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

I am a permanent employee, working as a manager, currently earning around 50 per hour.

I am married and am a nurse who worked shift work for close to 30 years. Shift work was OK initially but once I married a non-shift worker it was very disruptive to family /social life. It was very difficult to organise social events and friends and family had to book social outings at least 6 weeks in advance. From a marriage perspective one of us would be walking in the door as the other one left, if i was on night duty he had to creep around the house while i slept, he would have weekend off and i would be working and he really struggled when i had to work xmas or new year as he wanted to share that family time with me. On top of all these was the constant fatigue which I was largely unaware of until I got a 5 day roster - the change in my health and energy levels was astounding. It took many years to find a normal job but i will never go back to shift

work. Having constant sleep patterns and regular days off (i.e. weekends) had a huge impact on my life and relationships. Being able to meet friends and family and spend time doing things with my husband and having the energy to do these has been amazing. I advise every adolescent deciding on their future NOT to chose a career involving shift work.
Since starting a 5 day roster I was aware that staff on lower pay grades actually earnt more than me because of shift penalties but in all honesty i did not begrudge them a cent. Shift workers deserve every extra cent they earn.

If penalty rates were abolished no-one would want the jobs with mandatory shift work. The only reason a lot of staff roster themselves on afternoons, nights and weekends is because of the money - and those who don't need the money quite so much were happy to let them. I hated working afternoon and late shifts, leaving my family at home, and the knowledge i was earning a bit more was the only thing that sometimes got me out the door. If there had been no penalty rates i probably would have changed careers in my 20's. If there were no penalty rates you would have very disgruntled staff being forced to work after hours for no reward and I expect many would leave some professions such as nursing.

My weekends are important to me because I can spend time with my husband and family and friends. I do not need to ask all my friends to book events 6+ weeks in advance. I have missed too many social events from weddings to xmas to dinners or parties to count which often left my husband attending alone. From a health perspective not working weekends means I only work 5 days and the get 2 off, week after week, year after year, and my health and energy levels have improved dramatically. Working weekends generally means irregular shift patterns which have been shown to affect health (accidents due to fatigue, cancer, heart attacks etc).

I urge the committee to keep penalty rates. We do NOT live in a 7 day working week world. Much as I absolutely love no longer having to suffer shift work the big downside is trying to live in a monday to friday world. Trying to get quotes on weekends or before or after my working hours - impossible. Trying to get things delivered on weekends - no way. The majority of companies expect everyone (or maybe me because I am female) to be home from 8am to 5pm every day and are very inflexible. I even left work early the other day to get my car washed - shut at 4.30pm!
While I do not work in restaurants or retail etc the people who do deserve every cent of their penalties. Why should they work antisocial hours without reward? Why should they be expected to serve those of us who have the luxury of weekends off and receive nothing extra for their efforts?

Submitted by
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