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Workers turn to unions for better pay: new ABS data shows lift in union membership

A lift in union membership in the past year shows working Australians are turning to unions to improve their pay and conditions.

New ABS data released today shows there has been a lift in union membership of more than 82,000 workers and the proportion of the workforce in unions has increased from 19% to 20%.

The data shows there are 1.9 million Australians that are members of a union and that union members earn, on average, \$145 a week more than non-members.

There has been a rise in union membership density in both the public and private sectors with the strongest gains among male full time workers.

ACTU Secretary Jeff Lawrence said the new data was very encouraging considering most of the Liberals' WorkChoices IR laws were still in place when the ABS survey took place in August 2009.

"The lift in union membership is very encouraging.

"It shows working Australians are turning to unions to improve their living standards.

"They know that being an active member of a union and bargaining collectively is the best way to improve their wages and conditions.

"There has always been a pay bonus for union members and this year's ABS data shows an enormous 51% increase in the union wage advantage.

"The average union member now earns \$145 a week more than the average worker who is not in a union.

"Overall this is a great result for unions given the Global Financial Crisis.

"It shows the underlying strength of the economy and the success of unions in bargaining and campaigning for growth.

"The ACTU has been actively supporting a focus on union campaigning and growth and it is good to see the work of so many union organisers, officials and delegates starting to bear fruit," said Mr Lawrence.

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