

Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

1.1 On 29 March 2007, Senator Steve Fielding, leader of the Family First Party, introduced the *Workplace Relations (Restoring Family Work Balance) Amendment Bill 2007* into the Senate. On 10 May 2007, the Senate referred the bill to the Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee for inquiry and report by 14 June 2007. The committee dealt with this private bill concurrently with its inquiry into the provisions of the *Workplace Relations Amendment (A Stronger Safety Net) Bill 2007*.

Purpose of the bill

1.2 The purpose of the bill is to amend the Workplace Relations Act 1996 to restore to Australian workers their public holidays, meal breaks, penalty rates and overtime and to protect their redundancy entitlements. It seeks to achieve this by ensuring Australian workers are guaranteed a paid full day off in lieu paid at not less than a rate of time and one half for working on a public holiday; a meal break after five hours of continuous work; remuneration at not less than a rate of time and one half for working more time than their maximum ordinary hours of work; the preservation of existing redundancy entitlements; and a clear definition of ordinary hours of work.

Submissions

1.3 The committee advertised the inquiry in *The Australian* newspaper on 16 May 2007, inviting submissions by 4 June 2007. Details of the inquiry, the bill and associated documents were available on the committee's website. The committee also directly contacted the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations as well as various employer groups, industry organisations, unions, stakeholders, commentators and academics to invite submissions to the inquiry.

1.4 The committee received 11 submissions, which are listed at Appendix 1. The committee held a public hearing in Canberra on 8 June 2007. However, there were few references made to this bill during the hearing with the focus remaining on the *Workplace Relations Amendment (A Stronger Safety Net) Bill 2007*. The list of witnesses that appeared at the hearing is at Appendix 2 and copies of the Hansard transcript are available through links at <http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard/index.htm>.

Acknowledgement

1.5 The committee thanks those organisations and individuals who made submissions, gave evidence at the public hearing and otherwise assisted with the inquiry.