

To Whom It May Concern

I am emailing as a person with a disability and a long-time employee of a federally funded disability employment agency (open employment service) and as an accredited Supported Wage Assessor and a person who has had many unsatisfactory interactions with sheltered workshops since 1987 to register my vociferous support for the position adopted by the National Caucus of Consumer Disability Organisations and the Representatives of People With a Disability on the Government Working Party in relation to the proposed inadequate Employment QA legislation - as follows

"In the current form we do not support the Bill.

For the bill to be acceptable, section 5A must be changed to have the Standards and the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) included together in a disallowable instrument.

The current bill makes the Minister the sole determiner of the KPIs and are non-reviewable by the community and the Parliament.

The KPIs for standard nine (employment conditions) currently allow a host of loopholes for discrimination and exploitation in employment to continue.

We are seeking that wages below the federal minimum wage are determined by the Supported Wage System. This provides people with disability with the only available protection against exploitation.

Currently, many thousands of employees with disability are paid appallingly low wages that are determined by the employers. Employers use a range of assessment methods from 'pick a number' to 'convoluted schemes' that guarantee low wages. Wages as little as 50 cents per hour.

Many employees with disability are forced to agree to poor employment conditions for they are fearful of reprisals. Many employees are expected to negotiate employment contracts and agreements without either the capacity to understand or negotiate. The Commonwealth is aware of this and is not doing anything about it.

We want these practices of exploitation to stop!"

The proposed legislation provides for a valid QA structure, in terms of administration, but will not address fundamental issues of exploitation.

Unless the key performance indicators address current and long standing non-compliance, the proposed QA system will give approval to employer and service practices that are in breach of the principles and objectives of the Disability Services Act."

The Supported Wages System, while not perfect, is the only current mechanism for determining pro-rata wages sanctioned by national IR legislation -and received the overwhelming thumbs-up as a fair and equitable and well-received system by the KPMG FACS-commissioned SWS Evaluation Report. Indeed there are some progressive "Business Services" already using this system -so why can't they all?? And the Department (DFACS) itself highlighted a South

Australian "Business Service" using the SWS one the front page of its last national newsletter (Disability News).

It needs to be enshrined in law as the required minimum standard as an assessment tool; and then any of its imperfections can be rectified.....and not 5-10 years in the future as ACROD would wish, meanwhile prolonging the wage exploitation that has gone on for far too long in Sheltered Workshops.

The Trade Union movement have mounted the Fair Wear campaign to highlight the predicament of around 300,000 outworkers receiving Third World pay and conditions in the Australian textile industry.....now it's time for Parliament to recognise the rights of around 14,000-15,000 even more oppressed and vulnerable workers in commonwealth-funded "Business Services" who will continue to receive Third World wages (\$0.50 -\$2.00 per hour) regardless of their productivity.

The Commonwealth should not be buttressing unviable exploitative enterprises with ongoing taxpayers funding....but redirecting their funding to more appropriate non-employment services.....and this Act in its current form will only enable agencies to jump through standards loopholes and continue their existing wage/employment practices at the expense of workers with disabilities (esp. those with cognitive/intellectual disabilities).

Yours sincerely

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