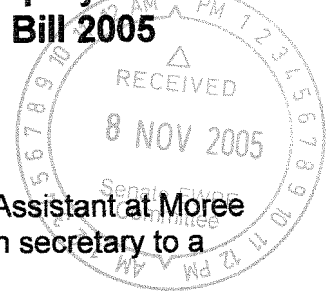


## Submission to the Parliament of Australia – Senate Enquiry into the Workplace Relations Amendment (WorkChoices) Bill 2005

Submission by Kristy LeMilliere  
Secretary, Moree Plains Council



My name is Kristy LeMilliere, I am employed as a Secretary/Personal Assistant at Moree Plains Council. I have been employed by the Council for 5 years. I am secretary to a council director.

I value my work with the Council. However, my family responsibilities are also a very important part of my life. I have a 3 year old son, Steven, who attends daycare. My husband works as a fitter/machiner and because we are not high paid employees we need both our wages to get by. I am worried that the WorkChoices laws will have a terrible impact on our way of life.

As an Aboriginal employee I am well aware of the fact that Aboriginals in my district have much difficulty getting work, there is high unemployment among my people. When we do get work, we tend to be employed in lesser-paid jobs. The good thing about skills based career paths is that at least you can be sure that your wage rate will be based on the skills used on the job. The State Award makes sure that council pays us according to a skills based salary system and although from time to time we have trouble getting management to do our annual assessments, when they are done they are based on skills. Skills based career paths is another thing that John Howard wants to remove from the state award. I am really worried that if we lose skills based pay then we will be more prone to discrimination.

I know that the Government ads promise that workers will be happier and better off under these changes and that discrimination and so on will still be illegal. The problem is, that Award conditions, such as skills based pay, play an important role in making sure that these basic working rights are actually applied at work and that we are treated equally. If we lose these rights in the award, then you'll only get decent treatment if you can negotiate an agreement. The difference is that the state award provides me and everyone else at council with a real guarantee that we will be treated fairly.

I am really angry about the fact that the Government wants employees to bargain individually. There are six support officers in my area, I believe we should all be paid the same based upon the work we do. Individual bargaining is not fair.

The thing I am perhaps most angry about is the fact that in the glossy TV ads the Government says that our working rights are going to be "protected by law". When you look at what is actually happening they are only guaranteeing our right for unpaid maternity leave. As a council worker in NSW, our State Award guarantees me and all other women in NSW local government right of access to paid maternity leave if nine weeks on full pay or eighteen weeks on half pay. You can also use you long service leave and take that at half pay while you are looking after the new baby. The working rules being put in place by the Government will mean that paid maternity leave will not be guaranteed in Awards. In a few years time, if for some reason we can't get an agreement for paid maternity leave, then it will disappear. This is absolutely disgraceful.

When Steven was born I was one of the first employees in our area to get access to paid maternity leave. Paid maternity leave helped our family at a time when we just wouldn't be

able to live on the one wage. We are planning to have another 2 children and if paid maternity leave is taken away then we'll have real trouble getting by. I can't afford not to work. But I can't afford not to be with my family. This could leave us in a very difficult situation, we'd have to think carefully before having another child.

Our State Award provides 15 days a year sick and carer's leave. The leave is accumulated. The Workchoices policy will eventually remove these conditions from Awards leaving lesser safety net of only 10 days cumulative paid personal leave a year.

Carer's leave is very important for me. Because my husband works, if my boy becomes ill at the child care centre I have to be able to take carer's leave to look after him. Losing 5 days paid leave per year out of the award is absolutely disgusting.

The same thing goes for flexible working conditions. Our State Award was recently changed so that the Council could not unreasonably refuse my request for access to flexible working conditions. Normally my job is worked from 8.30 am to 5.00 pm but they had to agree to change these hours to 8.00 am to 4.30 pm to suit my family commitments. This allows me to spend longer time with my child in the afternoons.

I understand that if the changes go through then my Award right to flexible working conditions will eventually be taken away. I will be left with the ability to "negotiate" flexible working arrangements though an individual contract. But what if you can't get an agreement that suits your family needs? This is another area where we will lose conditions.

The Government also wants to enable employees to trade away two weeks out of our four weeks annual leave. I like to have four to six weeks off over Christmas to be with my family. If we are unable to get access to decent wage increases through our annual salary reviews and so on, we could be put in a situation where they perhaps there is no choice other than to trade away this basic entitlement. This is absolutely disgusting.

If all this isn't enough, I have learned that the Senate Inquiry is only going to go for a few days. These changes are absolutely enormous and should not be allowed to occur without a proper and open process. You should come to Moree to look at how these changes will affect my community. If that is not possible, I would like to come to the Senate Enquiry and tell you what these changes will actually mean. I will need to make arrangements for Steven to travel with me.



Kristy LeMilliere  
7 Auburn St  
MOREE NSW 2400

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