

21 March 2017

Hon Bill Shorten MP
Leader of the Opposition
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House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

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Dear Mr Shorten

NSW Business Chamber is the peak business organisation in NSW, incorporating 16 Regional Chambers (such as Hunter Business Chamber and Illawarra Business Chamber), 200 Local Chambers of Commerce and 20,000 member businesses (which range in size from SMEs to some of the nation's largest corporations). In fact, we are the largest peak business organisation in Australia.

As you know, NSW represents approximately 1/3rd of the national economy, and has more employers engaged in retail and hospitality than any other state or territory. Disturbingly, however, there are parts of NSW (including parts of Western Sydney) that have unacceptably high levels of youth unemployment, with some regions recording levels of over 20%.

Not surprisingly, the recent decision of the Fair Work Commission to adjust some penalty rates in four of the 122 modern awards is an extremely important matter for our state, our young people, our Chamber and many of our members. As you are aware, the Fair Work Commission, headed by President Iain Ross, spent two years reviewing 6000 submissions and hearing from 140 witnesses before handing down its decision, so we suggest that any interference with that decision by politicians may well spell the end of the long standing concept of a true independent umpire in our workplace relations system.

However, I note that in an announcement on 14 March by your colleague, Brendan O'Connor, Labor has created the 'Australian Jobs taskforce' to travel across the nation holding discussions with employees and employers to keep the focus on penalty rates. Given that your party seeks to be the alternative government in Australia, and that you will soon ask the Australian people to elect you as our next Prime Minister, we feel that it is of critical importance that you demonstrate to the electorate that you will govern for all Australians, including the 2 million SMEs and their 7 million employees, and not just the 15% of the workforce that still belong to trade unions.

Accordingly, we welcome your recent announcement that you want to hold discussions with the businesses impacted by the penalty rates decision, and we hereby offer to facilitate meetings of such businesses in metropolitan and regional NSW to assist you to meet with them and to hear from them first hand.

We are aware that sometimes political advisers hand-pick companies to stage a media event to reinforce a particular preferred policy position, but we are certain that you are seeking more than just a photo opportunity from the national listening tour on penalty rates, so we stand ready to invite members from the relevant service sectors to meet with you and/or your representatives, and we can do so at very short notice.

We would suggest that you or your representatives need to visit areas such as the NSW Central Coast, the Mid North Coast and the Northern Rivers, as well as important inland cities like Tamworth, Orange, Albury and Griffith. We have substantial numbers of members in all of these areas and will immediately invite them to a meeting with you as soon as you can give us suitable dates.

The unemployed young people of NSW deserve more than to be a forgotten sideshow in an ideological contest between political parties who are both seeking popularity. It is time for our political leaders to show true leadership on their plight, and we look forward to hearing from your office very soon with dates for these important meetings with the real business people of Australia who put their assets on the line every day to help create jobs, generate taxes and power our economy.

I would ask your office contact Damian Kelly on 9458 7544 as soon as possible to make the necessary arrangements, and I look forward to joining you on the road as we hear first-hand from the business owners, and their employees, across NSW.

Yours sincerely



Stephen Cartwright
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

cc James Pearson, Australian Chamber of Commerce & Industry