



Minister for Education
Minister for Industrial Relations and
Minister for Racing

11 APR 2022

The Honourable Justice IJK Ross AO
President
Fair Work Commission
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Dear Justice Ross

I note the applications filed by the Health Services Union (HSU), the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) and the United Workers Union (UWU), in the Fair Work Commission (FWC) to vary the *Aged Care Award 2010* (AC Award), *Nurses Award 2010* (Nurses Award) and *Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Industry Award 2010* (SCHADS Award).

The Queensland Government shares the unions' concern that the work performed by employees under the AC Award, Nurses Award and SCHADS Award has been historically undervalued. While the Queensland Government referred its private sector industrial relations jurisdiction to the Australian Government in 2010, the Queensland Government maintains a strong interest in the wellbeing of all Queensland workers.

I note the range of evidence that supports claims of significant and widespread undervaluation of work in the aged care industry, as identified in the unions' outline of submissions. Most significantly, this includes the finding of the *Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety* (the Royal Commission) that a wage gap exists between aged care workers and workers performing equivalent work in other sectors, and that the provision of additional funding to aged care providers has not improved pay and conditions for providers' employees.

The Queensland Government notes recommendations 76(2)(e) and 84 of the Royal Commission. In combination, these recommend that the Australian Government work in conjunction with representatives of both employees and employers in the industry to ensure that the Awards accurately reflect the value of aged care work, and provide for equal remuneration for work of equal or comparable value. This reflects the long-standing policy of the Queensland Government that workers' remuneration should reflect the social and economic value of their work, and not be influenced by long-discredited assumptions based on gender.

I also note the drafting of a consensus statement on 17 December 2021 between the three unions and representatives of employers in the aged care industry. The parties to the consensus agreement agreed that wages in the aged care industry have been historically undervalued and that a significant wage increase is necessary to accurately reflect the value of the work performed by the aged care workforce. Following the findings and recommendations of the Royal Commission, the significance of both worker and employer representatives reaching an agreed position on necessary wage increases across the industry cannot be overstated.

The Queensland Government considers it unfortunate that contrary to the recommendations of the Royal Commission, the Australian Government has chosen to play no part in the deliberations.

The Queensland Government is conscious that the applications to vary the Awards differ in their particulars, and has no desire to favour any one application over another, or to seek to join the matter. However, I lend my support generally to the position that the prescribed wage rates in the AC Award, Nurses Award and SCHADS Award should be increased, and such other variations be made as are necessary to give effect to the recommendations of the Royal Commission.

The Queensland Government supports the endeavours of the HSU, ANFM and UUU to vary the Awards through their applications to the FWC and thanks the unions for undertaking this action.

If you require additional information or would like to discuss this matter further, please contact me directly or alternatively your staff can contact Ms Sharon Durham, Chief of Staff of my office, on (07) 3719 7110.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely



GRACE GRACE MP
Minister for Education
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