



Holidays and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012

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

The Electrical Trades Union (the ETU) is a union of over 12,000 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 Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee to interested parties to comment on the *Holidays and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012* (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, "In 2011, the previous Queensland Government conducted a review of the *Holidays Act 1983*. Community comments obtained through the review's consultation process indicated there was a majority support to move an existing public holiday to the second half of the year". The objective was to more evenly distribute the public holidays throughout the year.

As a consequence, the date of observance of the Queen's Birthday public holiday (Birthday of the Sovereign) was moved from the second Monday in June to the first Monday in October.

The Bill proposes to return the Queen's Birthday public holiday to its original date of observance and instead move the Labour Day public holiday to the second half of the calendar year.

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.

In Australia, on 21 April 1856, stonemasons working on the University of Melbourne marked 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 Barcaldine marched with flags and banners. The first May Day march in Brisbane followed, in 1893. "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 move the Labour Day holiday to October as proposed in the Bill would cause hurt and dismay to 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 2nd 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.

Proposal

The ETU proposes that:

- the first Monday in May be retained as the Labour Day holiday; and
- by way of achieving the stated objective of the Bill - to more evenly distribute the public holidays throughout the year – the holiday celebrating the Birthday of the Sovereign remain on the first Monday in October.