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Government shows it is on side of Australian workers with commitment to preserve penalty rates: unions

The Government's commitment to maintain the penalty rates system shows it is on the side of Australian workers who give up precious family and social time to go to work at weekends, say unions.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said the Government should be congratulated for resisting the scare campaign being played out by business groups who were scheming to slash workers' rights and conditions.

"We are pleased to see the Government's submission to the Fair Work Australia Modern Awards Review agrees that there is no economic argument for cutting penalty rates - which is exactly what employers in the hospitality sector are trying to do," Ms Kearney said.

"Any cut to penalty rates would undermine the principle of a weekend, which is a special time for family and friends, sport and recreation, and special events like weddings and birthdays. Across Australia each weekend, hundreds of thousands of workers go to work in shops, restaurants, hairdressing salons and service facilities and that helps make life easier for the rest of us.

"But while those of us who spend money in those shops and eat out in restaurants usually do so with family or friends, these workers give up that special time so that we can do just that. They often rely on weekend penalty rates in order to pay the weekly household bills, and to compensate the loss of their valuable weekend time."

Ms Kearney said the Government had made clear it was on the side of families and workers, not the side of self-interested employer groups.

"The Government's response to the FWA Modern Awards Review also weakens the attempt to abolish weekend penalty rates for more than 250,000 workers by Independent Senator Nick Xenophon's bill," she said.

Ms Kearney said the bill from Senator Xenophon to amend the Fair Work Act played into the hands of the business groups' scare campaign.

"Senator Xenophon is putting the interests of employer groups ahead of the well-being of Australian workers and their families," she said. "What he and employer groups fail to understand is that not only will this plan be detrimental to workers and their families, but the fact they will have less money to spend in the community, means the flow on effect into the wider economy is immeasurable.

"Despite this bill, unions will use Modern Awards Review to lock in entitlements for people who work on public holidays and weekends, and we are pleased the Government has shown it supports these workers."

Ms Kearney said the ACTU's applications to the review seek to preserve the rights to extra compensation that should come with working on days that most people take for granted as time with family and friends.

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