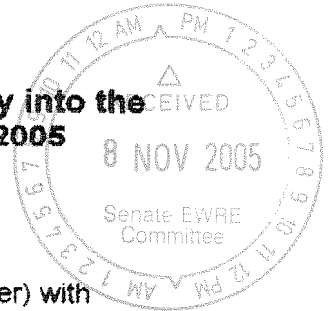


**Submission to the Parliament of Australia – Senate Enquiry into the
Workplace Relations Amendment (Workchoices) Bill 2005**

Submission by Neville Pearson
Plant Operator Armidale Dumaresq Council



My name is Neville Pearson, I am employed as a plant operator (Grader Driver) with Armidale Dumaresq Council in the New England district of NSW.

I am a member of the National Party and I am very concerned about the federal industrial changes. Who gave John Howard the mandate to take away our rights to Awards and have the independent Industrial Relations Commission removed in NSW?

For the last 26 years my conditions of employment have been set by our Local Government (State) Award. The Award has provided me and my workmates with regular general increases and establishes decent conditions giving employees a fair go.

I am concerned that conditions of employment that are supposedly "protected by law" in Workchoices will actually result in a reduction of many working conditions that we currently enjoy in our State Award. Over time Workchoices will reduce the local government community standard in a large number of areas.

Our State Award currently provides for 15 days sick leave to be accrued each year. This paid leave can be used for the illness of the employee or for carer's leave. Workchoices establishes a lesser standard of 10 days paid personal leave.

Workchoices enables employees to cash out annual leave. Most working people in my area are under enough pressure already to work harder to keep up with rising prices. The increase in fuel prices is hitting us hard. Our 4 weeks annual leave is a basic part of the Australian way of life. Employees should not be put under pressure to trade away basic a basic entitlement like your annual leave. If you live in the bush, how will you ever get the chance to travel to have a decent break if you are left with only two weeks leave? This is a ridiculous attack on the Australian way of life.

Women in our industry have fought for years to earn the right to paid maternity leave in our Award. It is unbelievable that John Howard is now proposing to make paid maternity leave unallowable in Awards. Why get rid of this? I thought John Howard believed in supporting working Australians.

Since the early 1990s there have been huge changes and increases in accountability in NSW local government. We are responsible for a big range of services that the other levels of government can't or won't do. As our responsibilities have increased and our skills have grown the State Award has given us access to skills based career paths. We now have a skills based salary system which gives every employees a salary range and an annual skills assessment. But, this didn't come easy and we had to fight every inch of the way to make council comply with the award. I honestly believe that if the requirement for skill reviews was not in the award, then we'd never have the chance for a pay rise. I am outraged that the WorkChoices changes propose to abolish skills based career paths from our State Award. Employees will not get a fair days pay for the work we do. It will mean lower wages.

My Union, the United Services Union, makes sure that the rights of all Local Government workers in NSW are represented when we negotiate with Council and when we negotiate our new Awards. John Howard is actually going to prohibit a whole range of Award conditions that we currently have that make sure we get decent Union representation. These include:

- Trade Union Training Leave
- Union Conference Leave
- Union representation on local Consultative Committees

The Local Government (State) Award has meant that I have had access to decent general pay rises that by and large have kept up with the cost of living during my employment. I am concerned that I will not get decent wage increases under John Howard's new laws. I am worried that my superannuation account will stagnate and will not be able to keep up with the cost of living.

I cannot imagine how my children and their families will cope with these changes.

I have been a member of the National Party since I was 18 years old and I have been a Delegate for the party in Armidale, working for 16 hours a day as a booth operator during election times. There will be no more of that given what John Howard is doing to me and my fellow workers.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss these concerns with the Inquiry.

Yours faithfully

N. K. Pearson J. P.

Neville Pearson

Date: *4/11/05*

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