

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Building and Construction Industry Inquiry

Submission no: 113

Received: 23/03/2004

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11th March 2004

The Secretary
Senate Employment Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee, Suite SG 52
Parliament House Canberra

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am a subcontractor in the building industry in Darwin, Northern Territory. I employ between 10 and 25 blocklayers and labourers and work mostly on larger commercial projects. All of my workers hold ABNs and are paid as subcontractors requiring them to have their own insurance as they are excluded from Worker's Compensation by the NT Work Health Act. Paying these workers as employees with all the attendant conditions would add in excess of 50% to my labour costs and make me uncompetitive with all the blow in subcontractors who tender for the same jobs at cut prices. These reduced rates are then used by the building companies to keep my price as low as possible or else miss out on the contract. Hence the price for blocklaying in Darwin where labour and materials should be higher is roughly half what is paid by the same building companies in southern cities. And the end result is reduced conditions for the worker.

The building industry in Darwin, particularly in safety and insurance aspects, is in the dark ages. I personally have tried to insure for Workers Compensation and not been paid claims and been sued after a worker hasn't had his own insurance, the definition of a worker becoming something only lawyers know after lengthy and costly discussions.

Most builders in Darwin seem to think safety is hard hats and boots and all other issues are irritations. Whole suburbs are built without toilets or site fencing, basic first aid etc. Complaints to Work Health bring little or no response, with the onus on the worker. I personally have a team of blocklayers and haven't had a visit to site by Work Health in the last year despite several calls.

The wages and conditions in Darwin are lower than in any other state or capital city and are kept artificially low by builders "black listing" anyone who complains too loudly. The only voice the average worker has in Darwin is the union. Unfortunately the culture is such that no one wants to join unless there is a problem which obviously puts the union in a rather aggressive and negative light.

This is just a basic outline of conditions as I see it. All statements can be corroborated.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Vern Cridland'. The signature is stylized and somewhat cursive.

Vern Cridland