

18 May 2004

JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ FROM AUSTRALIAN, STATE, TERRITORY AND NEW ZEALAND WORKPLACE RELATIONS MINISTERS

The Workplace Relations Ministers' Council (WRMC) met in Sydney today.

Ministers discussed the Employment Advocate's application of the no disadvantage test in approving Australian Workplace Agreements and Minister Andrews agreed to convey this to the Employment Advocate.

Minister Andrews stated that significant progress had been made in implementing the Cole Royal Commission's 212 recommendations on the Building and Construction Industry. Minister Andrews announced that the 2004-2005 Federal Budget provides funding of \$136.3 million over four years to fund a package of reforms which will set new standards and achieve cultural change in the building and construction industry.

State Ministers agreed to continue to work on a consultative and collaborative approach in the building and construction industry via the Victorian Ten Point Plan.

Minister Andrews reiterated that the States and Territories will be consulted on any future amendments to the National Code of Practice and Implementation Guidelines for the building industry.

Ministers agreed to release draft National Construction safety material for public consultation including a draft National Standard for Construction and a draft Code of Practice for the Prevention of Falls from Heights.

Ministers agreed to exchange unfair dismissal information on a quarterly basis.

The Council noted a range of key developments in workplace relations including industrial manslaughter legislation, the 2004 Safety Net Review of wages decision of 5 May 2004, and the Termination, Change and Redundancy test case decision of 26 March 2004.

State and Territory Ministers and a representative of the New Zealand Minister of Labour, reported on a number of workplace relations developments in their jurisdictions, including the provision of paid parental leave in New Zealand.

Ministers discussed harmonisation of tribunal registries services and dual tribunal appointments.

Ministers discussed a package of initiatives to strengthen safety leadership in government and agreed to consider this further at the next meeting.

Ministers noted progress on the prohibition of asbestos and requested that officials report back to the next meeting with a detailed implementation strategy to support an import ban of chrysotile *in situ* and further noted progress on developing revised regulatory material on asbestos removal. Officials will report to the next meeting on potential asbestos liability in home renovations and the possibility of a public information campaign across jurisdictions on this issue.

Ministers agreed to develop a strategy to prohibit the importation of explosives, including fireworks without a permit, and to establish a mechanism for communication with the Australasian Forum of Explosives Regulators.

Ministers noted progress with development of complementary OHS strategies and actions including cross border workers' compensation legislation.

Ministers endorsed the declaration of the National Code of Practice for noise management and protection of hearing at work. Ministers agreed that three reviews of the National Standard and National Code for Occupational Noise, National Standard for Plant and the National Certification Standard and Guidelines commence in 2004-05.

Ministers discussed concern at the incidence of psychological injury, trauma and stress claims and agreed that officials would examine common definitions and common exclusionary provisions and report back to the Council.

The Council discussed the Labour Chapter of the proposed Free Trade Agreement with the United States.

The Australian Government informed the States and Territories of its preferred position with respect to national coordination of OHS and workers' compensation in advance of its response to the Productivity Commission's report.

Attendees included: Federal Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, Kevin Andrews; NSW Minister for Commerce and Industrial Relations, John Della Bosca; Victorian Minister for Industrial Relations, Rob Hulls; Queensland Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations, Tom Barton; Western Australian Minister for Consumer and Employment Protection, John Kobelke; ACT Minister for Industrial Relations, Ms Katy Gallagher.

The Northern Territory Minister for Employment, Education and Training was represented by John Kirwan, Commissioner for Public Employment. The South Australian Minister for Industrial Relations was represented by Ms Michele Patterson, Executive Director, Workplace Services. The Tasmanian Minister for Justice and Industrial Relations was represented by Ms Kerrie Crowder. The New Zealand Minister for Labour was represented by Mr Andrew Annakin, General Manager, Employment Relations Service, Department of Labour.