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Submission to the Inquiry into the Fair Work Amendment (Small Business-Penalty Rates Exemption) Bill 2012

I am a retired Ambulance Officer at Broken Hill and a former executive of the Broken Hill Town Employees union.

As a shift worker, I found that working weekends for many years destroyed my ability to live a normal social life. Friends gave up asking me to social events traditionaly held on weekends because inevitably I would find that I couldn't attend due to work committments. Sporting events or membership with a sporting club were out of the question. Eventually this led to social isolation with people outside my work circle. If I handn't been paid a penalty rate for weekend work I surely would not have lasted 34 years in the job. It simply would not have been worth it. Looking back now I wonder if even double time penalty rates were enough. Consequently I empathise with shift workers due to my own experience.

As a union official I represented many retail workers at industrial commission hearings to defend them, often against small employers. At Broken Hill most employers belong to thier own union called the Broken Hill Chamber of Commerce who advise thier members on correct wages and conditions for thier employees. All, include some form of shift penalty for weekend work, never-the-less this often was the source of dispute, particularly from non Chamber of Commerce members. Some small business employers used every means possible to intimidate workers to reduce wage paymnt contrary to industrial agreement requirements. Some of these people had no regard for formal agreements relative to thier business and exploited employees. A relative statement from a respected Chamber of Commerce President put these people into perspective:"These are not responsible employers and if they are unable to pay the correct wages they probably should not be in business". This, I believe is the proper response to Mr Xenophon's proposed Bill. The Australian way of life focuses on most events occuring on weekends. Weddings, Church services, Football, racing or any other sporting event, Bar-B- Q's, and social get togethers, Entertainment including locally visiting celebraties. The list just goes on and on. A penalty rate makes employers reconsider the value of disrupting employees weekends unless it is absolutely necessary! I strongly urge you to defeat this proposal.

Submitted by
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Monday 17th of September 2012