

24 May 2006

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

The Workplace Relations Ministers' Council (WRMC) met in Sydney on 18 May.

Ministers discussed national workplace relations issues, including the implementation of Australian Government's WorkChoices reforms, progress with the work of the Award Review Taskforce and the timetable for the initial wage review of the Australian Fair Pay Commission. State and Territory Ministers reiterated their concerns regarding the WorkChoices legislation.

Ministers noted the information and education campaign currently being conducted by the federal Department of Employment and Workplace Relations to assist employers and employees to understand the federal Government's WorkChoices reforms. Ministers agreed that officials would discuss a number of issues going to the implementation of the WorkChoices reforms.

In discussing State workplace relations developments, Ministers noted the Australian Government's intention to introduce the Independent Contractors Bill into the Australian Parliament in the near future.

State and Territory Ministers also raised concerns about the potential future use of Commonwealth laws and regulations to impact on current and future State and Territory legislation.

In addition, State and Territory Ministers raised their concerns at the proposed amendments to the *Occupational Health and Safety (Commonwealth Employment) Act 1991* which would see self-insurers under the Commonwealth workers' compensation scheme also covered by the Occupational Health and Safety (Commonwealth Employment) Act.

Ministers noted the Australian Government's intention to intervene in all State wage cases, while States and Territories foreshadowed their participation in the Australian Fair Pay Commission's initial wage review.

A report on workplace relations developments in New Zealand was noted by Ministers.

The Australian Safety Compensation Council's (ASCC) business plans for 2005-06 and 2006-07 were endorsed by the Ministers. However, against the background of State and Territory concerns regarding the potential implications of access to self-insurance under the Commonwealth workers' compensation scheme, a number of proposed key objectives relating to the harmonisation of the respective workers' compensation jurisdictions were not endorsed by the States and Territories.

All Ministers other than NSW endorsed the declaration of the *National Standard for Licensing Persons Performing High Risk Work* by ASCC, noting that this would result in greater national consistency and will address concerns with the licensing system under

the previous Standard declared in 1992. NSW advised that it would be unable to comply with the Standard given corruption risks identified by that State's corruption watchdog.

Minister Andrews provided an update on progress to implement a prohibition on the importation of explosives. Ministers agreed that the Australasian Forum of Explosives Regulators (AFER) be requested to report to WRMC through the ASCC on the development of nationally consistent explosives regulation.

Ministers agreed to arrangements which would clear the way for the prohibition of workplace use of all forms of asbestos.

Ministers noted continuing discussions on proposed changes to the Navigation Act and their implications for the national occupational health and safety and workers' compensation scheme for seafarers (the Seacare Scheme).

Ministers noted the report on primary and dual industrial tribunal appointments.

Ministers agreed to meet again late this year.

Attendees included:

- The Hon. Kevin Andrews MP, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations (Cth)
- The Hon. Mr John Della Bosca MLC, Minister for Industrial Relations (NSW)
- The Hon. John Bowler MLA, Minister for Employment Protection (WA)
- The Hon. Rob Hulls MP, Minister for Industrial Relations (VIC)
- The Hon. John Lenders MP, Minister for WorkCover (VIC)
- The Hon. Linda Lavarch MP, Minister for Justice and Attorney-General representing the Hon Tom Barton MP, Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations (QLD)
- The Hon. Steven Kons MHA, Minister for Industrial Relations (TAS)
- The Hon. Michael Wright MP, Minister for Industrial Relations (SA)
- The Hon. Andrew Barr MLA, Minister for Industrial Relations (ACT)
- The Hon. Dr Chris Burns MLA, Minister for Employment and Training (NT)

Apologies:

- The Hon. Tom Barton MP, Minister for Employment, Training & Industrial Relations (QLD)
- The Hon. Ruth Dyson, Minister of Labour, New Zealand
- Dr James Buwalda, Secretary of Labour, Department of Labour, New Zealand, who was to represent the Hon. Ruth Dyson, New Zealand Minister of Labour.