



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

COMMITTEES

**Employment, Workplace Relations and
Workforce Participation Committee**

Report

SPEECH

Monday, 18 June 2007

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Date Monday, 18 June 2007
Page 11
Questioner
Speaker Hayes, Chris, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr HAYES (Werriwa) (1.13 pm)—I am happy to follow the member for Moreton in speaking on this report of the Standing Committee on Employment, Workplace Relations and Workforce Participation. I am very happy to be associated with this report. Unlike what was indicated by the member for Moreton, there is no dissenting report included in this document.

I congratulate the member for Moreton on his personal style of inclusiveness and, dare I say, enthusiasm. He certainly led the committee in such a way that there was very much a genuine bipartisan spirit and clearly one that was focused on the committee's outcomes. So I do commend the report. I intend to speak in the Main Committee later about the attention, effort, dedication and professionalism of the secretariat. That is a resource that we should never take for granted. Their efforts in these inquiries always amaze me.

To give a snapshot of the industry: it employs over half a million people, it generates in excess of \$17 billion of annual export earnings and it contributes 3.9 per cent of the GDP of the Australian economy. It is predicted that we will see strong growth in the industry, particularly through development of the Indian and Chinese markets as well as an expanding domestic market. This is clearly a very important industry. It is important economically and culturally and it is certainly a significant employment generator. It is an industry of enormous opportunity for this country.

While the committee's report and recommendations were made without dissent, Labor members, in their additional comments, sought to highlight three factors which were widely regarded during the inquiry as significantly affecting the industry's ability to attract and retain staff. These are: low pay and poor conditions; a lack of investment in training and staff development, which the member for Moreton referred to; and a reliance on temporary employees and the use of 457 visas as opposed to providing industry career opportunities—if you like, the job you have before having a real job.

Labor members observed that the application of Work Choices in an industry such as tourism—which was universally recognised throughout the inquiry as being characterised by hard work, low pay and poor conditions—could only result in the lowering of pay for an already low-paid sector of the Australian workforce. The House will recall recent debates concerning the Australian Hotels Association's template AWA, which relied upon the Lilac City Motel—which provides for a minimum wage of \$13.47 an hour, no penalty rates, no shift loading, no overtime, no payment for public holidays and no rest breaks—and the impassioned defence that the Prime Minister sought to make of that agreement.

As that was a template AWA prepared by the industry association, the committee should have not been surprised that the most outspoken supporter of Work Choices was Mr Peter Olah of the very same industry association. In his evidence to the inquiry Mr Olah conceded that there were regular breaches of industrial relations laws and non-adherence to award conditions throughout the industry. More surprisingly, Mr Olah conceded that Work Choices assisted the industry by allowing what had hitherto not been legal to be made legal. That was the evidence from one of the peak bodies of the industry, which wants to argue for greater access to overseas workers—guest workers, if you like—and which not only concedes the practice of award avoidance but designs template AWAs for its members that rely on minimum pay and conditions as being standard in the industry.

The one resounding message from all parts of the industry is that Work Choices is only allowing those in an already low-paid industry to be paid less. Hotel staff, bar staff, cleaners and restaurant staff all feel that Work Choices opens the floodgates, allowing their wages and conditions to remain constantly under threat in a highly competitive market. I will take the opportunity in the Main Committee to refer to various recommendations of this report, which received the bipartisan support of all members of the committee. I commend this report to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. IR Causley)—The time allotted for statements on this report has expired. Does the member for Moreton wish to move a motion in connection with the report to enable it to be debated on a later occasion?