

## Small business finds help is just a phone call away

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The fast-paced world of small business can be confusing and at times catch out even the best operators, a snapshot of calls made to the Fair Work Ombudsman for help shows.

Deli owners, florists, mechanics and even farm suppliers are among the employers who have driven calls to the Agency's Small Business Helpline to 300,000 since the priority service was launched in December, 2013.

Calls from a diverse range of business operators are being answered by the Small Business Helpline team, which is fielding an equally wide range of requests for assistance.

The number one reason small business calls is to ask about wages, followed by conditions, termination of employment, leave and entitlements.

Recent calls to the Small Business Helpline reveal the "helping hand" and advice some employers need to get on with their job and prosper.

A Western Australian garage operator called to pass on that he was more confident to employ more staff after he had received advice on minimum pay rates.

A florist in NSW was directed to the Small Business Fair Dismissal Code Checklist to help her through the sometimes uneasy process of dismissing an employee.

The Small Business Helpline has provided employers with advice on workforce participation, particularly through removing barriers, such as age discrimination, and protecting vulnerable employees, including visa-holders and young workers.

The scope of information and assistance provided has also extended to guidance on employees accessing leave entitlements, travel allowances and taking on casual employees with flexible working arrangements.

Fair Work Ombudsman Natalie James says she wants to make it as easy as possible for people to access the information they need about their workplace, and for people to know where to go for help.

A key role of the Fair Work Ombudsman is to promote productive and co-operative workplaces, and the Agency is extending a helping hand to employer, crafting a suite of tools and resources to strongly support small business in particular.

The Fair Work Ombudsman's website [www.fairwork.gov.au](http://www.fairwork.gov.au) provides an easy-to-access portal to a wide range of free information aimed at helping both employers and employees understand their respective rights and obligations.

Included on the website is template documentation to use when hiring, managing and dismissing staff, including letters of engagement and probation, timesheet and pay-slip templates, leave application forms and a self-audit check list.

The recently-launched mobile-friendly Pay and Conditions Tool (PACT) can assist business owners to calculate the correct pay for their employees and a series of Best Practice Guides is available on a range of topics, including "Small Business and the Fair Work Act".

Small business callers can receive priority service when they call the Fair Work Infoline on 13 13 94 between 8 am and 5.30 pm weekdays. A free interpreter service is also available by calling 13 14 50.

Small business operators can also tap in to the suite of easy-to-follow courses at the Fair Work Ombudsman Online Learning Centre.

The free courses provide advice and guidance on issues including difficult conversations in the workplace, starting a new job, hiring employees and managing performance.

The Fair Work Ombudsman continues to provide and build upon its suite of practical advice that is easy to access, understand and apply in support of encouraging compliant, productive and inclusive Australian workplaces.

"We work closely with employers to help them get the basics right in the first place so that problems don't arise in future," Ms James said.

"Where an issue does arise, we will work with the parties to assist them to resolve the matter, and then put processes in place to

ensure the same mistakes are not made again.

“If employers have misunderstood their obligations, we start with information and advice and encourage self-resolution.

“A conversation in the workplace between the employer and the employee can resolve many problems and ensure ongoing goodwill.”

Follow Fair Work Ombudsman Natalie James on Twitter [@NatJamesFWO](https://twitter.com/NatJamesFWO) (http://twitter.com/NatJamesFWO) , the Fair Work Ombudsman [@fairwork\\_gov\\_au](https://twitter.com/fairwork_gov_au) (http://twitter.com/fairwork\_gov\_au) or find us on Facebook [www.facebook.com/fairwork.gov.au](https://www.facebook.com/fairwork.gov.au) (http://www.facebook.com/fairwork.gov.au) .

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