



18 May 2015

Queensland Parliament
Finance and Administration Committee
By email: fac@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

**SUBMISSION: INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS (RESTORING FAIRNESS) AND
OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2015**

I am writing to make a submission on the *Industrial Relations (Restoring Fairness) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015*. This important Bill will help to restore and protect the rights of thousands of workers in Queensland who have been, or will be, negatively affected by changes brought about by the previous government.

In particular I would like to comment on three particular workplace rights I currently enjoy and stand to lose if the passage of this Bill is not recommended by the Committee: an entitlement to a fifth week of annual leave; consultation about organisational change; and the ability for union representatives to have access to the workplace.

Fifth week of leave

I live and work in far north Queensland and previously lived on the mid-north coast of New South Wales, an area with a very high unemployment rate. When my family and I relocated here in 1998, employment was plentiful, although not highly paid, and so later when my marriage ended, I remained in the area where I could be assured of employment opportunities and the chance to get ahead. And I did: I am now honoured to be serving my community as a local government officer in full-time employment, a position I have held since 2006.

All my family – children and elderly parents – lived on the mid-north coast of New South Wales. I travelled to see them at least twice each year, which entailed a day's travel each way, due to connecting flights. I therefore lost 4-6 days of annual leave each year just on travel to and from the destination. The fifth week of leave, which has been a right of local government employees in far north Queensland, was instituted to recognise the need for extra travel time due to the far north's extended

distance from other locations. Most people who live in this area have relatives that live intra- or interstate. When my children were younger and my parents were dying, this extra week's leave was the most precious thing to me, as it maximised the time I could spend with them.

The far north is also remote from various facilities and services that are commonly required by people from time-to-time: health and psychological care, education, children's sporting or other events, and retail. Attendance at appointments, events, or purchasing needed whitegoods for instance, usually takes a full day including travel, and annual leave is accessed by many to achieve these trips.

A further consideration for far north Queensland is the difficulty local government has in attracting suitably qualified professional staff. The isolation of the area means positions can go unfilled for months, sometimes well over a year, increasing workloads for other staff and reducing service levels to the community. The extra week's leave is a small 'perk' that can sometimes assist with providing a more attractive employment package to applicants.

If this Bill is not recommended for passage, and subsequently adopted, I and my colleagues could lose this vitally important extra week of annual leave when our Enterprise Bargaining Agreement comes up for review this September.

Consultation on organisational change

During my time in local government there have been many organisational ups and downs. My colleagues and I have been through an amalgamation with and a de-amalgamation from a much larger council, and have felt both the professional and personal effects of such change. We have witnessed, or been the subject of, forced organisational change, sometimes without any warning, and this can be devastating to the health, psychological well-being and economic stability of both the employee and their family.

We have seen staff members go on leave, only to come back and find their job no longer exists; or they have been placed into a different role altogether for which they may or may not have had training, or have the ability to perform or enjoy; or that their position has been moved to an office 70 km away.

It is vital for organisations to discuss proposed changes to their structure or job allocation with employees prior to these events so that employees have the time and ability to adjust to the transition. If employees are included in discussions they feel valued, part of the process and may contribute useful ideas. An organisation that is consultative allows employees to take ownership of changes and incites many positive returns.

If this Bill is not recommended for passage, and subsequently adopted, I and my colleagues could lose the right to be consulted about organisational change when our Enterprise Bargaining Agreement comes up for review this September.

Union visitation to the workplace

Enjoyable, secure employment, in which a worker feels they are using their skills and talents, as well as contributing to the community, is one of the greatest enhancements to life experience a person can have. When this is threatened workers can feel isolated, alone and frightened. A union is often the only assistance and support a worker has in this situation, and it is vital that union representatives have adequate and uninhibited entry to workplaces so they can consult with employees. It is also important for unions to be able to come to the workplace and meet with members so workers can stay informed about their industrial rights.

An employee should not feel threatened or intimidated when talking with a union official or representative, nor should they be afraid of recriminations. Employees should feel comfortable and safe in discussing issues face-to-face in the workplace with union representatives or attending meetings.

Unions and management should not be adversaries, but should work together for the good of all those within the organisation.

If this Bill is not recommended for passage, and subsequently adopted, I and my colleagues could lose the right to this vital support and the ability to have our union freely visit our workplace when our Enterprise Bargaining Agreement comes up for review this September.

Conclusion

I urge the Committee to recommend the *Industrial Relations (Restoring Fairness) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015* for passage, and restore fairness for hard working Queenslanders.

Yours faithfully



Susanna Andrews

