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## New laws to help bullied workers find reprieve

Union's welcome new laws that came into effect on January 1<sup>st</sup> 2014 that give bullied workers a way to solve stressful, damaging and sometimes deadly workplace bullying issues.

ACTU Assistant Secretary Michael Borowick said unions have been fighting for these changes for over a decade. "We put bullying on the agenda as a workplace issue and welcome these long awaited laws which we hope will directly and swiftly assist bullied workers."

"Every day unions hear heartbreaking story after story of bullying in the workplace and the significant ramifications on the health and wellbeing of these workers."

"As far as I'm concerned the change in laws hadn't come soon enough."

Mr Borowick said the new laws meant a worker could now lodge an application with Fair Work Australia seeking an order that bullying stop. Fair Work had to respond within two weeks of an application being lodged.

"Previously these workers had very limited if any recourse to assist them in workplace bullying situations. Instead the bullying was often ongoing sometimes to the point where the person was forced to leave that job, required stress leave or/and medication and in some tragic cases committed suicide.

"An order "that bullying stops" is focused on preventing any further bullying and this should not only help workers avoid the health and safety issues that arise but it could decrease the financial cost of bullying on the economy which is estimated to be anywhere between \$6 and \$36 billion annually."

Unions regularly receive complaints from workers. Recent cases include:

- A civilian working in the police force who was segregated, ganged up upon and after five years was forced to leave that workplace suffered post-traumatic stress;
- A nurse who was publically degraded and also punished for taking time off to care for a sick husband and son with change of shifts without notice;
- A retail worker who was verbally abused and humiliated, not allowed to take leave and filmed by the manager who then shared the footage with other staff was forced to apply for worker's compensation;

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- A dental worker was subjected to constant and unwavering bullying and harassment including about her personal life and about her injuries. Despite all her efforts the bullying would not cease; and,
- A person working in a male dominated industry, who experienced sexual, physical and verbal abuse because she is female and gay. She received prank calls on her mobile and at home and a senior colleague grabbed her breast and said, “I can do that because I out rank you.”

Mr Borowick said that these changes do not set out to prevent bullying occurring but they will aim to stop it. However it is estimated that the new laws will only assist 80 per cent of the workforce.

“It’s unfortunate that the laws will not cover 100 per cent of workers. We are looking into the details and await more information about who has been left out.”

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