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## Decent rise to minimum wage is needed to ease growing cost of living pressures, say unions

Australian households are feeling the pinch of sharply rising cost of living pressures, according to new official data which bolsters the case for a decent increase to award minimum wages.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics' Analytical Living Cost Index (ALCI) for employee households rose by 1.7% in the March quarter for an overall result of 4.9% for the previous 12 months.

ACTU Secretary Jeff Lawrence said the new ALCI data confirmed that this year's claim of a \$28 per week increase in the federal minimum wage was necessary for Australia's lowest paid workers to maintain their standard of living.

The claim on behalf of about 1.4 million workers is for a \$28 a week (4.9%) increase in the National Minimum Wage and in other award minimum wages up to the benchmark tradesperson's rate; and a 4.2% increase for other award workers.

It would lift the National Minimum Wage from \$569.90 to \$597.90 – a 74c/hour increase from \$15 an hour.

"This new data shows how hard it is for low-paid workers to make ends meet," Mr Lawrence said.

"Food is the biggest contributor to increased living costs, recording a 2.9% increase in the March quarter alone. Fruit costs rose 16% and vegetables 14.5%.

"Other big hikes were in transport (2.7% in the quarter) and electricity (5.1%).

"A \$28 a week increase would be just enough for the low-paid to keep their heads above water."

Fair Work Australia is conducting its annual hearings into the ACTU's minimum wages claim this week.

Opening the hearings on Monday, the ACTU presented the results of new research into attitudes towards wealth, inequality and the minimum wage.

It shows Australians dramatically underestimate the degree of wealth inequality within society.

"The claim of \$28 a week is a modest and affordable amount at a time when the economy is strong, company profits are growing, yet the costs of living faced by workers and their families are increasing by almost 5% a year," Mr Lawrence said.

"Minimum wage workers are essential to the economy. They are the people who clean our schools and shopping centres, serve us in hotels, who take care of our elderly and our children, yet their value is not reflected in their pay packets.

"We must ensure they are not left behind."

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