

NATIONAL INDEPENDENT RETAILERS ASSOCIATION

Media Release

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Fair Work help Line waiting time not fair

The National Independent Retailers Association (NIRA) is concerned about the implementation of the new award system and the support to small business.

Peter Strong, CEO of NIRA stated today “the government is working closely with some organisations on getting information out to small businesses on the new system but in the end that information is confusing, hard to understand and extra information cannot be easily accessed by small business. And the language used is also confusing for example one clause states “*the employer must pay no less than the loading or penalty in this award plus the specified proportion of the transitional percentage,*” was this designed for rocket scientists?”

Mr Strong added. “On the positive side the flexibility clauses in the modern award look like an excellent tool that should be able to be used to benefit employees and small business operators. There is an opportunity for properly negotiated changes that will increase efficiency and job opportunities, but the way the awards are written it is still confusing and getting information about the awards is difficult.”

NIRA notes that over \$10m was provided to unions to better skill their workplace advocates. Mr Strong highlighted “an employer can sit on the Fair Work Australia help line for longer than 90 minutes before they give up and hang up and get back to the business they run. That \$10m donated to the unions would have been better spent developing a support system for the largest group of employers in the country. Small business, particularly small retailers, should have their own specialised help line run by industry experts who can talk the language of the employer.”

Mr Strong highlighted that “a small businesses is actually an individual who cannot possibly manage a complex workplace relations system as well as OH&S, tax requirements, local ordinance, marketing, financial management, stock control as well as earn an income. They aren't big business. They don't have a pay team and a raft of advisers. They haven't got the time to sit on the phone for hours and hours waiting for an answer.”

NIRA asks the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Small Business to ensure that the government's agencies approach to small business should be cooperation, education and access to information, and that support to small business is adequately resourced.

Mr Strong finished by saying “giving union officials deep understanding of workplace laws will not have the same positive results as supporting the employer in the first place. We need to get rid of the adversarial approach traditionally taken by organisations such as FWA towards employers and practice cooperation and support. When you ring FWA the introductory message warns that any information provided may be used to conduct workplace investigations, which is hardly a friendly welcome to a help line.”

Ends

Contact: Peter Strong, CEO NIRA: 0414 961 073