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Expanded Comcare would disadvantage injured workers

Injured workers will be worse off under the Abbott Government's plans to expand Comcare – the national OHS and worker's compensation scheme.

The Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Bill will allow employers who operate in multiple states to exit state and territory workers compensation schemes and self-insure under Comcare.

This will result in lower OHS standards and will disadvantage both workers and small businesses.

Under the government's proposed changes, workers will lose the legal rights they currently have under their state or territory schemes such as WorkSafe in Victoria or WorkCover in NSW.

This includes lower OHS standards and the exclusion of a number of compensation claims.

Smaller businesses will also have to pay higher premiums if big businesses move to Comcare because it will reduce the premium pool for state and territory schemes.

The ACTU opposes the government's push to remove workers' rights to compensation and believes the Comcare scheme should operate at the same standard, or exceed current state and territory schemes.

Key facts:

- 184 Australians lost their lives at work in 2014 (Safe Work Australia);
- ABS statistics shows that 50 out of 1000 workers experience a workplace injury or illness every year;
- Workplace injuries cost Australia an estimated \$60.6 billion, or 4.8% of GDP every year (Safe Work Australia)

Quotes attributable to ACTU Assistant Secretary Michael Borowick:

"The Abbott Government's Bill is a lowest common denominator approach that absolves big business their responsibility for protecting and compensating their workers if they are injured.

"This means less health and safety rights for workers and in the long term less viable state-based workers' compensation systems.

"Workers, especially those in high-risk jobs, could be excluded from compensation if they were moved onto Comcare, this is simply unacceptable and we will oppose any attempts to strip workers of their existing common law rights.

"The Abbott Government should be focused on improving Comcare to be on par, or exceed current state and territory schemes rather than would increase protections for workers."

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