

# VACC, MTA–NSW, MTA–SA and MTA–WA

## Reply Submission to the Productivity Commission Draft Report on the Workplace Relations Framework

Dated 18 September 2015



## Introduction

This submission responds to many of the draft recommendations set out in the Productivity Commission's Draft Report into the Workplace Relations Framework published in August 2015 (the Draft Report). Not all of the issues dealt with by the Draft Report are addressed in this submission as they do not directly relate to the business operations of members of the Motor Trades Organisations. We have identified the priority issues in this submission as outlined in the Draft Report that potentially pose a significant impact on the vehicle industry in Australia.

This is a submission from the Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce (VACC), including the Tasmanian Automobile Chamber of Commerce (TACC), and its sister organisations: the Motor Trader's Association of New South Wales (MTA-NSW) the Motor Trade Association of South Australia (MTA-SA) and the Motor Trade Association of Western Australia (MTA-WA) (together the Motor Trades Organisations).

The Victorian automotive industry is largely made up of small businesses. Small businesses with between one and 19 employees comprise approximately 54% of all automotive businesses. Medium to large business make up just 4% of the automotive industry, with the remainder operating as sole traders. About 14% of businesses have an annual turnover of less than \$50,000.

According to the Department of Industry, total employment for the automotive industry, which includes both the automotive manufacturing sector, and the automotive retail, service and repair sector account for a total of 315,300 as of the 2013/14 financial year.

## Reply to Draft Recommendations 3.1, 3.3 and 3.4 – Creation of Two Divisions within the Fair Work Commission

The Motor Trades Organisations agree in principle to two distinct division within the Fair Work Commission (FWC). One Minimum Standards Division would be responsible for annual wage reviews and modern award reviews and making award determinations. The other division, the Tribunal Division, would perform a quasi-judicial function relating to unfair dismissal and adverse action disputes, as well as approval of agreements, rights of entry and industrial disputes.

The Draft Report Overview provides for the Minimum Standards Division to comprise of members primarily with expertise in economics, social science and commerce, not the law.<sup>1</sup> Further, the Draft Report proposes that the Tribunal Division should have members drawn from ‘a range of professions, including the law, commercial dispute resolution, ombudsman’s offices and economics.’<sup>2</sup> The Motor Trades Organisations consider that, in order to arise at a balanced outcome, both divisions should include representatives with experience in business, particularly small to medium sized business. Otherwise, the decision making processes of both divisions will not properly take into account the particular operating circumstances and pressures of various sectors of the business community.

The Motor Trades Organisations support a return to the old tripartite model of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission nominations. The tripartite approach involved the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Australian Industry Group and the Australian Council of Trade Unions agreeing on a mutual basis to nominate people for appointment to the Commission by the relevant Federal Government Minister. This ensured that Commissioners comprised a wide range of views and backgrounds, from academia, employees and employers.

### *Summary of recommendations:*

- 1. The FWC should be divided into separate Minimum Standards and Tribunal divisions.*
- 2. Fair Work Commissioners for both divisions should include members of the business community.*
- 3. The old tripartite model of appointments should be reintroduced for the nomination and appointment of Members of the FWC.*

## Reply to Draft Recommendation 3.2 – FWC Appointments

The Motor Trades Organisations support a review of appointments after the expiration of a five year period. However, we do not support the review being conducted by an independent expert appointment panel and the President. Members of the FWC should be required to reapply for their roles at the end of their period in office in accordance with the system outlined in our Reply to Draft Recommendations 3.1, 3.3 and 3.4.

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<sup>1</sup> Productivity Commission, Workplace Relations Framework, Draft Report Overview, p 12.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p 12.

*Summary of recommendations:*

1. *Members of the FWC should be appointed on the basis of a fixed five year term.*
2. *At the conclusion of a Member's fixed term, he or she should be required to apply for a new fixed term position in accordance with standard application processes.*

## Reply to Draft Recommendation 3.5 - FWC Publications

The Motor Trades Organisations support this draft recommendation.

*Summary of recommendations:*

1. *The FWC should publish more detailed information about conciliation outcomes and processes.*

## National Employment Standards

### Reply to Draft Recommendation 4.1

The two Modern Awards most commonly used by members of the Motor Trades Organisations are the *Vehicle Manufacturing, Repair, Services and Retail Award 2010* (VMRSR Award) and the *Clerks – Private Sector Award 2010* (Clerks Award). Both of these Modern Awards include provision for employers and employees to agree to substitute public holidays for an alternative day. These clauses are of great assistance to businesses across metropolitan, regional and country areas, by providing productivity improvements through flexible rostering arrangements to meet their respective operating requirements.

*Summary of recommendations:*

1. *Substitution of the word 'may' for 'shall' in Section 115(3) of the Fair Work Act 2009.*

### Reply to Draft Recommendation 4.2

The Motor Trades Organisations support a limitation on the number of public holidays to which penalty rates apply. There may be occasions where Australian States or Territories, whether for ceremonial or recreational reasons, determine to gazette an additional public holiday. In a national industrial system, comprising of national Modern Awards and employment standards, there should be uniformity across States and Territories as much as possible.

*Summary of recommendations:*

1. *The National Employment Standards should be amended so that employers are not required to pay for leave or any additional penalty rates for any newly designated State and Territory public holidays.*

### Reply to Draft Recommendation 4.3

The Motor Trades Organisations do not consider that there is any significant interest or grounds for extending the existing 20 days of paid annual leave in the National Employment Standards. The creation of a periodical review of annual leave entitlements will, by its very existence, create a new impetus for reduced productivity in an increasingly competitive global environment. Furthermore, this unnecessary additional review will create uncertainty in business.

Employers and employees often agree in the current industrial relations system to extend annual leave entitlements through Enterprise Bargaining arrangements. Many company human resources policies also provide for the additional option for employees to purchase additional leave. These current arrangements provide for significant flexibility between employers and employees, without the need for government intervention.

The Motor Trades Organisations support an extension of the cash-out option for any accrued annual leave where it is mutually agreed between the employer and employee. The cash-out option for Award covered employees should be the same as currently applies for Award/agreement free employees under Section 94 of the *Fair Work Act 2009*.

#### *Summary of recommendations:*

- 1. There should be no review of grounds for extending the existing annual leave entitlements in the National Employment Standards.*
- 2. The cash-out option currently provided for Award/agreement free employees in Section 94 of the Fair Work Act 2009 should be extended to all employees.*

### Reply to Chapter 4 Information Request – Casual Workers

The Motor Trades Organisations oppose any further complications to the current arrangements covering casual workers. Altering the existing remuneration and entitlements conditions in the manner proposed runs the risk of creating great uncertainty as to whether a person originally employed as a casual worker remains in that employment status or has, in effect, become a part time or full time employee. This confusion will be particularly problematic for seasonal and/or regular and systematic casual employees.

#### *Summary of recommendations:*

- 1. That current casual employment structures be left in their current form.*

## Changes to the existing unfair dismissal regime

### Reply to Chapter 5 in General – Unfair Dismissals

The Motor Trades Organisations continue to support the position, espoused in our Submission to the Productivity Commission's Review of the Workplace Relations Framework, that unfair dismissal legislation should be significantly reviewed.<sup>3</sup>

Unfair dismissal legislation has fostered a system of suspicion and doubt amongst employers. Many members of Motor Trades Organisations now consider that there is no such thing as a 'fair' termination. FWC determinations consistently find that a termination may be unfair due to procedural defects regardless of whether there was a valid justification for dismissal. This emphasis on procedure above substance has drastically reduced employer confidence in Australia's industrial relations framework.

In the event that unfair dismissal legislation remains, the emphasis on 'harsh, unjust or unreasonable' should be removed and replaced with an alternative concept.<sup>4</sup> One option is to use the existing concept of 'a fair go all round' in considering the employer's justification for dismissal of the employee. Alternatively, consideration could be given to the particular circumstances surrounding the termination of employment as the primary factor in determining whether a termination was valid and not unfair.

If the concept of procedural fairness, determined by what is 'harsh, unjust or unreasonable', is retained, then it should be a secondary consideration in determining whether the termination was valid or unfair.

#### *Summary of recommendations:*

- 1. If the existing unfair dismissal regime is to continue, then the 'harsh, unjust or unreasonable' concept should be removed, replaced or delegated to a secondary position in determining whether a termination was valid or unfair.*

### Reply to Chapter 5 Information Request – Lodgement Fees for Unfair Dismissals

The Motor Trades Organisations consider the current cost for lodging an unfair dismissal application so minimal that it encourages former employees to file frivolous or otherwise vexatious claims.

#### *Summary of recommendations:*

- 1. If the existing unfair dismissal regime is to continue, lodgement for an unfair dismissal application should be somewhere in the vicinity of \$250.*

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<sup>3</sup> VACC, MTA-NSW AND MTA-SA Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry on the Workplace Relations Framework, pp 12-14.

<sup>4</sup> Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth), s 385.

## Reply to Draft Recommendation 5.1

Providing the FWC with greater discretion to consider unfair dismissal applications prior to conciliation sounds like a good idea in theory. However, the Motor Trades Organisations are concerned that parties' representatives would be able to avoid the possibility of decisions 'on the papers' by obscuring facts and issues in dispute.

Current applications for unfair dismissal are often unclear as to the reasons behind why an applicant was dismissed from their employment. The application form should therefore be modified to require applicants to clearly express how and why the employee was terminated and the precise reason for their application.

### *Summary of recommendations:*

- 1. If the existing unfair dismissal regime is to continue, then the reason for a dismissal must take precedence over the procedural requirements currently prescribed in the Fair Work Act 2009.*
- 2. If the existing unfair dismissal regime is to continue, then the application form should require applicants to clearly state how and why the employee was unfairly terminated and the precise reason for the application.*

## Reply to Draft Recommendations 5.2 and 5.3

The Motor Trades Organisations support these draft recommendations.

### *Summary of recommendations:*

- 1. If the existing unfair dismissal regime is to continue, then the penalty regime for unfair dismissal cases should be restructured to reduce emphasis on procedural defects.*
- 2. If the existing unfair dismissal regime is to continue, the emphasis on reinstatement as the primary goal of unfair dismissal legislation should be removed.*

## Reply to Draft Recommendation 5.4

The Motor Trades Organisations support the retention of the Small Business Fair Dismissal Code. The principles behind the code provide a positive protection for small businesses, who cannot afford adequate human resources teams and work closely with their employees on a 'hands on' day to day basis.

If the Small Business Fair Dismissal Code is to be retained, then the FWC must have regard to the processes set out in the Small Business Fair Dismissal Code Checklist. The past experience of the Motor Trades Organisations is that the FWC has largely ignored the Small Business Fair Dismissal Code and applied the principles of unfair dismissal to small, medium and large businesses in equal measure.

### *Summary of recommendations:*

- 1. If the existing unfair dismissal regime is to continue, the Small Business Fair Dismissal Code should be retained with added emphasis from the FWC.*

## Reply to Draft Recommendations in Chapter 6 – General Protections

The Motor Trades Organisations, in our submission to the Productivity Commission's Review of the Workplace Relations Framework, advocated for the removal of general protections legislation from the *Fair Work Act 2009*.<sup>5</sup> This remains our primary position due to the uncertainty created for members by the subjectivity of the provisions.

Employees who have been validly terminated during a minimum period of employment have utilised the general protections provisions to bring a claim based on frivolous, vague and vexatious claims. These claims are often extremely difficult, time consuming and expensive for employers to respond to, particularly due to the additional burden of a reverse onus of proof. Claims of this nature are generally settled by the employer paying compensation on a no-fault basis to avoid the burdens associated with defending them in the courts.

If the general protections provisions are to be retained in the *Fair Work Act 2009*, the Motor Trades Organisations generally support the recommendations outlined in draft recommendations 6.1 to 6.5.<sup>6</sup>

Another issue of real concern relates to the dismissal laws regarding a termination of employment on account of a temporary illness as prescribed by Regulation 3.01 of the Fair Work Regulations 2009. The requirement that an employee can be absent on unpaid personal leave for a period of up to three months before an employer can bring the employment relationship to an end is unreasonable, especially so in the context of small businesses. It is extremely difficult for a small business to continue to manage operations while an employee is away on an extended period of personal leave. While employers will generally try to cover the usual temporary absences, to deny them any opportunity to recruit a permanent replacement until the employee has been on unpaid personal leave for more than three months is harsh, unjust and unreasonable and can have a disastrous impacts on the business.

### *Summary of recommendations:*

1. *General protections provisions should be removed from the Fair Work Act 2009.*
2. *If the existing general protections provisions are to continue, then the recommendations set out in the Draft Report should be adopted.*
3. *Reduce the period of three months provided for in Regulation 3.01 of the Fair Work Regulations 2009 to one month.*

## Reply to Draft Recommendation 8.1 – Minimum Wages

The Motor Trades Organisations believe that the economic circumstances of employment and living standards of the low paid should be a relevant consideration within the existing annual wage review framework.

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<sup>5</sup> VACC, MTA-NSW AND MTA-SA Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry on the Workplace Relations Framework, pp 9-11.

<sup>6</sup> Productivity Commission, Workplace Relations Framework, Draft Report Overview, p 49.



*Summary of recommendations:*

1. *The FWC should consider the risks of unexpected variations in economic circumstances on employment and living standards of the low paid when making its annual national wage decision.*

## Reply to Draft Recommendation 9.1 – Variations in Uniform Minimum Wages

The Motor Trades Organisations do not support draft recommendation 9.1.<sup>7</sup> Following the introduction of the *Fair Work Act 2009*, there have been automatic regular annual reviews of minimum award wages each year. Small businesses are vulnerable to wage adjustments because of cash flow problems. Employers are aware that regular reviews take place each year and can factor in a wage adjustment. Ah hoc, unpredictable and temporary adjustments during the year would create business uncertainty and cash flow issues.

*Summary of recommendations:*

1. *Modern Award variations should remain within the current review structures.*

## Reply to Chapter 9 Information Request – Junior Rates of Pay

The primary modern award in the vehicle industry, the VMRSR Award, prescribes junior rates of pay.<sup>8</sup> These rates of pay have been part of the primary award covering the industry for many years and have assisted young employees to obtain employment in the industry.

Award based pay structures assist young people to determine whether they are attracted to a long term career in the industry. Junior rates of pay also give employers the opportunity to assess whether young people have an aptitude for a range of roles in the vehicle industry. Given the current economic circumstances and skill shortages in the industry, introducing a more complicated pay structure could result in a counterproductive impact on employment of young people. The award only sets out minimum standards and employers have the opportunity to pay over award payments to compensate for the experience and competency of a young employee in a particular role.

*Summary of recommendations:*

1. *That the status quo continues for junior pay rates as structured in Modern Awards.*

## Reply to Draft Recommendation 9.2 – Review of Apprenticeship and Traineeship Arrangements

The Motor Trades Organisations do not favour another general Australian Government review of apprenticeships and traineeships as proposed in draft recommendation 9.2.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p 50.

<sup>8</sup> *Vehicle Manufacturing, Repair, Services and Retail Award 2010*, cl 14.

There have been enough reviews to date. These reviews have failed to understand that the automotive industry is made up of predominantly small business. The industry is heavily reliant on traditional apprenticeships and traineeships that articulate into trade qualifications. There is often the assumption that industries are alike, which is not the case. For example, after much media attention on the level of funding spent on traineeships in the retail industry, funding was curbed across certificate II qualifications in all industries. This occurred even though the automotive industry utilised certificate II qualifications for real job outcomes, while also providing a pathway for mature aged entrants before committing into a full certificate III apprenticeship.

The automotive training package provides for credit of certificate II automotive qualifications when articulating into a certificate III trade qualification. It is a legitimate pathway to a full trade qualification, and the certificate II qualification leads skills for a real job outcome in the industry.

Suggestions that the Fair Work Commission through an industrial instrument can encourage or support the take up of apprenticeships is not supported. Our experience shows that the award system is not flexible enough to adjust to changes in training standards or training requirements. In our industry the award provides for a simplistic four level wage structure that enables apprentices to progress through at their own pace based on the training plan agreed between the employer apprentice and training provider.

The Motor Trades Organisations do not support complex and inflexible award prescriptions that cannot be amendable to changes in training requirements or training standards. The training plan and the assessment processes are sufficient to ensure progress is made in the apprenticeship. The design of the training package is integral and supports engagement by industry, when industry is involved and consulted in the design of the training package.

Proactive changes by the automotive industry to its training package have addressed and supported the uptake of vocational education in secondary schools by limiting the credit transfer to more align with the individual's ability and the employer's expectations. Other industries have yet to make these changes and perceive vocational learning outcomes in secondary schools as counterproductive to their industry, which is not the case in the vehicle industry. More effort must be made to encourage the uptake and participation of students in skills shortage trades.

The Motor Trades Organisations support a review of the factors that affect the supply and demand for apprenticeships and traineeships, including the appropriate design and level of government, employer and employee incentives with a particular focus on the cost of employing apprentices over 21 years of age, as set out in draft recommendation 9.2.

Increasingly, small to medium sized businesses are being asked to bear the brunt of training costs. Increases to wages for both first and second year junior and adult apprentices from 1 January 2014 has resulted in a disincentive for employers to take on apprentices.

Faced with a significantly higher wage structure over the traditional four year period of an apprenticeship, employers are not prepared to employ adult apprentices because they realise that the higher wage will not necessarily mean higher productivity in a shorter period than junior apprentices. Employers are therefore placed in a situation where the field for

suitable candidates has been reduced because employers are not prepared to accept the higher wage structure for the same productivity outcome as a junior apprentice and also bear the cost of training.

Currently, there are no financial support arrangements or incentives provided by the Commonwealth Government to employers to employ adult apprentices between the ages of 21 to 25 and over. When the adult apprentice classification was introduced into the Federal Vehicle Industry Repair, Services and Retail Award in 1999, the higher wage structure was based on the rationale that as people over the age for 21 were more mature and had more life experience than junior apprentices. This meant they would be able to become more productive quicker than the junior apprentices. This has proved not to be the case.

The build-up in cost pressures on small to medium size businesses has translated to greater expectations being placed on apprentices to become a productive member of the business very early in their apprenticeship. This is irrespective of whether the employee is a junior or adult apprentice.

*Summary of recommendations:*

- 1. That factors which affect the supply and demand for apprenticeships and traineeships should be reviewed*
- 2. The review or development of competency based training arrangements should be dealt with on an industry specific basis.*
- 3. The appropriate design and level of government, apprentice and employer incentives should be reviewed and implemented.*

## Reply to Draft Recommendation 12.1 – Repairing Awards

The Motor Trades Organisations support the removal of the requirement for the FWC to conduct four yearly reviews of the Modern Awards. Since the introduction of Modern Awards on 1 January 2010, there has been a mid-term review commencing in January 2012, which has run into the four year review that commenced on 1 January 2014. As a consequence, there has been no period of stability for employer organisations and their members to read an up to date award for their industry.

The four year review has created an expectation from both employer and employee organisations that there is a requirement to file applications simply because a review period has commenced. These extremely time consuming reviews occur not because of any particular foreseen need for change, but simply because of an arbitrary legislative requirement to conduct a review under the *Fair Work Act 2009*. Employer and employee representative organisations feel an obligation to involve themselves in these reviews to maintain a relevancy in the industrial relations system. Furthermore, the nature of perpetual reviews defeats the object of a Modern Award system of creating a stable Modern Award.

The Motor Trades Organisations do not support proposals that would enable the FWC to review and vary awards as necessary to meet the Modern Awards Objective. The insertion of a provision of this nature runs the risk of increasing the frequency of award reviews beyond that which currently exists under the four year review process. The award modernisation process that commenced in June 2008 was intended to create a stable Modern Award

system, creating awards that were simple and easy to understand. The current review process has failed to produce this outcome.

Ongoing reviews of awards and constant changes frustrate all parties involved in the existing industrial relations framework. The system allows for individual flexibility agreements and enterprise awards that supplement the Modern Award. The Motor Trades Organisations submit that once the Modern Awards are reviewed to a point where they are simple and easy to understand, they should only be subsequently modified for compelling reasons to ensure a stable award system.

The Motor Trades Organisations consider that Modern Awards should only be reviewed on application by a party named in Section 158(1) of the *Fair Work Act 2009*. This would ensure that proposed changes to Modern Awards could be assessed as and when they arise in an otherwise stable system.

*Summary of recommendations:*

1. *The FWC should only review Modern Awards on application by a party named in Section 158(1) of the Fair Work Act 2009.*

## Reply to Draft Recommendation 12.2 – Wage Setting Powers of the Proposed Minimum Standards Division

The minimum wage should be reviewed through a single review procedure. The Motor Trades Organisations support the new Minimum Standards Division of the FWC reviewing the minimum wage through either the review of the Modern Award or the annual wage review, but not both. Duplication of the minimum wage review process would amount to an unnecessary additional burden on all parties submitting reviews, as well as on businesses required to keep up with more frequent increases.

*Summary of recommendations:*

1. *Minimum wage reviews should only be undertaken as part of a single review procedure.*

## Reply to Draft Recommendations in Chapter 15 – Enterprise Bargaining

The Motor Trades Organisations maintain our position on Enterprise Bargaining as set out in our Submission to the Productivity Commission's Review of the Workplace Relations Framework.

*Summary of recommendations:*

1. *That protected industrial action should be precluded if a union has not obtained a majority support determination, conducted good faith bargaining and discussed productivity gains with the employer.*
2. *Productivity offsets must be included in the good faith bargaining process. If not, then a union should be precluded from taking protected action under the Act.*

3. *Union officials should not be able to act as a bargaining agent for employees outside their union's coverage.*
4. *Consideration be given to a return to the previous system where an employer could negotiate with a union or directly with employees.*
5. *Review the process and procedures, including the time prescribed, to approve an Enterprise Agreement as they are presently too complex for small to medium size businesses to consider using such agreements. This review should also aim to reduce the workload of FWC members and allow for private agreements between employers and employees.*
6. *Finally, consideration should also be given to returning to a 'no disadvantage test' rather than the BOOT, which is too restrictive and prevents employers from achieving flexible arrangements appropriate to their workplace.*
7. *A simpler cancellation process that takes account of changed economic or business operating circumstances.*

## Reply to Draft Recommendations in Chapter 16 – Individual Arrangements

The Motor Trades Organisations support these draft recommendations.<sup>9</sup>

### *Summary of recommendations:*

1. *That Parliament implement the Draft Recommendations set out in Chapter 16 of the Draft Report.*

## Reply to Chapter 17 Information Request – The Enterprise Contract

When VACC appeared at the Productivity Commission's public hearing on 8 September 2015 on behalf of the Motor Trades Organisations, they submitted that small business operators have traditionally relied on an award to determine minimum wages and conditions of employment. The vehicle industry has traditionally operated on the basis of employers paying over award payments in order to attract skilled staff. Wages and conditions are ordinarily set out in a standard common law contract of employment.

The Motor Trades Organisations do not support the implementation of enterprise contracts. Common law contracts of employment, such as those that are common in the vehicle industry, are far simpler agreement making processes than the process for making enterprise contracts as set out on page 38 of the Draft Report Overview.

### *Summary of recommendations:*

1. *That enterprise contracts are not implemented in Australia's workplace relations framework.*

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<sup>9</sup> Productivity Commission, Workplace Relations Framework, Draft Report Overview, p 56.

## Reply to Draft Recommendations in Chapter 19 – Right of Entry

Right of entry for small businesses that do not have significant union membership has become a serious problem. Many small businesses and their employees feel harassed by unions that regularly visit their worksites despite having no members in the business. Draft Recommendation 19.8 of the Draft Report goes some way to addressing this problem, however the Motor Trades Organisations consider that two visits every 90 days is vastly in excess of what is reasonable.<sup>10</sup> We therefore recommend that right of entry entitlements in such circumstances be extended to a maximum of twice in a 365 day period.

The Motor Trades Organisations support these draft recommendations. Furthermore, we reiterate our recommendations set out in our submission to the Productivity Commission's Review of the Workplace Relations Framework.

### *Summary of recommendations:*

- 1. That Parliament implement the Draft Recommendations set out in Chapter 19 of the Draft Report.*
- 2. That Entry Notices have the time of the proposed visit (either authorised rest break or regular meal break) and the general purpose/nature of the visit.*
- 3. That union permits have a photograph of the union official.*
- 4. The workplace lunch room is not the property of a union and the venue for a meeting should be based on an available meeting room to suit the business' operating requirements.*
- 5. That regulation of right of entry remain in the Act rather than through enterprise agreements.*
- 6. That the FWC give consideration when granting right of entry permits to the number of permits previously granted with respect to a business over a 12 month period.*

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p60.