

Friday, February 21, 2025

## The Coalition should join with the government in opposing cuts to penalty rates

The ACTU is calling on the Federal Coalition to support the Government in its intervention to oppose cuts to retail workers' penalty rates.

Opposition Leader Peter Dutton should back the Government in opposing an application by Australia's largest retailers to cut penalty rates for some of Australia's lowest-paid workers.

Employment and Workplace Relations Minister Murray Watt is intervening in the Fair Work Commission hearing to support retail workers trying to stop their penalty rates from being taken away by big retailers, including Woolworths, Coles, Kmart, Costco and 7-Eleven. The ACTU welcomes this intervention.

The Fair Work Commission's ruling could impact more than a million workers, including 360,000 permanent workers in key award-reliant sectors and 660,000 workers on enterprise agreements or contracts that these awards underpin.

Australian Unions urge Coalition Leader, Peter Dutton to join retail workers and the Government in opposing this bid to wipe out retail penalty rates by big business.

The rollback on penalty rates in retail could trigger further challenges to penalty rates across other award-reliant industries, including hospitality, healthcare, fast food and administration.

The Australian Retailers Association application covers permanent workers on the retail award earning \$53,670 or more – only \$6,000 above the national minimum wage of a full-time worker and well below the 'low paid' threshold the Fair Work Commission considers when updating award wages.

As Minister in the previous Coalition Government, Michaelia Cash described weekend penalty rates as outdated and commented that it "seems to deter weekend work."

### Quotes attributable to ACTU President, Michele O'Neil:

"This is a test of priorities for Peter Dutton. Will he be on the side of working people or on the side of big business? It's time the Opposition Leader gave voters clarity about where he stands on penalty rates, wages and work rights.

"The Fair Work Commission cut penalty rates in 2017 with Peter Dutton cheering them on. He then voted eight times against restoring them.

"The last thing Australian workers can afford is a pay cut from Australia's biggest companies. The Australian Retail Association's application is an insult to hard-working Australians who rely on their penalty rates and work rights to make ends meet.

"There's a domino effect when we allow penalty rates to be cut for one group of workers, we risk seeing further cuts across the board for more than a million Australians.

"It's time for Peter Dutton to go on the record about whether he will back big business or workers who rely on their penalty rates."

**ENDS**

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