

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Building and Construction Industry Inquiry

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Senate Inquiry into Building and Construction Industry Improvement Bill 2003

REG MULLINS



I have been a registered plumber since the age of around twenty-two. I am now fifty-seven. I am director of Barden Steeldeck Industries Pty Ltd and we employ around fifty-five people. We do commercial industrial roofing on projects in and around Melbourne. I haven't read the legislation, I'm aware of some of its provisions by word of mouth, and wish to make some comments.

Since the introduction of the pattern bargaining, I believe its giving companies like my own surety of outcome and brought me to a level playing field with other contractors. We can plan to the end of the agreement, which is usually three years. This is terribly important for my business, dealing with major construction. I know my costs for wages and for tendering. To regulate the Industry by negating pattern bargaining would make it very difficult for many contractors, in my view. It would bring a degree of uncertainty making it hard to survive.

A pattern agreement does not suit everyone. Many of the employers I know have opted for another agreement, namely the non-Union agreement. This is to bring more flexibility, into for example, control of working hours. This is because the plumbing industry has a diverse lot of people, different sections to it – maintenance, domestic, and commercial, and not everyone can afford to pay the rates under the Union agreement.

I have a philosophical problem with a structure that does not adequately protect people's employment. Over the last ten years or so, in all industries, the level of employment has been brought down through piece work, sub-contracting, or casual employees. This can lead to social problems, ie. employers have stopped employing people on a proper salary basis. This must be

addressed to insure that people can work their way to retirement, with provisions that ensure a relaxed and comfortable retirement. The lack of correct salary employment for people is a problem our nation will face in the future. I think this is very important and must be addressed.

Since the change of Union administration in 1999, I have found that they are very open to discussion, that is if I have a problem we can sit down and talk the issue through. I find that the Union understands the problems that face a business, and this can lead to fruitful discussions. We don't always agree, but we always find out way forward. We do have an umpire to resolve disputes if necessary, namely the Dispute Board and the Australian Industrial Relations Commission.

One point of issue is protected action. Apart from protected action I would like to see another tool of negotiation.

I believe that with the introduction of the thirty-six hour week that first and second year apprentices are costing the company too much money. Employees should be encouraged to take on apprentices, for the future of our Industry. The Union understands this, and are seeking to have this point addressed, for example capping site allowance.

Signature:.....



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