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## Employers 'crying wolf' want low paid workers to take a pay cut

Australian Unions say employer groups calling for a wage freeze or a mere \$8 per week rise in the minimum wage are essentially calling for a real pay cut for Australia's lowest paid workers.

ACTU Secretary Dave Oliver said, "Every year no matter what the data, the state of the economy and business outlook employers say an increase to the minimum wage will result in catastrophic outcomes. Every year they are proven wrong."

"This year it's the same old story again and what employers are proposing will serve to basically cut the wages of those who least can afford it."

"We are calling for a \$27 per week increase because it's fair and reasonable and, importantly, will ensure the gap between low paid workers and the rest of the workforce does not widen even further."

Unions reject employer comments that link reasonable wage increases with a drop in employment.

"The panel has previously expressed the view that 'a modest increase in the minimum wage has a very small or even a zero effect on employment' and there is nothing in the current submissions that counter that view," Mr Oliver said.

"Australians do not want to live in a country of 'haves' and the 'have-nots' and the only way for low paid workers to keep up is for the Fair Work Commission to ignore employers scare-mongering and approve a decent increase."

Mr Oliver said unions were also dismayed at Government responses which were full of empty rhetoric and disregard for workers, communities and families.

"What federal and state Government submissions are essentially supportive of is a continued widening of a gap, that within 20 years, will see a class of working poor in Australia that's similar to the United States.

"The Abbott Government is jumping on the employer's bandwagon to once again attack low paid workers."

"The minimum wage is now just 43.3 per cent of average full time wages - the lowest proportion on record," Mr Oliver said.

"If action isn't taken now, by around 2035 that figure could languish below 30 per cent.

"That's why the ACTU is demanding the National Minimum Wage increase to \$649.20 a week for Australia's lowest paid including cleaners, retail and hospitality staff, child care workers, farm labourers, and factory workers.

"If we want to be the country of the fair go then Australia's minimum wage must be increased.

"It is the responsible thing to do and it is the right thing to do - Australians are emphatic, we do not want a US style underclass of working poor in this country.

"Staff are the heart and soul of many businesses and employers should appreciate the contribution these workers make by paying them a fair wage. Not trying to rip them off."

**Media contact: Carla De Campo, 0410 579 575 and Eleni Hale 0418 793 885**