

'Disrespectful': Coalition appointees dumped from minimum wage panel

David Marin-Guzman *Workplace correspondent*



Updated Mar 10, 2023 – 9.27am,
first published at Mar 9, 2023 – 6.46pm

Labour economist and Coalition appointee Mark Wooden has been unceremoniously dumped as an expert panel member for this year's minimum wage decision in what he described as a "disrespectful" action.

Mr Wooden said he was told on Thursday by the associate of new Fair Work Commission president Adam Hatcher that his services were no longer needed at this year's wage review following the Albanese government's appointment of new expert panel members.

The discovery came as a surprise to Mr Wooden, who had only fulfilled three of the five years of his appointment and was already preparing for this year's review, set to take place over the next few months.

He said fellow Coalition appointee and former Labor minister Martin Ferguson is also no longer part of the panel, although Mr Wooden did not know if Mr Ferguson had resigned.

Mr Ferguson did not return requests for comment before publication.

University of Sydney professor of gender and employment relations Marian Baird and economist and senior Treasury economist Mark Cully will replace the pair. Mr Burke announced Ms Baird's and Mr Cully's appointments as expert panel members on Monday but his announcement only referenced their appointment in relation to new panels on gender pay and the care sector.

"Today I happened to send an email to one member of the [annual wage review] secretariat as I hadn't heard anything [about the review]," said Mr Wooden, who is also a professor at the University of Melbourne.

“I had done some preparatory work [for the review] but I hadn’t heard anything. My email was forwarded to the president’s office and his associate said the composition of this panel is ‘x’ and as a result your services are not required.”

“It was disrespectful not to at least approach me and warn me.”

As his appointment is a five-year-term, Mr Wooden said he was technically still on the panel but his services were just not required.

An FWC spokeswoman said under the Fair Work Act the president was responsible for constituting the expert panel for the annual wage review, which is made up of seven members that must include the president and three experts.

She said the government’s recent appointments meant there were now six expert panel members to choose from and president Hatcher had made the decision on Thursday.

“Professor Wooden and Mr Ferguson were informed by email very shortly after this decision was made that they would not be asked to serve on this year’s annual wage review,” she said.

“As Professor Wooden’s appointment is for a period of five years, Professor Wooden would be eligible for inclusion in future annual wage reviews during this time.”

Mr Wooden attracted controversy last year [<https://www.afr.com/work-and-careers/workplace/extraordinary-intervention-undermined-wage-panel-independence-act-20220506-p5aj3t>] when he made media comments during the election that the last thing the panel wanted was “governments telling us what to do” in response to then prime-minister Scott Morrison’s refusal to back an increase.

Australian Council of Trade Unions secretary Sally McManus complained at the time that the peak union body had “deep concerns” about Mr Wooden after his “extraordinary and highly inappropriate intervention”.

“Mr Wooden’s intervention undermines the independence and impartiality of the entire annual wage review process,” she said.

Mr Burke, who was then in opposition, said at the time he was also “deeply concerned that this intervention by an individual involved in deliberating on the minimum wage jeopardises the integrity of the wage review process”.

“Appointees are meant to be impartial – not politically partisan,” he said.

In 2020, amid fears of a contraction during the pandemic, Mr Wooden issued a [rare dissenting report](https://www.afr.com/work-and-careers/workplace/rare-split-in-minimum-wage-decision-reveals-risk-to-jobs-20200619-p55464) [https://www.afr.com/work-and-careers/workplace/rare-split-in-minimum-wage-decision-reveals-risk-to-jobs-20200619-p55464] to the wage panel’s decision for a 1.75 per cent increase that year and recommended the increase should be nothing.

**RELATED****[RBA is squashing a mythical wage spiral](https://www.afr.com/policy/economy/rba-is-squashing-a-mythical-wage-spiral-20230226-p5cnpe)**

<https://www.afr.com/policy/economy/rba-is-squashing-a-mythical-wage-spiral-20230226-p5cnpe>

**RELATED****[Wages outlook a ‘key risk’ for rates](https://www.afr.com/policy/economy/inflation-driven-wage-rise-could-push-interest-rates-higher-20230126-p5cfn0)**

<https://www.afr.com/policy/economy/inflation-driven-wage-rise-could-push-interest-rates-higher-20230126-p5cfn0>

[David Marin-Guzman](#) writes about industrial relations, workplace, policy and leadership from Sydney. *Connect with David on [Twitter](#). Email David at david.marin-guzman@afr.com*