

Thursday, 14 March 2013

## Tony Abbott must match PM's commitment to enshrine penalty rates in law to protect low-paid workers

The ACTU has welcomed Prime Minister Gillard's announcement that penalty rates will be included in the Fair Work Act and has called on Tony Abbott to do the same.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said that all political parties needed to commit to enshrining penalty rates in law to ensure that workers required to work week-ends were adequately compensated.

The Gillard Government today announced it would insert a new modern awards objective in the Fair Work Act to protect penalty rates and make it clear there needs to be additional remuneration for employees who work shift work, unsocial, irregular, unpredictable hours or on weekends and public holidays.

"Penalty rates are paid to more than 500,000 low-paid Australian workers in hospitality, retail, and other sectors who work weekends or public holidays," Ms Kearney said.

"For those in casual or other insecure forms of work, penalty rates are vital to paying rent and bills."

"Penalty rates have been part of the Australian workplace for decades but they are now under attack from employers.

"Removing penalty rates without compensation would be an effective pay cut for these low-paid workers.

The decision by the Prime Minister is the result of major campaign by the union movement to highlight the growing attack on penalty rates by employers, and to protect the Australian week-end.

"Weekend work is often necessary, but there should be recognition that weekend workers sacrifice time with friends and family, and penalty rates provide that," Ms Kearney said.

MS Kearney said employer groups had lodged more than 20 submissions to a Senate Inquiry on penalty rates calling for them to be scrapped or reduced.

These include calls from the National Retail Association for week-end penalty rates to be removed altogether in the fast food industry, and the Restaurant and Catering Association arguing that penalties should only apply in restaurants after an employee has worked six consecutive days.

"There is clearly a concerted push to reduce penalty rates, despite the fact there is no evidence this will create new jobs, and plenty of evidence it will hurt low-paid workers," Ms Kearney said.

"Mr Abbott must now match the Prime Minister's promise and let workers no that he will protect their penalty rates. The Coalition cannot continue to dodge the debate on these important issues for workers."

For more information on the Save Our Weekend campaign visit <http://saveourweekend.org.au/>

**Media Contact: Ben Ruse 0409 510 879**