

Monday 1st March 2021

Small business and unions join together for Award improvements to help recovery.

Australia's leading small business association and the peak trade union body are supporting an agreement between the SDA and Master Grocers Australia that will make changes to the Retail Award which covers about 1.2million workers.

The improvements are in a submission to the Fair Work Commission, and if agreed, will allow retail businesses and workers to agree to increased hours for part time workers that provide flexibility to business and certainty and security for part time workers.

The improvements are supported by the ACTU and COSBOA as a decent and fair response to the challenges faced by the retail sector in the pandemic and will ensure that the recovery does not further casualise work.

The new system requires that any change in hours is done by written agreement between workers and employers and includes a provision that would ensure that any sustained increase in hours can be reviewed and incorporated into workers' contracted hours. This reform will guarantee workers have certainty of hours as the recovery progresses and business is able to adjust to increasing demand.

Importantly, both employers and workers will gain access to arbitration through the Fair Work Commission.

The ACTU and COSBOA said today that this agreement shows that when the interests of real small business and workers are considered, and the ideological obsessions of the big business IR lobby groups are put aside, real improvements to the system can be made that delivers fair flexibility and certainty for both employer and workers.

The ACTU and COSBOA believes these changes will strengthen the use and rights of permanent part time work and avoid the casualisation of the economic recovery. This will also provide small businesses with the confidence and flexibility to rebuild their businesses as part of the economic recovery.

Quotes attributable to COSBOA Chief Executive Officer Peter Strong:

"Small businesses needs strong consumer confidence and to be able to adapt to changing conditions. These new arrangements deliver both by ensuring certainty for working hours but also creating flexibility for businesses to grow permanent jobs as the economy recovers.

"Small businesses want to invest in their employees, giving more hours in a fair and planned way to existing part time workers. This agreement does this by respecting employees rights to certainty and also giving flexibility to small business. Unlike other solutions this agreement provides enforceable rights for business and workers.

"Genuine agreement between unions and employers has always been possible, but not in a process which has been hijacked by ideologues."

Quotes attributable to ACTU Secretary Sally McManus:

“Underemployment is a major problem in our economy, and we risk the jobs recovery in hard hit sectors becoming entirely casualised, with workers having no chance of permanent jobs with permanent rights and predictable hours.

“These new rights will mean greater certainty and protection for working people. More hours when you want and when the business recovers, with secure pay and the guarantee of ongoing work with regular hours and will not leave workers worse off.

“Agreements like this are possible when the needs of ordinary people are put ahead of ideology. There are too many big business lobby fanatics who just want more one-way flexibility by removing protections for workers. There are better ways to approach problems where workers rights can be protected and improved while also addressing the particular concerns and circumstances of hard-hit small businesses. It takes good will, creativity and a willingness to genuinely listen to each other.

“Getting money into the hands of working people and giving them the security to spend is the only way out of the pandemic recession. The Government’s Omnibus Bill will hurt working people and the economic recovery. Flexibility and fairness can only be achieved by working together, the Omnibus Bill imposes solutions that undermine fairness.”

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