interpreter service is also available on 13 14 50.

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Contact us

Fair Work Online: www.fairwork.gov.au

Fair Work Infoline: 13 13 94

Need language help?

Contact the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) on 13 14 50

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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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