

**Senate Standing Committee on Education Employment and Workplace
Relations**

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Supplementary Budget Estimates 2012-2013**

Outcome 4 – Workplace Relations and Economic Strategy

DEEWR Question No. EW0682_13

Senator Abetz asked on 17 October 2012 , Hansard page 120

Question

Minister involvement with Abigroup strike

Senator ABETZ: The minister was written to—it looks as though it might be undated—by his counterpart in Queensland about the changes to the Fair Work Act and a transfer of business provisions. Sorry, I withdraw that. He was written to about that as well, but the issue I want to talk about first of all is the Queensland government health project and the ongoing strike that went for about eight weeks with the Abigroup. The project losses are approximately \$300,000 per day from the delay. Can we be advised as to what the minister did to stop this dispute or to involve himself in this dispute to bring it to an end.

Mr Kovacic: The minister spoke to both of the parties and as a result of that there was ultimately a memorandum of understanding negotiated between the parties which led to a return to work and a process for resolving outstanding issues, if I can put it that way, which was to be overseen by Commissioner Simpson from Fair Work Australia. My understanding is that the parties were back before Commissioner Simpson on Monday of this week. I am not aware of the outcome of that.

Senator ABETZ: When did the minister involves himself?

Mr Kovacic: In terms of the precise date I would need to take that on notice.

Senator ABETZ: How long had the dispute been going on for before he finally deigned to visit?

Mr Kovacic: I need to take that on notice.

Answer

The Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations wrote to and spoke to the parties in early September 2012. Following those discussions and letters the parties agreed to talks before FWC which ultimately assisted the parties in resolving the outstanding matters in dispute. On 18 September Minister Shorten also wrote to The Hon Jarrod Bleijie MP, Attorney-General and Minister for Justice in relation to the dispute.

Fair Work Australia ordered industrial action to stop on 6 August 2012. There were Federal Court proceedings during August. The FWC proceedings mentioned by Mr Kovacic relate to private mediation.

The FWBC, the independent building and construction regulator, commenced an investigation into the matter on 7 August 2012. In September it also commenced an investigation into subcontractor compensation claims arising out of the industrial action.