

Workplace Relations Framework

A Submission to the Productivity Commission

In the Workplace Relation Framework draft report, it recognises the argument that weekend penalty rates are a form of compensation for working unsocial hours and loss of amenity. As a former casual waiter in the event services sector within the hospitality industry, I disagree that there is amenity lost by working on a weekend. Services that are available on weekends are generally available during the week.

But the hours are undeniably very unsocial. As much as the Productivity Commissioners might like to shop and eat whenever they feel like it, we do not yet live in a 24/7 society. Most weekend work is done by casual workers because part- and full-timers do not want to work weekends; they'd rather spend time with their family and friends. My family and partner work daytime hours during the week. When they had time off on the weekends, I was at work. I missed countless family gatherings and celebrations because I had to work weekend nights or was too tired from working until sunrise the day of. I could not see my friends often. In fact, making plans with them was futile because until I saw my roster I didn't know when I would be able to and by then it was too late. Forget trying to make new friends outside of work. Employers would laude casual loading as an excuse for denying a request for a Saturday night off. I understand that casual loading is compensation for a lack of leave entitlements, but penalty rates are compensation for the personal sacrifices we make so that people, like those who work at the Productivity Commission, can shop and eat whenever they feel like it. Even on a Sunday or public holiday.

How dare the Productivity Commission tell us that because we are in low-skilled industries we do not deserve the same level of compensation for our personal sacrifices as a worker in a high-skilled industry does? How dare you argue that our time away from our loved ones is not of equal worth as the time a nurse or pharmacist spends away from his/her loved ones? Award rates are set to compensate highly-skilled workers for their years of training. Likewise workers in low-skilled occupations receive much lower base rates because of their lack of training. Casual loading applies to any employee who does not receive leave entitlements, whether they are high- or low-skilled. Likewise penalty rates should apply equally to all workers. Whether it's 150% or 200%, the Sunday penalty rate should be the same across ALL awards and industries.

The elitism of the Productivity Commission is unjust and horribly insulting. You are arguing that retail and hospitality workers do not deserve Sunday penalty rates because we are less educated, have completed less training. You are arguing that we should not be equal under the law. You are arguing for inequality.

Shame on you.