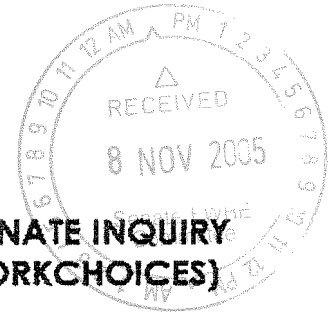


**SUBMISSION TO THE PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA – SENATE INQUIRY
INTO THE WORKPLACE RELATIONS AMENDMENT (WORKCHOICES)
BILL 2005**



SUBMISSION BY MARTIN WYNNE

STORE KEEPER, BOGAN SHIRE COUNCIL

My name is Martin Wynne. I am employed by Bogan Shire Council as a Store Keeper and have been with the council for 13 years. Bogan Council is located in the North West of New South Wales. Our main town centre is Nyngan. We are a small Council in terms of employees. We have only about 56 permanent employees, if you count contractors at places like the pools, the water cart operators etc, the highest count you might get is about 65 employees. However, we cover a big area of New South Wales and we are responsible for delivering a large range of Government services to the people in our district. Once you get this far west there are not really many State or Federal Government services available, most Government support comes through the local council.

I am extremely concerned about the Workchoices changes that are being pushed through the Federal Parliament. I am as much worried about future generations as I am worried about myself. There is so much confusion due to the fact that the Federal Government has been unwilling to come clean with all the innuendoes and advertising about what the new system will actually mean. It is really hard to make a judgment about these changes without having had the proper time to look at the proposals properly, it just seems to be being rushed through.

At Bogan Shire we work under the Local Government (State) Award. From what I can tell, if the changes go through, our Award will be converted into an agreement and in a couple of years time, we will have to negotiate our own agreement at Bogan, or perhaps even negotiate individually. At the moment, even though we are a small council, we get the benefit of having our conditions of employment and general wage increases set through the industry wide state award negotiations. This is terribly important to us, it doesn't matter whether you are employed at Canterbury or Cobar, Balmain or Bourke, at least you get the same general increases which help keep up with the cost of living. The cost of living in this area is getting increasingly difficult. Petrol prices are going up and your dollar doesn't go far enough as it is. Losing the protection of our State Award will be really difficult.

I also understand that a huge number of award conditions will be "not allowable" under the new system. In the bush there are conditions which I fear we may lose.

For example, in the State Award, we currently have provisions about occupational health and safety. In 2001, we got some improvements through the state award to make sure that all new graders, loaders, back hoes, trucks and rollers had to be fitted with air-conditioning. We have incredible temperatures out on the job. We had employees going off with heat stress and the temperatures are up to 48 degrees while people are working plant and equipment. We took a thermometer out on the road, and found that it was 62 degrees Celsius on the side of the tar road in some locations. Since the award changed Council basically had to make sure that all new items of plant and equipment must have air-conditioning. These days we only have one item of plant that is not air-conditioned. I am concerned that if we lost the ability to maintain occupational health and safety standards through the award, this would have a negative impact on keeping conditions like this. We may just go back to the old ways again.

In the North Western district there are still some councils that camp-out. At Bourke, Cobar, Brewarrina and Warren the distances are so great that employees need to travel out once or twice a week and camp overnight in order to get road works and other work completed in distant locations. The award makes sure that employees get access to minimum standards for caravans and accommodation. Before 1995 there was no requirement that the caravans be air-conditioned. Despite there being a lot of complaints, nothing was done about it. It was only when the award change came in requiring air-conditioning that a lot of employees gained this. I honestly believe that if these types of minimum standards are made "not allowable" then employees in the bush will lose out.

I know there are a lot of other award conditions that will be stripped away from the award over a period of years if we go into the Federal system. I understand we are threatened to lose access to basic things such as salary systems, together with award based long service leave and annual leave requirements and so on. This is terrible.

One of the issues I am most angry about is the loss of unfair dismissal laws. We are well under the 100 employee limit. I know there are quite a few country councils in New South Wales that come under the limit. Just within my area I am pretty sure that Bourke, Brewarrina and Warren all come under the 100 employee limit.

The loss of unfair dismissal laws is just devastating, I think it is un-Australian. As the law is now, people can still be dismissed if they do the wrong thing and employers go about it in a proper way. The loss of unfair dismissal laws will really hurt us in local government. From time to time, my workplace gets quite political. Anyone with an opinion could well be singled out, if we lose

our unfair dismissal laws. I am outspoken person. Over the years I have pointed out when, senior management have tried to use their positions to obtain various items unlawfully. Does this mean that I could be sacked? Under these new laws, if you stand up for fundamental rights you could be dismissed. This is just ridiculous.

I am also concerned that in our area we have a lot of employees with literacy problems. Many of the blokes have left school at 14 or 16 years old and I don't believe the Government has given much thought to this. Employees place a lot of trust in the Union and the Union Delegate to negotiate for them and protect their rights. Employees without good education, and without strong numbers behind them will do worse off under this system.

I urge the Senate to reject the Workchoices legislation. Come to Nyngan and have a look at what these laws will be do to us at this workplace.

Alternatively, I am happy to come to Canberra to address the inquiry.



Martin Wynne

Date: 08/11/05.

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