

FACTSHEET: INDEPENDENT AIRC ABOLISHED

The Howard Government has reduced the powers of the independent Industrial Relations Commission. This is a recipe for more disputes and lower workplace standards.

For over 100 years Australia's state and federal Industrial Relations Commissions have acted as the independent umpire at work, settling industrial disputes and setting decent minimum standards enjoyed by all workers. The federal and state Industrial Relations Commissions were unique to Australia. They provided an independent forum where working people can take disputes with their employer if things go wrong.

The Commissions were one of the reasons why Australian workplaces have always been safer and fairer than those in other countries, like the USA. They protected living standards and the Australian way of life.

Before the election of the Howard Government	Since election of Howard Government in 1996	Under WorkChoices, from 2006
<p>Industrial Relations Commission had power to settle workplace disputes.</p> <p>Commission decided what minimum wages and conditions should be in awards without government limits.</p>	<p>Australian Industrial Relations Commission's powers reduced.</p> <p>Minimum conditions in awards limited to matters set by Government.</p> <p>Government tries to pass new laws to overturn any Commission decisions it does not agree with.</p> <p>Commission has less power to settle disputes.</p>	<p>Take away Australian Industrial Relations Commission's power to set minimum wages and award conditions.</p> <p>Only 5 minimum conditions for agreements, set by the Government, not independent Commission.</p> <p>Commission has no power to settle disputes, can only invite people to a meeting.</p> <p>Get rid of State Industrial Relations systems as far as possible.</p> <p>The Commission's focus on policing unions and workers if they breach the Government's complex laws.</p>



Instead of the independent Industrial Relations Commissions, the Howard Government has created the so-called Australian Fair Pay Commission. The AFPC will not be required to consider fairness when setting minimum wages. Nor will it set wages in the context of living standards in the community generally.

Free confidential assistance can be obtained from the ACTU's Union Helpline, for both union members and non-members: 1300 362 223.

Before WorkChoices: Australian Industrial Relations Commission	Under WorkChoices: Australian Fair Pay Commission
<p>Fairness and productivity: The AIRC must, when adjusting the safety net of minimum wages, consider economic effects on employment, inflation and productivity, and must also consider the need to provide fair minimum standards for employees in the context of living standards generally prevailing in the Australian community, and the needs of the low paid.</p> <p>The members of the AIRC are independent, and its procedures are transparent.</p> <p>The veracity of the evidence considered by the AIRC is tested through the adversarial processes.</p> <p>Collective bargaining is the primary vehicle for over-award payments.</p> <p>Skill based classification structures provide transparent criteria for progression with between grades.</p> <p>Employees can campaign across an industry for an increase in wages based on changes to work value, or based on gender pay inequity.</p>	<p>Competitiveness and profit: AFPC must, when adjusting wages, consider the capacity for the unemployed and low paid to obtain and remain in employment; employment and competitiveness across the economy; set a minimum wage for low paid workers; set minimum wages for junior employees, employees to whom training arrangements apply and employees with disabilities that ensure those employees are competitive in the labour market.</p> <p>AFPC members appointed for fixed term, all are part time.</p> <p>AFPC determines the timing and frequency of wage reviews; the scope of particular wage reviews; the manner in which wage reviews are to be conducted; and when wage-setting decisions are to come into effect. The process is neither transparent nor accountable.</p> <p>Proposals to promote AWAs as the predominant form of agreement making, in preference to collective agreements and awards. AWAs are associated with lower wages for non-managerial employees.</p> <p>Australian Fair Pay Commission to set new Australian Pay Classification Scales. No role in progression criteria. Skill based classification structures no longer an allowable award matter.</p> <p>Pattern bargaining outlawed.</p> <p>Industry-wide bargaining campaigns to address issues like gender pay inequity will be made illegal.</p>

Free confidential assistance can be obtained from the ACTUs Union Helpline, for both union members and non-members: 1300 362 223.