



# **Holidays and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015**

**SUBMISSION BY  
THE ELECTRICAL TRADES UNION OF EMPLOYEES**

The Electrical Trades Union (the ETU) is a union of over 15,000<sup>1</sup> members representing employees employed in, or in connection with, the electrical industry.

This submission has been prepared by the ETU in response to the invitation issued by the Finance and Administration Committee to interested parties to comment on the *Holidays and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015* (the Bill).

We welcome the opportunity to put forward our views to the Committee.

The ETU supports and adopts the submissions of the QCU, however, if there is any conflict between the submissions of the QCU and the submissions made by the ETU about specific issues then the ETU submission should be given precedence.

### **Objective of the Bill**

According to the Explanatory Notes of the Bill, “From 2013, the then LNP Government moved the Labour Day public holiday from the first Monday in May (where it had been observed since 1891) to the first Monday in October and also moved the Queen’s Birthday public holiday back to the second Monday in June.”

This decision of the then LNP Government was inconsistent with the preferences of the Queensland community, that had been communicated through the 2011 review of the *Holidays Act 1983*, which sought to keep the Labour Day public holiday in May and move the Queen’s Birthday public holiday to October.

The Bill proposes to “to give effect to the Government’s pre-election commitment ‘Honouring the real Labour Day’ by restoring the Labour Day public holiday to the first Monday in May. The commitment also provided for the movement of the Queen’s Birthday public holiday from June to October.”

### **Background**

Labour Day, known in many countries as International Workers’ Day, is celebrated and marked with a public holiday in more than 80 countries around the world. Labour Day developed out of the 8 hour day movement, which sought to reduce the excessively long hours that were routinely worked in many industries, to allow 8 hours for work, 8 hours for leisure, and 8 hours for sleep.

Labour Day is a day of great significance to the ETU and its members, an opportunity to remember and honour the efforts and sometimes sacrifices of the many people who have been responsible for achieving the working conditions that we enjoy today.

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<sup>1</sup> As at 31 May 2015

In Australia, on 21 April 1856, stonemasons working on the University of Melbourne marched to Parliament House to advance their claims for an 8 hour working day. Shortly afterwards, they reached agreement with their employers for a 48 hour week, and so the 8 hour day was born. This was a major achievement for working people and a victory march was held on 12 May to celebrate. Over the next few years, the 8 hour day was formalised in most states of Australia, with Queensland officially adopting the 48 hour week in 1858.

One of the first Labour Day marches was held in Queensland in 1891, when striking shearers in Barcardine marched with flags and banners. The first May Day march in Brisbane followed, in 1893. The “Eight Hour Day” on the first Monday in May was gazetted as a public holiday by the Queensland government in 1901. It was renamed “Labour Day” in 1912. Since 1901 Labour Day has consistently been celebrated in Queensland on the first Monday in May.

The ETU always has a large contingent of members marching on Labour Day, both in Brisbane and in a number of regional centres around the State. It is an opportunity to gather with other unions and celebrate the working conditions that are currently enjoyed in Queensland. It is a family day that culminates in a festival with music, barbeques, guest speakers, and rides and activities for children.

Labour Day in Queensland is steeped in history and tradition and its observance in May is highly valued, as it has been for more than a century. To many working people it is more than a just a public holiday. For this reason we consider that it would be undesirable to change the date of observance of Labour Day.

ANZAC Day, another public holiday in the first half of the year, is also a day of great significance because of what it stands for. On ANZAC Day we commemorate the dedication and sacrifices of the men and women who have served in the armed forces. You can imagine the public outrage that would ensue, and justifiably so, if there was a change to the date for observance of ANZAC Day. It would be unthinkable to consider moving the ANZAC Day public holiday, and for clarity, this is *not* what the ETU proposes. However for many working people, Labour Day assumes a similar significance, and to restore the Labour Day holiday back to its rightful place in May, as proposed in the Bill would be welcomed by many people.

### **Queen’s Birthday**

The birthday of the sovereign was first celebrated in New South Wales in 1788 when Governor Arthur Phillip proclaimed a holiday to mark the birthday of King George III. Until the 1930s the Sovereign’s birthday was celebrated on the actual date of the King or Queen’s birthday.

The birthday of King George V was 4 June, and after his death in 1936 when the Commonwealth and all of the states (except Western Australia) agreed to proclaim a public holiday near the birth date of King George, and settled on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday in June.

The actual birth date of Queen Elizabeth II is 21 April 1926. The June date for the Queen's birthday holiday bears no relation, in either practical or historical terms, to the actual date of Queen Elizabeth II's birthday. Further, there is no particular memorial or historical significance to the date. It is for this reason that Moving the Queen's Birthday public holiday to October, as proposed in the Bill, is the most appropriate way to more evenly distribute the public holidays throughout the year.

Moreover, such an approach is consistent with the views expressed by the Queensland community during the comprehensive 2011 review of the *Holidays Act 1983*.

### **Proposal**

The ETU proposes that the *Holidays and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015* is implemented so that:

- the Labour Day public holiday be returned to the first Monday in May; and
- the public holiday celebrating the Birthday of the Sovereign be moved to the first Monday in October.