National education and union news



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Australian unions go for a 4.5 per cent wage boost

Australian Unions will pursue a wage claim of 4.5 per cent in the upcoming Annual Wage Review.

The ACTU's claim will increase the minimum wage to $25.18 per hour, lifting the annual full-time rate by $2,143 to $49,770.

The 4.5 per cent claim directly affects the 2.6 million Australian workers whose pay is set by awards, but it also affects all working Australians, as it sets minimum wage floors.

Lower-paid workers have borne the brunt of this cost-of-living crisis. The most award-reliant workers are in the accommodation and food services, community, care, retail, arts, recreation and health care sectors.

The Australian Unions' claim is both affordable and responsible, underpinned by a strong labour market, inflation within the Reserve Bank's target and real GDP growth trending upwards, and 25,000 new businesses being created each month.

ACTU Secretary Sally McManus said: "Australia's lowest paid workers need and deserve a decent real wage increase. We must remember that our minimum wage for a full-time adult worker is only $47,626 a year. It is not enough and needs to increase. We are not America, and no one should be left without a liveable wage after working full-time hours."

"A 4.5 per cent rise for 2.6 million award-reliant workers is what they need to get ahead of inflation caused by global supply problems and price gouging by the likes of supermarkets and insurance companies," she continued.

"Wages move when unions fight for them and are assisted by governments who are prepared to also do the heavy lifting, by intervening at the Fair Work Commission and updating workplace laws to close wage cutting loopholes."

Bosses argue against higher pay rises

Award-reliant workers should not earn enough to live in Sydney, be able to afford lunch at work, or save for overseas holidays, according to a major employer group, in its submission to the Annual Wage Review.

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) submission, filed last month, criticised Fair Work Commission research into the minimum income that award-reliant workers need for a "healthy living" – because it included $465 in weekly rental costs, set at a low-paid benchmark of about 60 per cent of median rents in Sydney.

ACCI instead said rental amounts should be aligned with rents in lower-priced capital cities, despite the $465 also being well below the median rent in every other capital city.

There are an estimated 224,454 award-reliant workers in Western Sydney that ACCI believes should not earn enough to live there.

The cost of renting a unit in Cabramatta ($420 a week) or in Fairfield ($450 a week) makes it clear that an allowance of $465 a week is scarcely enough.

In the same submission, ACCI argues that spending a mere $3.94 a day to cover the cost of lunch is too much and that putting aside $22.10 per week to save for an

international trip to see family is unnecessary.

The Fair Work Commission's budget standards show that a single person working full time on the current minimum wage of $915.90 falls about $236 a week short of the minimum income standards for a healthy living.

ACCI has put forward a pay increase of just 2.5 percent for lower-paid and award-reliant workers, barely matching inflation. Other employer groups have put forward claims that would see minimum wage workers cop a real pay cut of nearly $800 a year.

According to analysis by the Australia Institute, if the Fair Work Commission had agreed to ACCI's pay claims over the past decade, minimum wage workers would be $160 a week worse off now.

This is a key reason why the ACTU is calling for a 4.5 percent increase in minimum wages so that lower-paid workers can make progress towards a decent standard of living.

ACTU Secretary Sally McManus said: "A major employer group does not think workers deserve enough pay to live in Western Sydney. This is an outrageous insult to working people. Where do employers expect the retail workers, hospitality and care workers of Western Sydney to live?"

Clerical workers face potential wage cuts as employer attack spreads

Australian Unions are warning that employer attacks on penalty rates
have spread beyond the retail sector to target workers in administration, banking and finance.

Key employer lobby groups have made submissions to the Fair Work Commission to remove penalty rates and other award protections in exchange for a one-off
pay increase.

Analysis by the Australian Services Union (ASU) shows these proposals would cost individual clerical workers up to $12,000 per year in wage cuts.

If upheld, workers' break times, shift breaks, hours of work, overtime payments and penalty rates would also be scrapped. A receptionist on $67,000, doing six hours of overtime a week, would stand to lose $300 a week, or close to $16,000 a year under this proposal. A senior administrative worker, who worked Tuesday to Saturday each week, would lose $7,000 each year.

While the Clerical and Admin Award directly sets the pay and conditions of 70,000 workers, the employers' bid, led by the Australian Industry Group (AIG), would undermine the pay and conditions of about 720,000 clerical workers nationwide.

Employers have filed similar applications to strip away penalty rates for workers covered by the Banking, Finance and Insurance (BFI) Award. Workers in these sectors typically receive hundreds of dollars each week in penalty rates to help them get by.

The latest attacks on penalty rates comes as the Australian Retailers Association, with the support of some of Australia's largest retailers, including Coles, Woolworths, Bunnings, 7-Eleven, Kmart and Mecca are seeking to cut penalty rates for an estimated 200,000 retail workers.

If the application is upheld, individual retail workers stand to lose $5,000 a year in wages earned through penalty rates, allowances and overtime, or more than
$1 billion in total.

The Retailers Association wants penalty rates, overtime and other entitlements removed for permanent workers, in exchange for a one-off pay rise to buy out award protections. The retail award covers 350,000 workers and indirectly sets the pay and conditions for another 690,000 workers.

Overall, more than one million Australians face wage cuts if penalty rates are removed from retail, finance and admin awards.

ACTU Secretary Sally McManus said Australian workers needed to earn penalty rates to stay ahead of price pressures. “People deserve to be paid fairly for staying back or working anti-social hours at night and weekends,” she said.

“Penalty rates help workers in retail, admin and finance – most of whom are women – to earn enough income to support themselves and their families.”

May Day 2025

The SSTUWA joined fellow unions on Sunday 4 May for the annual May Day celebration in Fremantle.

The event, which included a festival and march, was a vibrant demonstration of solidarity.

May Day is celebrated annually around the world and recognises the achievements of working people and the union movement.

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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