

**Question on Notice**  
**No. 529**  
**Asked on Thursday, 15 March 2007**

**MR CHOI** ASKED THE MINISTER FOR STATE DEVELOPMENT, EMPLOYMENT AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS (MR MICKEL)—

QUESTION:

With reference to informing workers of their rights and options under the new unfair Federal Government Industrial Relations regime— What is his department doing about this matter?

ANSWER:

The Queensland Government has acted to ensure Queensland workers caught up by Work Choices retain as many of the vital employment protections they received under the *Industrial Relations Act* and the strong award system as possible.

Queensland's existing Wageline and Fair Go Hotline services have been providing information, advice and referrals to workers and employers affected by Work Choices, as well as providing on-going assistance to workers and employers covered by Queensland's industrial relations legislation.

Last year, the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission (QIRC) conducted an inquiry into the *Impact of Work Choices on Queensland workplaces, employees and employers*. The response from community groups, concerned parties and employees was overwhelmingly negative – submissions and evidence showed that: workers felt they had lost entitlements; they were being forced to sign AWAs; there was widespread fear of dismissal due to the loss of unfair dismissal protections, and some employers felt that Work Choices' removal of entitlements and protections undermined the trusting relationship they had worked hard to establish with their employees.

In its final report, the QIRC recommended that the Queensland Government establish a Workplace Rights Office or similar body, so that Queensland workers and employers could obtain assistance, information and referral if necessary when they had concerns about workplace practices or any workplace-related legislation, State or Federal.

The State Government will be establishing a Queensland Workplace Rights Ombudsman, who, in association with the services of the existing Fair Go Hotline, will provide advice and assistance to employees and employers about any legislation affecting the workplace, including Work Choices.

The Ombudsman will be in a position to investigate cases of unfair, unlawful or otherwise inappropriate practices, and refer these on to the relevant enforcement agency where necessary.

This "one-stop shop" will mean that workers and employers will be able to obtain the relevant information or be directed to the appropriate agency without having to find their way through the confusing proliferation of agencies existing to deal with Work Choices matters.

Amendments to the *Workplace Safety Act 1996* ensure that authorised representatives have the right of entry to workplaces where certain criteria are met. This is to help ensure safety in the workplace for Queensland workers now covered by Work Choices.

The introduction of the *Child Employment Act 2006* ensures that work does not interfere with children's schooling and that children are prevented from performing work that may be harmful to their health or safety or their physical, mental, moral or social development. Work Choices was not designed to cover these child employment issues, so the introduction of this Act provides protection to all Queensland children, irrespective of the jurisdiction their employment falls under.