

22 August 2008

COMMUNIQUÉ FROM AUSTRALIAN, STATE, TERRITORY AND NEW ZEALAND WORKPLACE RELATIONS MINISTERS COUNCIL

Today's 77th meeting of the Workplace Relations Ministers' Council (WRMC) in Sydney was conducted in the same spirit of cooperation that has been a defining feature of these meetings.

Ministers discussed the progress of the Australian Government's workplace relations reform agenda, including the status of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission's award modernisation process. Ministers welcomed the extensive stakeholder consultation that has been undertaken.

Ministers discussed a broad timeframe for considering draft legislation and provided the Deputy Prime Minister with an agreed position on key issues. Ministers undertook to continue this approach.

The Deputy Prime Minister undertook to brief WRMC Members on the substantive Workplace Relations Bill as soon as possible, following the draft legislation being considered by the High Level Officials Group (HLOG). HLOG will continue to meet to finalise views on the development of a national workplace relations system for the private sector.

On the matter of harmonisation of occupational health and safety arrangements across Australia, Ministers discussed the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Intergovernmental Agreement for Regulatory and Operational Reform in Occupational Health and Safety (IGA) and the agreement to implement uniform national laws by 2011. Ministers noted a progress report from the Chair of the National OHS Review panel, Mr Robin Stewart-Crompton, who will provide a first report to Ministers in late October consistent with the terms of reference previously agreed by Ministers.

Ministers were briefed on the progress of the review of the Comcare self-insurance workers' compensation scheme. Ministers were advised that the Government was considering a number of recommendations to strengthen and improve the scheme. Ministers noted that officials would be briefed prior to any announcements about changes to the scheme coming out of the review and agreed that officials would consider and make recommendations to Ministers on how the Commonwealth and State OHS regulators could best work together.

Ministers were updated on the establishment of the Australian Safety and Compensation Council (ASCC) replacement body and noted that the enabling legislation is scheduled for introduction in the Spring 2008 sitting of Parliament.

Ministers agreed to consider participating in award modernisation proceedings relating to the Textile, Clothing and Footwear Industry Award with a view to establishing comprehensive and effective modern award protection for outworkers. They also discussed recent developments in relation to the 457 Visa Scheme Inquiry prior to delivery of the final review report in October 2008.

Ministers endorsed the *National Code of Practice for the Prevention of Falls in General Construction (General Falls Code) (2008)* and the *Comparative Performance Monitoring Report, 10th edition* submitted by the Australian Safety and Compensation Council (ASCC).

Ministers also noted the imminent retirement of Mr Ted Cole after 43 years working in the industrial relations area, primarily as the Commonwealth Advocate in numerous matters before industrial tribunals. Ministers wished Mr Cole well.

Attendees included:

- Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard MP, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations (Cth)
- The Hon Eric Roozendaal MLC, Acting Minister for Industrial Relations (NSW)
- The Hon John Mickel MP, Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations (QLD)
- The Hon Paul Caica MP, Minister for Industrial Relations (SA)
- Mr Andrew Barr MLA, Minister for Industrial Relations (ACT)
- The Hon Tim Holding MP, Minister for WorkCover (VIC)
- Ms Jaala Pulford MLC, Parliamentary Secretary for Industrial Relations; representing the Hon Rob Hulls MP, Minister for Industrial Relations (VIC)
- The Hon Steven Kons MP; representing the Hon David Bartlett MP, Minister for Workplace Relations (TAS)

Apologies:

- The Hon Rob Hulls MP, Minister for Industrial Relations (VIC)
- The Hon David Bartlett MP, Minister for Workplace Relations (TAS)
- The Hon Robert Knight MLA, Minister for Public Employment (NT)
- The Hon Jon Ford, MLC, Minister for Industrial Relations (WA)
- The Hon Trevor Mallard, Minister of Labour (NZ)