

Submission
No 10

INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF COMMONWEALTH WORKCHOICES LEGISLATION

Organisation:

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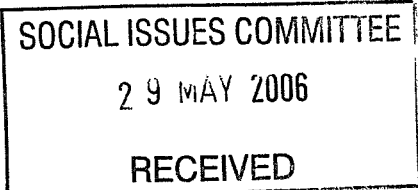
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Theme:

Summary

SUBMISSION

To



STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

**INQUIRY INTO THE IMPACT OF
COMMONWEALTH WORKCHOICES
LEGISLATION**

INTRODUCTION

We are a group of concerned retirees fearful of the direction this Federal Government's Work Choices legislation is taking us. In response we formed a group after a Your Rights at Work public forum in the federal electorate of Lindsay at the end of 2005.

Although we no longer have to fight for wages and conditions at work, this legislation still affects retirees, in particular those dependant on the State Pension. It is also worth noting that retirees do not live in a bubble. Most of us have children, grandchildren and even great grandchildren. We care about what legacy is left for them and recognize that we owe a debt to the past and have a responsibility to the future.

We recently launched a campaign to inform other retirees about the affects of the Work Choices legislation on them and received interest from around 90 concerned retirees at our very first public meeting.

The 'Retirees Care' community group welcomes the opportunity to make written submissions to this Inquiry on behalf of local retirees (both pensioners and self-funded retirees). We would also like the opportunity to make oral submissions to the Inquiry and request that a visit be made to the Penrith area to enable us, and other concerned community groups, to have their say.

We are aware of surveys and polling which have been conducted as part of the Your Rights at Work campaign that clearly demonstrates that people in Penrith are very worried about the Industrial Relations changes and the impact it will have on their families, including retirees. 'Retirees Care' is taking a stand to send the message that the Penrith community and its retirees do not approve of Work Choices.

IMPACTS OF WORKCHOICES ON RETIREES

The Work Choices legislation will directly affect retirees in the following ways:

- The way in which the minimum wage is set will affect the Male Total Average Weekly Earnings and therefore pensions, possibly reducing its value in real terms.
- The health and wellbeing of families will be affected. Rising illness and falling levels of mental and physical health could be caused by the proposed workplace changes as seen in New Zealand as 'the low wage model' replaces the 'living wage model'. A New Zealand Health Ministry Report shows that widening inequality contributed to rising mortality rates, cardiovascular disease, lung and other cancers and suicides and created gaps in life

expectancy. The health of families and the broader community will of course impact retirees who rely on these informal networks for support.

- Retirees will increasingly be asked to fill the gaping holes in the childcare system, exacerbated by Work Choices. Unpredictable and unsociable work hours, shift work and night work coupled with the high cost and inaccessibility of quality child care means grandparents are forced to take up the slack. My husband and I already do two days a week looking after three year old twin boys and the responsibility as well as the restriction placed on our retirement is enormous. Retirees will also be increasingly called on for after school care as parents are called to work 'flexible' hours. What happens to the kids when both parents can be called to work at any time? The grandparents get the call.
- Aged care, already in crisis, seems destined to lose more ground. Under the last Labor Government a proportion of funds to Nursing Homes were tied for the employment of qualified nurses. Under this Government, there is no such tying of the grants and this has led to an increase in unqualified carers. These employees receive very little training and are often itinerant workers, perhaps travellers or migrants still finding their feet in Australia, who can't be expected to complete all the duties of a nurse with so little support behind them. There are also quality assurance issues associated with the vulnerability of nurses who will now have to negotiate their own AWAs. Will they still feel confident enough in their job security to report misdemeanours? Given that authorities rely on whistle blowers in nursing homes to ensure best practice this is a key issue for retirees.
- Casualisation of the workforce continues to devalue our young people in particular and anger retirees who worked so hard for secure working environments in the past. In 1988 74% of all employees were permanent full time workers. Now 60% are fulltime, while 60% of our young (nearly 2 in 3) are casual. This work is sometimes an opportunity to finance study (which has become so expensive that often there is another drain on retirees' finances) or an entrée to full time work. But for many it offers little hope of advancement and is characterised by poor wages, poor conditions, unreasonable hours and no training. They have no say in their work arrangements and often fear the loss of work or conditions if they 'rock the boat'. This will only escalate with Work Choices and the scrapping of the unfair dismissal laws. Casual work makes it impossible for employees to obtain a homeloan or make long-term financial commitments, crippling the growth of communities. The discontent bred through casualisation has also been linked by overseas studies to increases in crime and a breakdown of law an order.
- The impact of Work Choices on safety in the workplace is a major worry for the whole Australian community including retirees. On 28th April my husband and I attended International Day of Mourning for people killed at work. That morning the Sydney Morning Herald quoted a staggering figure in terms of the number of young people killed in the last ten years. The figures quoted were 500 deaths of people under 25 and 310,000 injuries and the article stated that this was more than the first and second world war together. I also am aware of

a young apprentice who fell to his death at a major worksite in Penrith. All of these young people killed and injured have parents and grandparents and if it happened in my family, I know whom I would blame. We are desperately concerned about the safety of all workers under WorkChoices, especially since the allowable conditions in AWAs do not cover safety training and issues.

- Many retirees rely on volunteer services such as firefighters, SES workers, charity helpers and others to help and protect them in times of need. With only 5 minimum conditions in AWAs volunteers who have had their rights secured by an act of parliament previously might be afraid of losing their job or having to make up time lost if called for an emergency. This will leave retirees and the elderly even more vulnerable.
- Retirees recognise our debt to the past and our responsibility to the future. Over 100 years our fathers, mothers and we fought for work conditions for ourselves, our children and future generations. We have many stories to tell and feel angry and frustrated that these conditions, which have been eroded over the past 10 years, were in March 2006 finally stolen.

The Retirees Care submission provides a broad view on the likely impact of the WorkChoices Legislation on our community. It is our view that many workers will be substantially disadvantaged by the changes to the Industrial Relations System. Retirees will also directly be affected as outlined above.

However, more importantly, as I have said before, we do not live in a bubble. These extreme changes will cause insecurity, stress, unsafe work environments, fear, anger, frustration and sadly, family breakdowns. We, as elders in the community, implore that these changes are rejected.

Submission compiled by

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