

Modern award system must leave no workers worse off, say unions

Unions will seek to ensure that no workers are left worse off as a result of the latest variations to modern awards requested by the Federal Government.

ACTU Secretary Jeff Lawrence said the requests made by Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard to the Australian Industrial Relations Commission had rejected the worst aspects of an employer fear campaign, and recognised that workers should not be disadvantaged by the award modernisation process.

“Employers have for many years wanted a streamlined award system appropriate for the modern Australian economy,” Mr Lawrence said.

“There has been widespread consultation and hearings, and plenty of opportunities for all parties to raise their issues.

“The union movement is a supporter of award modernisation, and has confidence in the ability of the AIRC to strike the right balance for workers and business.

“Unions’ core principle is that no workers should be left worse off by award modernisation.

“Where there have been concerns that workers will go backwards, unions have made strong representations to the commission to revisit the modern awards, and make sure that no workers are left worse off.”

Unions particularly welcome the intervention by the government in clerical, banking and finance awards to ensure that there would be no reduction to the safety net for call centre workers, Mr Lawrence said.

Ms Gillard has also supported the operation of penalty rates across the retail industry with a long transition period to allow employers to adjust.

“The five-year transition period will give retailers plenty of time to adapt to the modern award,” Mr Lawrence said.

“There is no reason for them to continue making outlandish claims about the cost impact of award modernisation.”

In the horticulture award, unions have concerns that the retention of piece rates may be used to undermine wages.

Unions welcome the introduction of a new compliance regime for the sector and will actively monitor it to ensure there is robust and effective enforcement of award pay and conditions.