



NEW LAWS WILL GIVE CHILD WORKERS GREATER PROTECTION

The Government will introduce Queensland's first laws to specifically protect children from workplace exploitation, Premier Peter Beattie said today.

"For the first time Queensland will have a minimum working age, and specific bans on people under the age of 18 working in areas such as adult entertainment," Mr Beattie said.

"Importantly, we will also limit the hours children can work during school terms, so that education does not take second place behind work.

"Exploitation can take many forms, and in today's competitive world it is unacceptable to jeopardise a child's education and long-term job prospects so they can earn a few dollars.

"In the Smart State we want young people to be learning or earning, but earning must not be at the expense of learning.

"The vast majority of employers are fair to young workers, but this legislation will crack down on the small minority of employers who take advantage of children in the workplace," Mr Beattie said.

Mr Beattie said Cabinet had decided to legislate to protect child workers and volunteers, after the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian reviewed child labour.

The review was announced in December 2002, and included extensive consultation with groups including employee and employer organisations, students, other young people, and advocacy groups.

The legislation is due for introduction to Parliament this year, and details will be finalised during drafting, after further consultation.

Features of the legislation will include:

- Broad safeguards for children in both paid and unpaid work.
- A general minimum working age of 13, reduced to 11 for some forms of supervised employment such as deliveries and charitable collections.
- The minimum age will not apply to work in a family business or in entertainment other than adult entertainment, but a code of practice will be developed to cover these areas.

- A list of prohibited forms of employment for all children under the age of 18. Examples will include topless waitressing, topless modelling and other forms of adult entertainment.
- A new offence for employing a child under the age of 18 in work which is likely to harm the child's health, safety, or wellbeing. Details will be finalised during drafting.
- "Light work" provisions to limit children's hours of work during school terms so that their education does not suffer as a result of part-time employment. Details will be finalised during drafting.
- Clarification of employers' obligations to child employees. This will include requirements: to keep detailed records of child employees available for inspection; to provide induction packages and age appropriate training including workplace health and safety training; and to make all reasonable endeavours to ensure a parent or responsible adult is kept informed if a child is injured or becomes ill at work; and
- Stronger protection to enable people aged under 18 years who do not have easy access to a parent or guardian to autonomously enforce their industrial rights. This will be important for teenagers who live independently of their parents.

The Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, Elizabeth Fraser, said: "I welcome the government's proposed reforms, which address the issues identified in the review and are consistent with feedback from key stakeholders and young people.

"I thank the government for the comprehensive response to the recommendations from the review, which will contribute positively to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people," Ms Fraser said.

In addition to the new legislation the government will introduce a package of non-legislative measures to be administered by the Department of Industrial Relations.

Mr Beattie said the package will include a code of practice protecting children and young workers under the *Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995*; and development of an entertainment code of practice.

"We will continue examining the issue of monitoring and screening people supervising or working with children.

"The government will also continue to examine the possible extension of the Criminal Code, in light of the findings of a related Crime and Misconduct Commission inquiry into the Adult Entertainment Industry.

"I thank the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian for conducting the review, which will lead to stronger safeguards for children who work or volunteer," Mr Beattie said.

2 May 2005

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