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Unions fight two-pronged employer attack on public holidays for workers on irregular shifts

An alarming number of full-time workers no longer receive penalty rates for working public holidays, including Christmas Day, or long weekends because they work non-standard shifts.

At the 2012 Modern Award Review, which begins hearings on public holidays today, unions will argue that the growing number of employees working non-standard hours are still entitled to penalty rates for working public holidays.

ACTU Secretary Dave Oliver said people whose standard working week was Sunday to Thursday, for example, should still receive the same number of public holidays as Monday to Friday workers.

“A lot of workers now work unusual shifts or regular weeks that aren’t Monday to Friday, which means they miss out on long weekends or penalty rates. For example, a worker who normally worked Sunday to Thursday could still have to work a five-day week when a public holiday falls on a Friday and everyone else gets an extra day off.

“The current system is weighted against employees who work a non-standard week,” Mr Oliver said.

“Every full-time worker should have the right to the full calendar of public holidays. It should not be a matter of luck depending on what days of the week you are rostered on, how many hours you work, or what industry you are in.

“All Australians deserve public holidays but employers are trying to make sure that workers with non-standard hours continue to miss out.

Employer submissions have argued for penalty rates to be paid only on substitute days where a public holiday falls on a weekend, or for some public holidays to be scrapped altogether.

Employers have also argued to reduce public holiday rights in submissions to the Federal Government’s review of the Fair Work Act, which has recently been completed.

The WA Chamber of Commerce and Industry submission has called for the number of public holidays to be reduced from 11 or 12 in most states, down to 10 across the country.

“Australians should not accept the number of public holidays or rights to penalty rates being reduced, and unions will fight to defend them”, said Mr Oliver.

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