

United Firefighters' Union of Australia, Union of Employees, Queensland

Submission regarding the Holidays and other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015

United Firefighters' Union of Australia, Union of Employees, Queensland (United
Firefighters' Union Queensland) – 8th July 2015

Contact: John Oliver
State Secretary



1. Request for permission to publish this submission

UFUQ requests permission from the committee to publish this submission, particularly for the information of our members, interstate firefighter unions, and Queensland unions affiliated with the Queensland Council of Unions (QCU).

We authorise the publication by the parliament.

2. United Firefighters Union Australia, Union of Employees Queensland (UFUQ)

The United Firefighters' Union of Australia, Union of Employees Queensland (UFUQ) is an industrial organisation of employees registered under the *Industrial Relations Act 1999*.

UFUQ is affiliated with the Queensland Council of Unions (QCU).

UFUQ is bound by awards of the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission and is party to certified agreements made and registered under the Act. UFUQ has a history of representing our members and bargaining under the Act.

UFUQ have over 2500 Members, both full time and part time, who are affected by the Bill. Our members respond to almost every emergency situation not only in Queensland but interstate and internationally. Our members are extremely dedicated in all facets of firefighting and rescue. Our members are highly regarded by the Queensland community.

3. Policy objectives

According to the First Reading speech, the purpose of this Bill is to “return the Labour Day public holiday from the first Monday in October to its rightful place on the first Monday in May”.

The Queen’s Birthday Public Holiday will be moved to October, thereby reversing the changes made by the previous parliament.

UFUQ supports the policy objective of restoring the Labour Day holiday to its traditional date in May.

The Bill is consistent with, and will achieve that objective.

UFUQ understands the policy objectives of moving the Queen’s birthday holiday to October, particularly the notion that public holidays might be spread out more evenly across the calendar year. In our view, the maintenance of the traditional May public holiday for Labour Day is of more significance and importance than spreading public holidays out more evenly.

4. Background

In September 2011, the Bligh government published a discussion paper entitled, “getting the balance right: a proposal on holidays in Queensland”. This paper was based on a survey of over 22,600 Queenslanders, and recommended that public holidays should be spread more evenly across the year. The Bligh Government responded to this by passing legislation in November 2011 to move the Queen’s Birthday public holiday to October.

In August 2012, the previous parliament reversed the implementations proposed by the review, moving the Queen’s Birthday holiday back to the first half of the year and moving Labour Day to October.

Unfortunately, the actions of the majority LNP government at that time, in moving the Labour Day public holiday was seen by many as partisan spite, in the context of a stream of legislation patently targeted at unions and public attacks on organised labour by LNP members of the majority government.

UFUQ would have had no concerns if the Bligh government, or the Newman government had not tampered with the public holidays at all. As far as we are concerned they could have been left alone from the start.

The current Bill before the House is a fulfilment of the Palaszczuk Government’s election promise made during the campaign in January 2015. The moving of the Labour Day public holiday back to May was approved by the Queensland population as part of the elected party’s election mandate.

5. History of Labour Day

The commemoration of Labour Day originated in the “8 hour” movements of the 1850’s. These movements sought to advance society by achieving standard daily working arrangements providing for 8 hours work, 8 hours leisure or education, and 8 hours rest or sleep.

In Australia, a standard 8 hour day was achieved in 1858 and recognised by public processions from 1865. Initially, only those workers who had achieved an 8 hour day marched in the official processions.

From 1890, all workers could participate in 8 hour day processions, to promote the objective, whether they had achieved the standard or not.

During the critical 1891 Shearers Strike in Barcaldine, striking shearers held a procession on May Day, 1 May 1890.

The first official Brisbane May Day march occurred in 1893.

“Eight Hour Day” was formally acknowledged as the first Monday in May in 1901, when it was gazetted as a public holiday by the Queensland government.

In 1912 the public holiday was renamed *Labour Day*.

The public holiday was continued for over a century and traditionally involved an organised procession through the streets of Brisbane ending at a park where a festival takes place to entertain participants and their families.

Currently, the traditional procession and family activities still occur in May, but for the past two years have been held on a Sunday and there is no public holiday.

6. History of the Queen's Birthday Holiday

A day celebrating the monarch's birthday has been observed in Australia since 1788, when Governor Arthur Phillip declared a holiday to mark the birthday of the King of Great Britain.

Until 1936, a holiday was held on the actual birthday of the monarch, but, after the death of George V, it was decided to keep the date on the second Monday in June.

The June date is not the actual birthday of the current monarch, Queen Elizabeth II. The Queen's actual birthday is in April.

There is not much historical significance of the actual date of observance of the monarch's holiday.

The UFUQ is not as concerned about when the monarch's birthday holiday is observed, as we are about preserving the traditional May date for the Labour Day holiday.

7. UFUQ traditional celebration of Labour Day

UFUQ members have traditionally participated in Labour Day commemorations every year at the beginning of May. Our members participate in the traditional processions across Queensland, in May, as well as enthusiastically joining in with other families in festive activities in parks following the marches. Our members' families including children and grandchildren have traditionally enjoyed the day as a welcome family activity as well as a traditional march.

Our members enjoy, not only celebrating our achievements as a union, but also joining with other unions and their families to celebrate their achievements, but also to join with their communities in a leisure day.

The current situation of having a Labour Day public holiday in October, when the traditional Labour Day march and ensuing celebrations are held in May, is incongruous.

UFUQ supports the policy objective of restoring a Labour Day public holiday to the 1st Monday in May as outlined in this Bill, and welcomes the return of the Labour Day public holiday to its rightful place in May.

UFUQ would hate for the swapping around of public holidays to become linked to which particular government holds the majority numbers in parliament.

We ask all committee members, and all elected MP's to respect our values and beliefs about the traditional recognition of the Labour Day holiday in May, despite whether you share our beliefs or not. Wherever possible, we encourage all community representatives to enjoy the procession and recognise the positive contributions made by the labour movement.

Even those who seem to find it difficult from time to time to respect what we stand for and agree with our objectives, could at the very least leave us to enjoy our traditional commemoration one day out of 365 in a year.

UFUQ thanks the committee for the opportunity to provide feedback on this Bill.