



AUSTRALIAN CHAMBER OF
COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY



ACCI RESEARCH

Minimum Wage Decisions: Impacts on Business

APRIL 2011



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1. ABOUT ACCI

1.1 Who We Are

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) speaks on behalf of Australian business at a national and international level.

Australia's largest and most representative business advocate, ACCI develops and advocates policies that are in the best interests of Australian business, economy and community.

We achieve this through the collaborative action of our national member network which comprises:

- All state and territory chambers of commerce
- 27 national industry associations
- Bilateral and multilateral business organisations

In this way, ACCI provides leadership for more than 350,000 businesses which:

- Operate in all industry sectors
- Includes small, medium and large businesses
- Are located throughout metropolitan and regional Australia

1.2 What We Do

ACCI takes a leading role in advocating the views of Australian business to public policy decision makers and influencers including:

- Federal Government Ministers & Shadow Ministers
- Federal Parliamentarians
- Policy Advisors
- Commonwealth Public Servants
- Regulatory Authorities
- Federal Government Agencies

Our objective is to ensure that the voice of Australian businesses is heard, whether they are one of the top 100 Australian companies or a small sole trader.

Our specific activities include:

- Representation and advocacy to Governments, parliaments, tribunals and policy makers both domestically and internationally;
- Business representation on a range of statutory and business boards and committees;
- Representing business in national forums including Fair Work Australia, Safe Work Australia and many other bodies associated with economics, taxation, sustainability, small business, superannuation, employment, education and training, migration, trade, workplace relations and occupational health and safety;
- Representing business in international and global forums including the International Labour Organisation, International Organisation of Employers, International Chamber of Commerce, Business and Industry Advisory Committee to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Confederation of Asia-Pacific Chambers of Commerce and Industry and Confederation of Asia-Pacific Employers;
- Research and policy development on issues concerning Australian business;
- The publication of leading business surveys and other information products; and
- Providing forums for collective discussion amongst businesses on matters of law and policy.

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2. INTRODUCTION

1. The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) is the largest and most representative organisation of Australian business, representing more than 300,000 employers employing more than 4 million Australians. ACCI's membership of 37 separate Chambers of Commerce and Industry Associations extends across all industries and to businesses of all sizes. Within this network, ACCI has particularly strong membership representation across the profile of workplaces most subject to minimum wage decisions (smaller to medium sized businesses and those in industries such as retail, hospitality and business services).
2. A new Minimum Wage Panel within the national Industrial Tribunal, Fair Work Australia, has responsibility for setting and adjusting minimum wages and conditions of private sector employees across Australia.¹ ACCI and its wider membership network of employer organisations represent the views of the core interest in setting and increasing any minimum wage – those businesses that must bear the cost of any wage increases granted by the Annual Wage Review (AWR) process under Part 2-6 of the *Fair Work Act 2009* (the Act).
3. It is of course those same businesses that make the critical decisions about whether to take on new employees and create additional employment for Australia's unemployed and under-employed.
4. ACCI and its members have been the key employer voices in Australian minimum wage setting for more than a century. ACCI and its progenitors have consistently led industry in the evolution of Australian minimum wages, both through the Australian Industrial Relations Commission's (AIRC) National Wage Case/Safety Net Reviews and the Australian Fair Pay Commission's (AFPC) Wage-Setting Reviews.
5. Australia currently has the most regulated and highest minimum wages in the OECD.² Australia is also the only country to have a cascade of multiple minimum wage rates which range from the National Minimum Wage of \$569.90 per week to over \$1900.00 per week and apply to unskilled, trade, managerial and professional employees. On top of these base wage costs are related on-costs, penalty rates, allowances,

¹ All employees employed by private sector corporations and unincorporated employers (unincorporated employers in Western Australia remain covered by state laws).

² See "International Comparison" table at the end of this paper.

loadings, workers compensation premiums, payroll tax, superannuation and associated administrative costs.

6. The new Minimum Wage Panel of Fair Work Australia published its inaugural decision on 3 June 2010 and awarded an increase of \$26 per week to all minimum wage rates from low skilled to high skilled professionals and managers.³ The result was \$1 short of what the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) requested.
7. This result led labour economists, such as Professor Mark Wooden of the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, to question the role of our current minimum wage system in achieving an important objective of protecting the needs of the low paid, commenting:⁴

“Australia is, however, relatively unique among industrial nations in having not one single minimum wage, but a whole raft of different minima that vary both across awards and within awards. While the number of such minima has been greatly streamlined over the years, the question still remains as to why we need to set a multitude of minimum wage floors for jobs scattered across almost the entire wage distribution.

If the rationale behind minimum wage adjustments is to protect the living standards of the lowest paid, I can see little reason why we need more than one global minimum wage. Varying award rates above the global minimum has little to do with protecting the needs of the lowest paid.”

8. Commenting on the impact of the new Fair Work minimum wage laws on the unemployed following the inaugural minimum wage decision Professor Wooden stated:⁵

“Minimum wage rises benefit low-paid workers at the expense of the unemployed. Any action that increases the cost of hiring low-wage labour reduces the likelihood of those without jobs finding one in the future. Moreover, it is the long-term unemployed who’s employment chances are most damaged. This seems very unfair. And it certainly doesn’t promote social

³ Annual Wage Review 2009-10, [2010] FWAFB 4000 (June 2010).

⁴ Wooden, M., “An Unfair Safety Net?” , *Australian Bulletin of Labour*, Volume 36, No 3, 2010, p.325.

⁵ Wooden, M. “A hole in the safety net”, *The Australian Financial Review*. 9 June 2010.

inclusion through greater workforce participation [...] The decision looks even more unfair once you realise that many low-paid workers do not live in poor households, and that a low-paid worker has a much better chance of getting a better paid job than someone who doesn't have a job at all."

9. The setting and adjustment of minimum wages in Australia remains an important exercise because of the influence and impact of that process upon employers, employees and those seeking employment.
10. The focus of minimum wage determinations should be directed to the impact on the employers and employees (including those that are seeking employment) who are most affected by non-productivity based minimum wage increases. Particularly those employers that pay exactly or slightly more than the minimum wages required by a relevant modern award.
11. Minimum wage decisions continue to disproportionately impact particular employers and sectors of the economy.
12. The focus should not only be on the broad domestic economy and larger international economies, as this risks ignoring the impact on vulnerable small to medium sized employers.
13. It remains the position that service industries including retail, hospitality and restaurants have a comparatively higher level of direct employment on minimum wages (without over award or enterprise agreement based pay) than both all industries averages and other industries with a higher incidence of agreement making (manufacturing, construction, mining, communications, transport etc).
14. This means that the impact of wage increases in minimum wage reviews is disproportionately (and more comprehensively) experienced in these industries than other industries, including those sectors with a higher incidence of agreement making (who generally pay above award rates and are therefore not required to adjust their actual pay following an increase in minimum wages).
15. Regulatory burdens are an important consideration, particularly for smaller firms that must implement increases to minimum wages and who may not have the HR resources that larger firms may have. Many employers will incur additional red-tape costs as a result of an increase in minimum wages. Pay-roll software, contracts of employment/policies/manuals may need to be updated, and in some

cases, specific industrial or legal advice obtained. Whilst it is difficult to quantify these administrative costs, it is a burden which should be required to be taken into account by Fair Work Australia. Just because employers are on notice that an increase is to take effect from the first pay period on or after 1 July each year, does not mean that they know what the increase will be and can adjust payrolls accordingly.

16. Labour on-costs have been considered by the previous national industrial tribunal in its 2004 decision [PR002004], the AIRC noted (at [308]):

“On-costs mean that for every dollar awarded by the Commission, employers must spend more than \$1, whereas the impact of tax and tax transfer arrangements means that, in many cases, the employee receives substantially less than \$1 as additional disposable income ...”

17. In attempting to provide empirical research to the Panel on the impact of last year’s decision on national system employers, particularly small to medium sized employers, who are sensitive to minimum wage decisions, ACCI undertook a national online survey of employers across Australia who were directly affected by the Panel’s 2010 AWR decision. The survey was carried out in conjunction with ACCI’s network of Chambers and Industry based members and reflects the views of a representative cross section of Australian employers. ACCI’s *National Employer Survey* has been designed to provide information about the impact of AWR decisions on those required to bear the cost of those increases – the employer and business owners in Australian SMEs.
18. The survey gathered both quantitative and qualitative data from national system employers who were directly affected by national minimum wage decision.
19. In summary, a significant number of employers indicated that as a direct result of last year’s increase, employers responded by offering less hours to staff, increased the costs of products/services to customers, and experienced a decrease in cash flow and overall level of profitability. It also had a direct negative effect on employers’ hiring intentions to put on new staff and required an increase in the hours owners worked in their own business. Whilst the majority of employers did not report a change in the number of employees, a significant number of employers did report that the decision resulted in a decrease in full time and part time staff.

20. Employers were also given an opportunity to provide comments in relation to the 2010 AWR decision or this year's AWR decision.
21. This qualitative research is also useful to understand, first hand, how many businesses view the AWR process and the impact these and other pressures are having on many firms.
22. The research should be considered as part of 360 degree feedback on the impact of the 2010 AWR decision and ACCI commends the findings to all participants involved in the AWR process and policy makers.
23. It is intended that the first *ACCI National Employer Survey* will be developed in subsequent releases and will be a ongoing independent piece of research to complement existing and future research on minimum wage determinations.
24. It is encouraging that the results from the first *ACCI National Employer Survey* is consistent with other surveys and the research conducted by the Workplace Research Centre on behalf of Fair Work Australia.

3. ACCI NATIONAL EMPLOYER SURVEY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

25. There is a significant gap in empirical research in assessing the impact of minimum wage determinations on businesses that are regulated by federal industrial awards.⁶ In attempting to provide relevant feedback on the impact of last year's decision on national system employers, particularly small to medium sized employers who are principally affected by such determinations, ACCI undertook a survey of private sector employers across Australia at the beginning of 2011.⁷
26. The survey gathered both quantitative and qualitative data from national system employers who were directly affected by the 2010 AWR decision.
27. Participants were also given an opportunity to provide comments in relation to the 2010 AWR decision or this year's AWR decision.
28. The research should be considered as part of a 360 degree appraisal on the impact of the 2010 AWR decision.
29. It is intended that the *ACCI National Employer Survey* will be developed on in subsequent reviews and will be a ongoing piece of key research to complement existing and future research on minimum wage determinations in the federal workplace relations regulatory milieu.

3.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

30. Where employers passed on all or part of the 2010 AWR decision to at least one modern award regulated employee, the majority of employers indicated that as a direct result of the increase they reported a decrease in the level of overall profitability (65.9%) and a decrease in the level of cash flow (54.6%).

⁶ National system employers and their employees are subject to regulation via modern awards, which are defined on an occupation or industry basis. See the Fair Work Australia website for a list of modern awards: <http://www.fwa.gov.au/index.cfm?pagename=awardsfind>. Where an employee is not subject to a modern award, the National Minimum Wage Order may apply. The national minimum wage for adults is \$569.90 per week, calculated on the basis of a week of 38 ordinary hours, or \$15 per hour.

⁷ The research and questionnaire is also contained in the ACCI submission to the 2011 Annual Wage Review (18 March 2011) and can be accessed here: www.acci.asn.au

31. Whilst a majority of employers reported no change to the number of employees, the second most reported effect was a decrease in the number of full-time employees (18.6%), part-time employees (12.9%), and casual employees (24.2%) as well as an increase in the number of juniors (10.6%).
32. Similarly, whilst the majority of employers reported that the total number of employment hours offered to employees did not change (53.4%), the second most reported impact was a decrease in total number of employment hours offered (39.1%).
33. The majority of employers reported no change to the selling price of products and services offered (54.4%), the second most reported effect was an increase in the selling price of products and services offered (32.2%).
34. Employers also provided comments on the impact of modern awards on their business which is summarised below.

3.3 SURVEY DESIGN

35. Data was collected using an online survey system from February through to March 2011.
36. ACCI members provided the URL to the survey in member only publications.

3.3.1 Questionnaire

37. All participants who visited the online survey were presented with standard information ("guidance note") in the introductory section to the survey, with guidance notes to some questions to direct the participants accordingly.
38. All questions required a forced response (the exception was Q13) and respondents could only chose one response per question.
39. Where respondents answered "No employees" to Q2 ("How many persons does your business currently employ?") or "No" to Q6 ("Are any of your employees covered by a Modern Award?") the survey was automatically ended. This was to ensure that the survey questions on the impact of the 2010 AWR decision captured data from employers who self-reported that they employed at least one employee whose

employment was regulated by a modern award. It is possible that relevant employers were excluded as the note to Q6 directed respondents to answer “No” if all of the employees were covered by a Registered Enterprise Agreement or Registered Individual Agreement as defined in the “Key Terms” introductory note.

40. Where a respondent answered “No” to Q8 (“Did any of your employees covered by a Modern Award receive an increase to their pay as a direct result of the decision of Fair Work Australia in June 2010 to increase minimum wage rates?”) the survey automatically skipped Q9, Q10 and Q11.
41. Participants did have the ability to change their choice throughout the survey prior to finalising their response. The online system did not prevent the same respondents from completing the survey multiple times.
42. The total number of participants who commenced the survey was 923, however the number of responses for each question was variable. Around 444 respondents skipped Q9, Q10 and Q11 due to the “skip logic” function on Q6 and Q8 in addition to those respondents who closed their browsers mid way through the survey.

3.3.2 Incentive payments

43. No incentives were offered to participants.

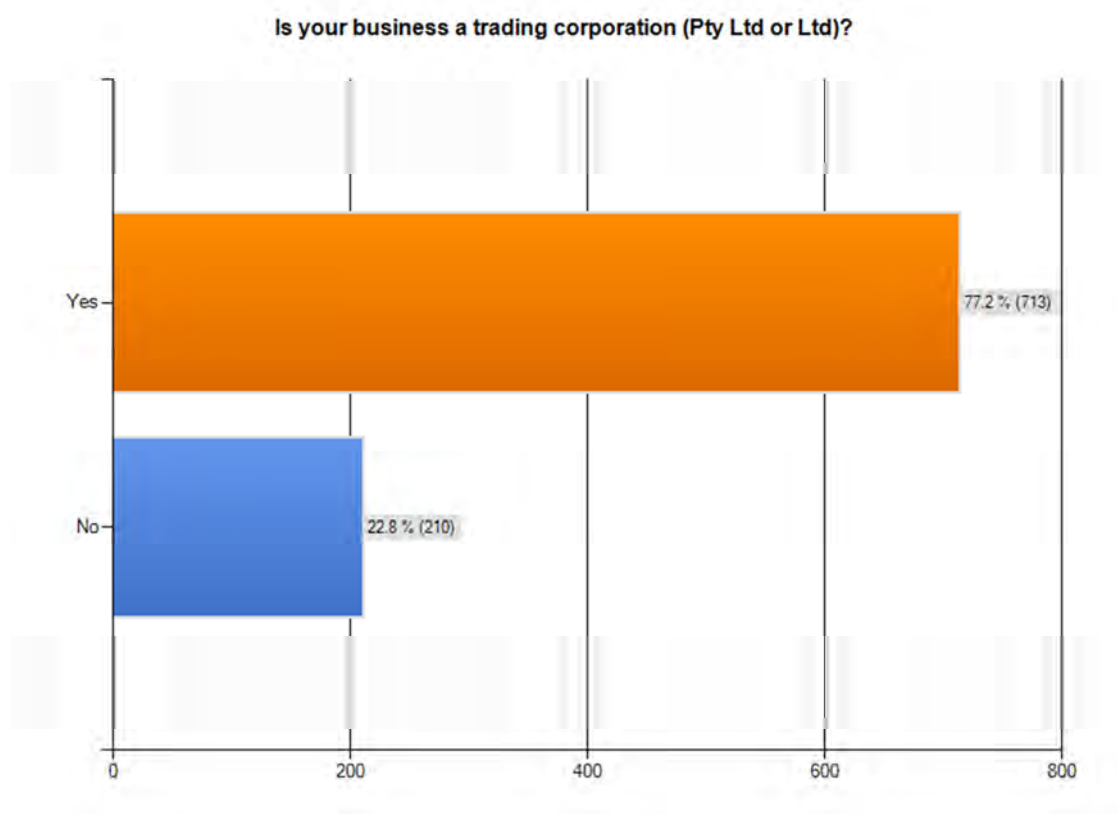
3.3.3 Methodological Considerations

44. Online survey collection, as opposed to other possible survey methods, was considered the most efficient and best way to collect data.
45. There are a number of methodological limitations to the survey, including sampling errors and non-response errors. It was not possible to know how many potential respondents received an invitation to participate in the survey.
46. Measurement error may have occurred in the form of multiple completions of the survey from the same respondent in addition to forced-responses.

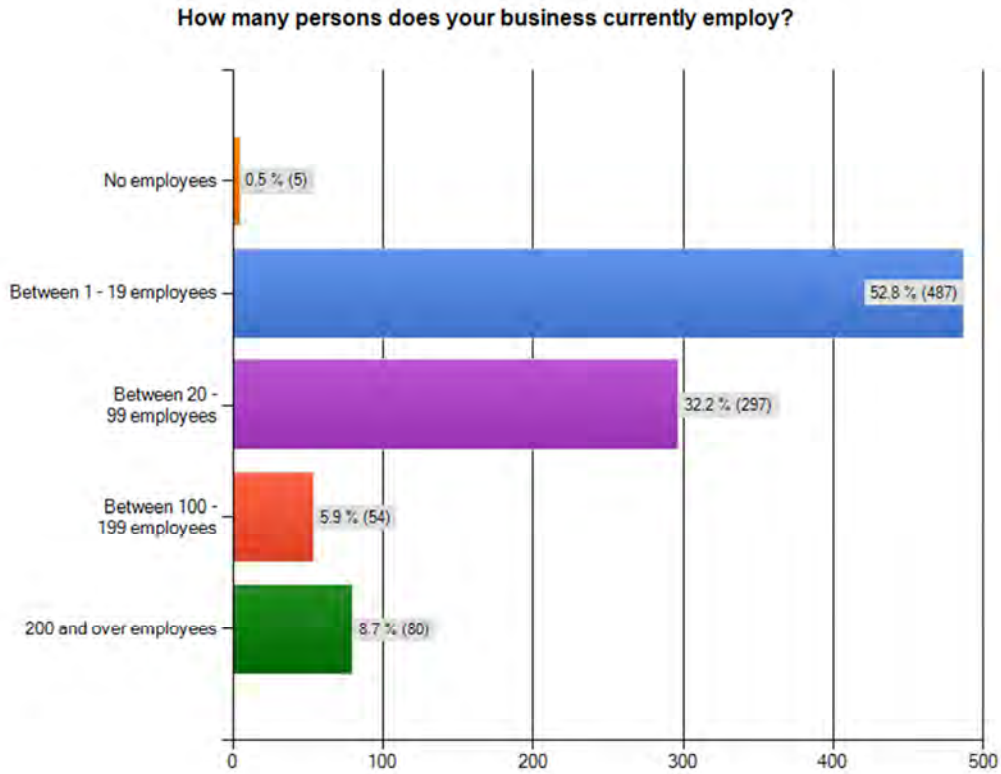
3.4 RESULTS

3.4.1 Demographics

47. The majority of participants indicated that they were trading corporations (77.2%).

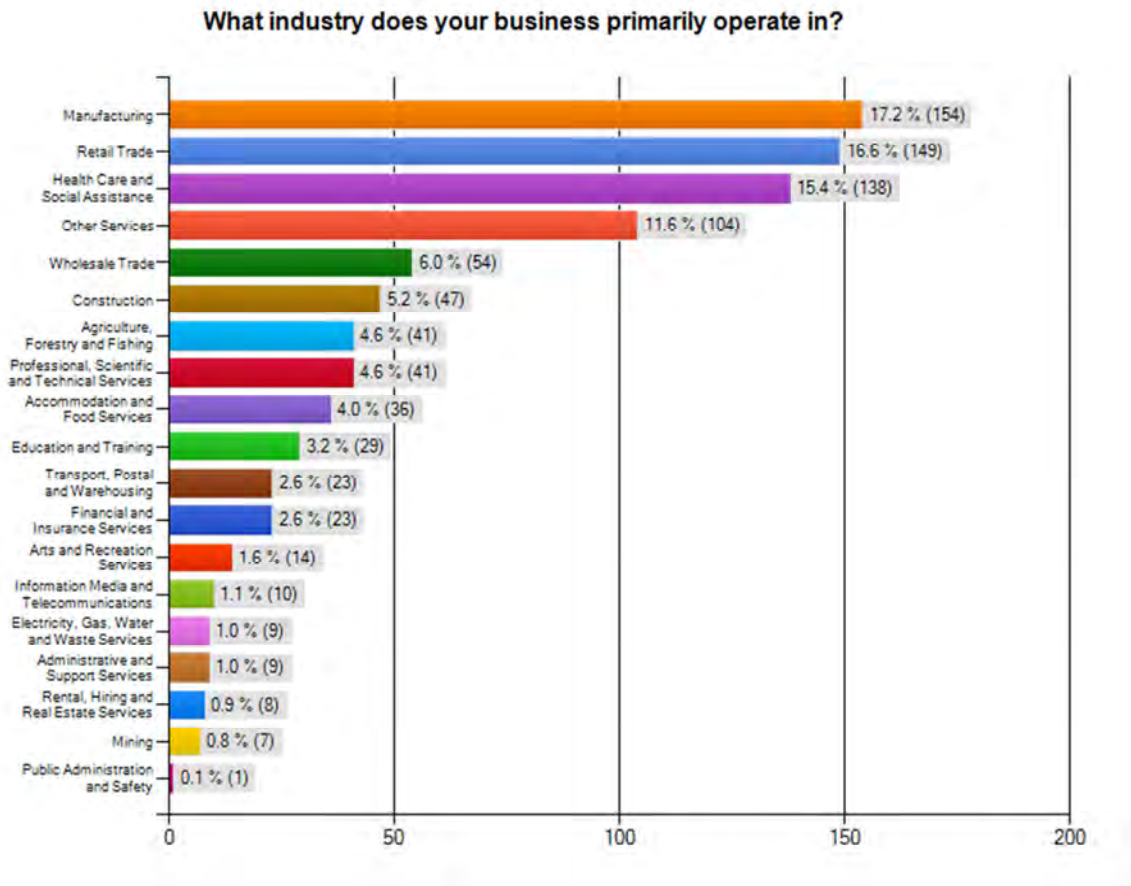


48. Most participants identified themselves as Small to Medium Sized firms.⁸

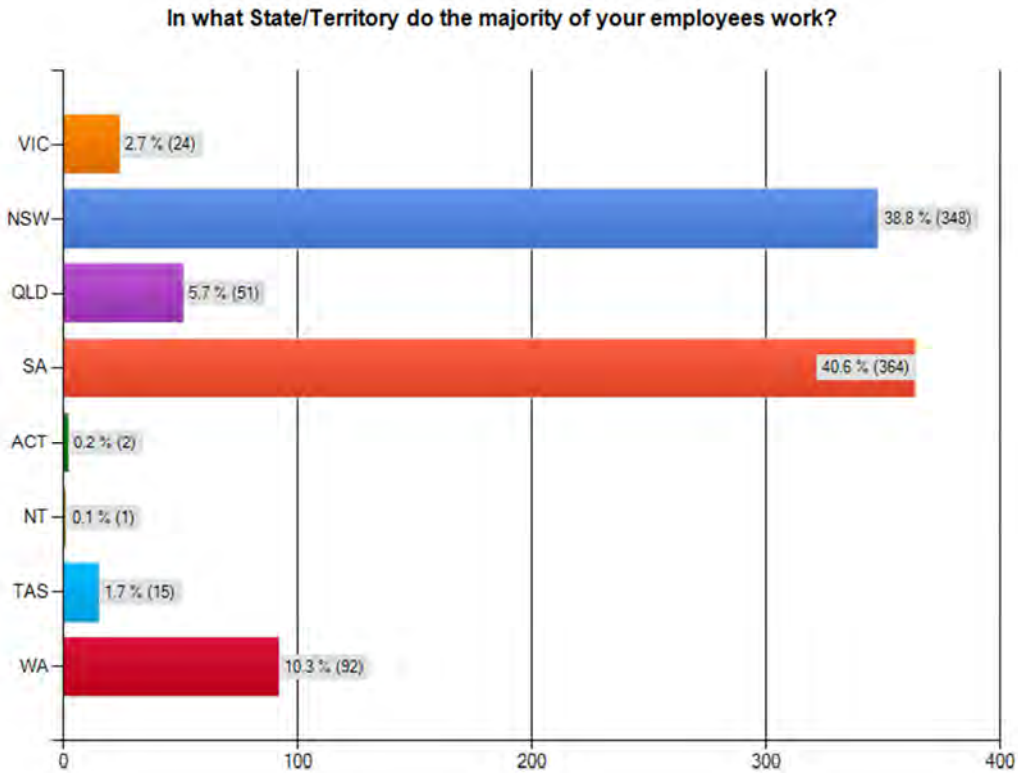


⁸ Where a respondent indicated "No employees" the survey was automatically ended.

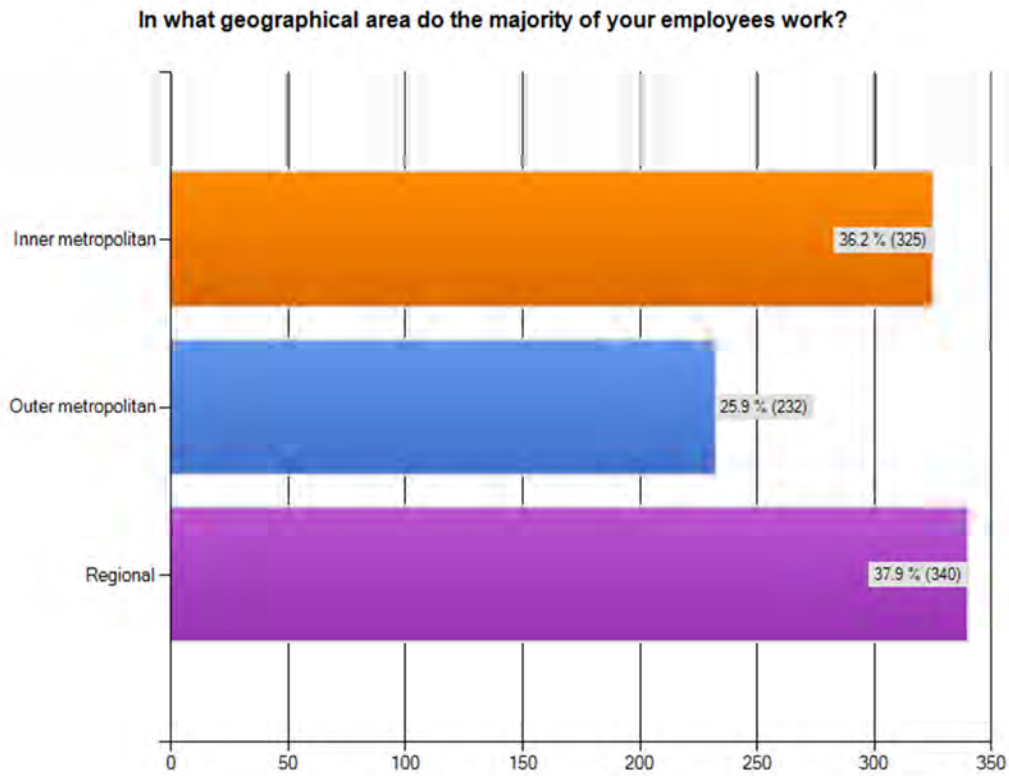
49. Using the broadest level ANZSIC Industry Divisions, the top five industries employers operated in were: manufacturing (17.2%), retail trade (16.6%), health care and social assistance (15.4%), other services (11.6%) and wholesale trade (6%).



50. The majority of participants indicated that their employees worked in South Australia (40.6%), followed by New South Wales (38.8%), Western Australia (10.3%), and Queensland (5.7%).

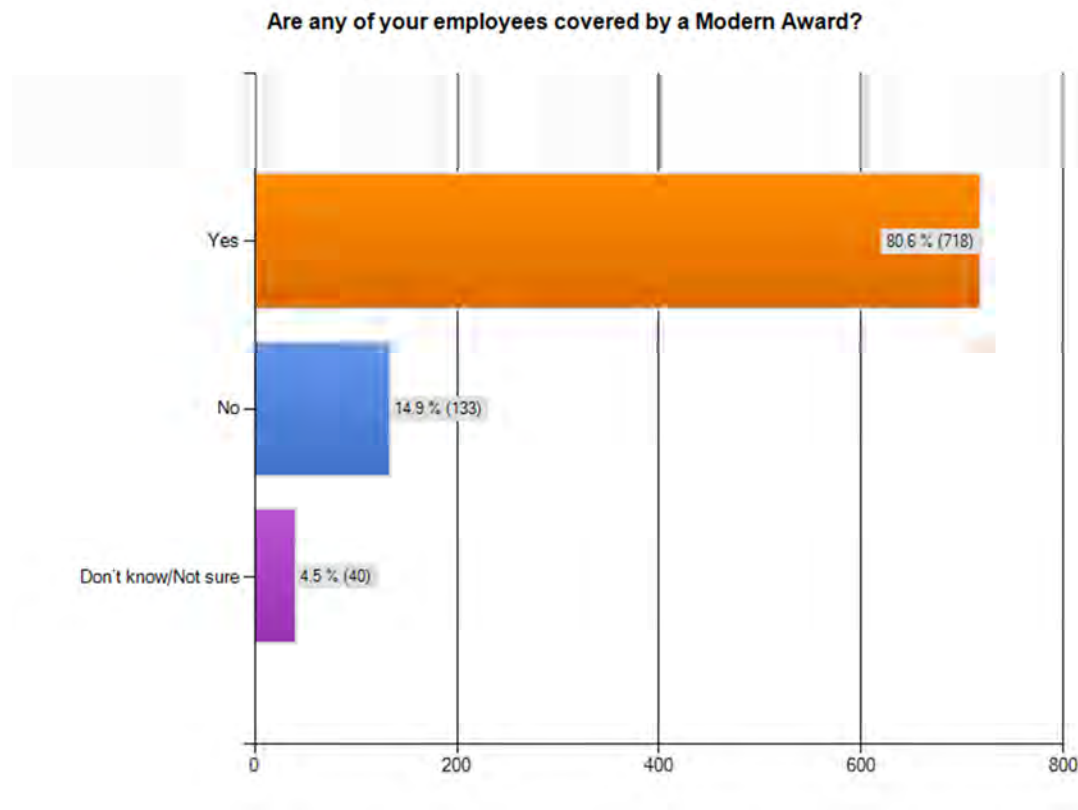


51. The majority of participants indicated that their employees worked in regional areas (37%), followed by inner metropolitan (36.2%) and outer metropolitan (25.9%).



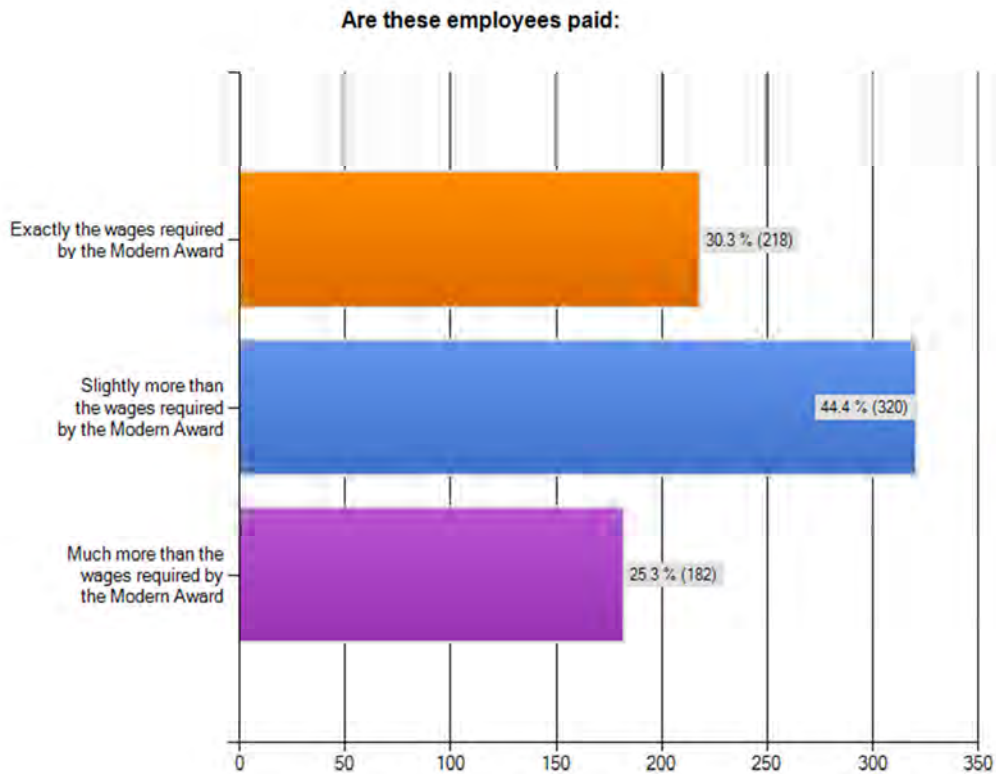
3.4.2 Award Coverage

52. Most participants indicated that a modern award covered at least one of their employees (80.6%).⁹



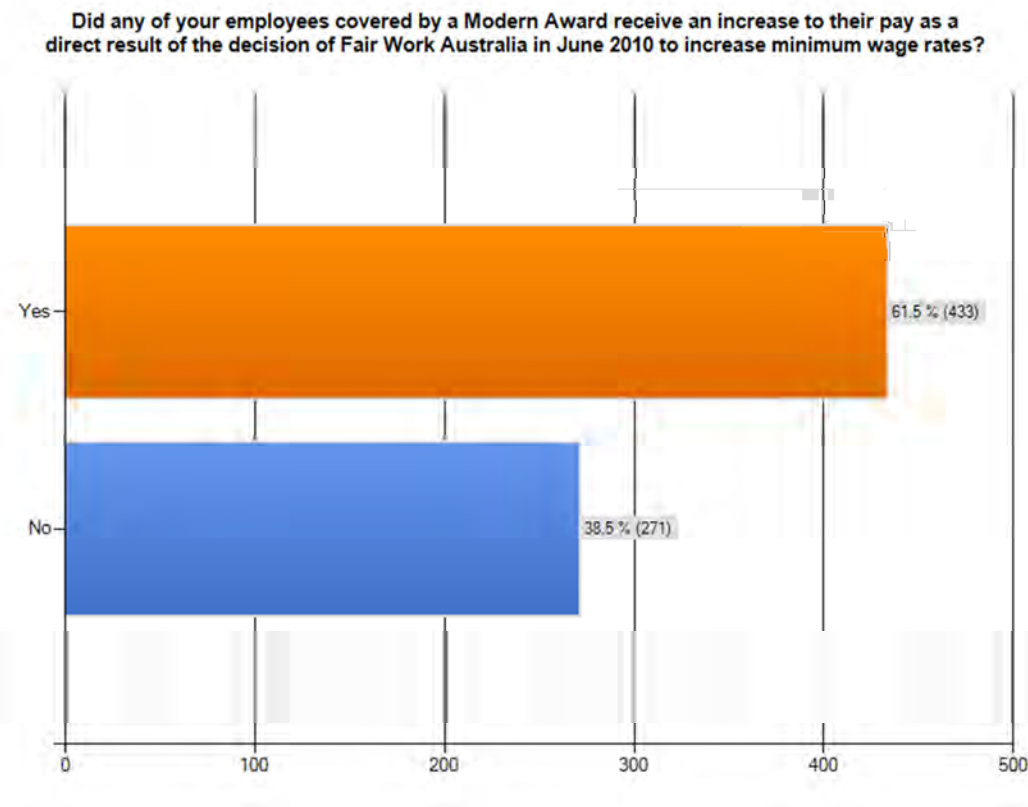
⁹ Where respondents indicated "No" or "Don't know/not sure" the survey was automatically ended. A guidance note applied to this question.

53. Most respondents indicated that they paid award regulated employees “*slightly more than the wages required by the Modern Award*” (44.4%), followed by “*exactly the wages required by the Modern Award*” (30.3%) and “*much more than the wages required by the Modern Award*” (25.3%).¹⁰



¹⁰ A guidance note applied to this question.

54. The majority of respondents (61.5%) indicated that they had passed on all or part of the 2010 AWR Decision to their employees who were covered by a relevant modern award.¹¹



3.4.3 Impact of the 2010 Decision

55. Where employers did pass on all or part of the 2010 AWR decision, the majority of employers indicated that as a direct result of the increase they reported a decrease in the level of overall profitability (65.9%) and a decrease in the level of cash flow (54.6%).
56. Whilst a majority of employers reported no change to the number of employees, the second most reported effect was a decrease in the number of full-time employees (18.6%), part-time employees (12.9%), and casual employees (24.2%), as well as an increase in juniors (10.6%).
57. Similarly, whilst the majority of employers reported that the total number of employment hours offered to employees did not change

¹¹ Where respondents indicated "No", they would automatically be taken to Q12. A guidance note applied to this question.

(53.4%), the second most reported effect was a decrease in total number of employment hours offered (39.1%).

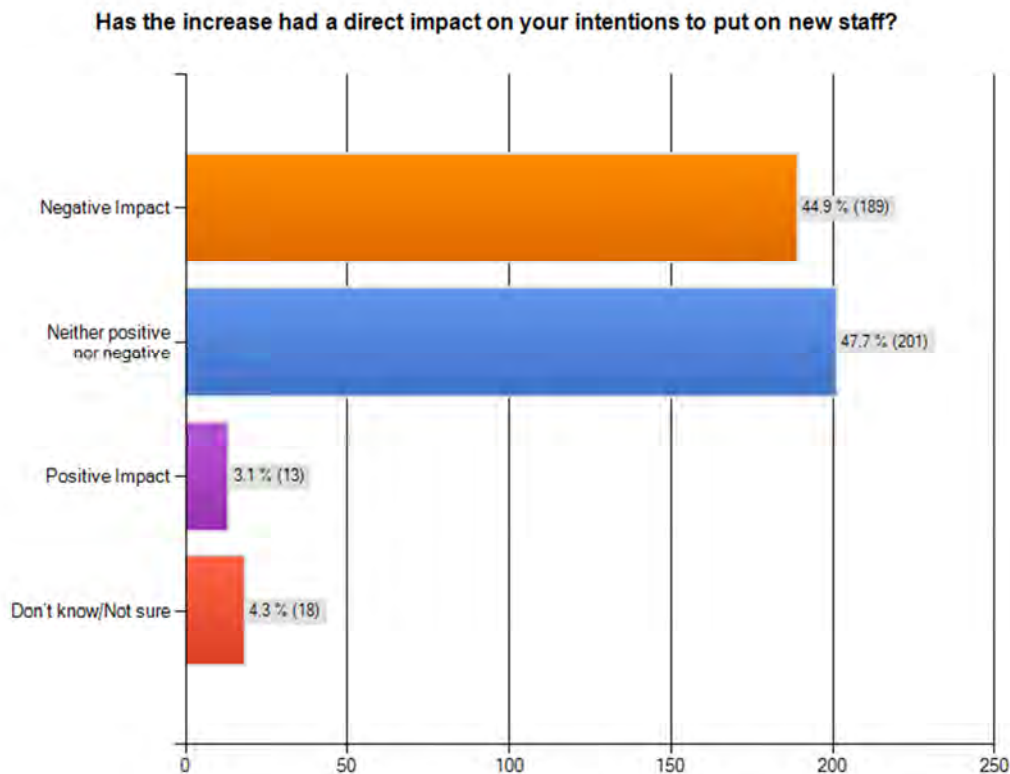
58. The majority of employers reported no change to the selling price of products and services offered (54.4%), the second most reported effect was an increase in the selling price of products and services offered (32.2%).

Has the increase directly led to changes in any of the following in your business?					
	Increase	No Change	Decrease	Don't Know/ Not Sure	Not Applicable
The number of full-time employees in your business	4.2% (18)	71.3% (303)	18.6% (79)	0.7% (3)	5.2% (22)
The number of part-time employees in your business	8.5% (36)	67.1% (285)	12.9% (55)	1.6% (7)	9.9% (42)
The number of casual employees in your business	9.6% (41)	59.1% (251)	24.2% (103)	1.2% (5)	5.9% (25)
The number of juniors in your business (aged under 21)	10.6% (45)	60.7% (258)	6.8% (29)	0.5% (2)	21.4% (91)
The number of trainees and apprentices	7.1% (30)	56.9% (242)	7.1% (30)	0.7% (3)	28.2% (120)
The total number of employment hours offered to employees	3.3% (14)	53.4% (227)	39.1% (166)	0.9% (4)	3.3% (14)
The level of investment in your business	7.1% (30)	57.9% (246)	24.7% (105)	2.1% (9)	8.2% (35)
The level of overall profitability in your business	3.8% (16)	25.2% (107)	65.9% (280)	2.6% (11)	2.6% (11)
The selling price of products and services offered by the business	32.2% (137)	54.4% (231)	5.9% (25)	1.9% (8)	5.6% (24)
The level of cash flow in the business	3.3% (14)	35.1% (149)	54.6% (232)	4.0% (17)	3.1% (13)

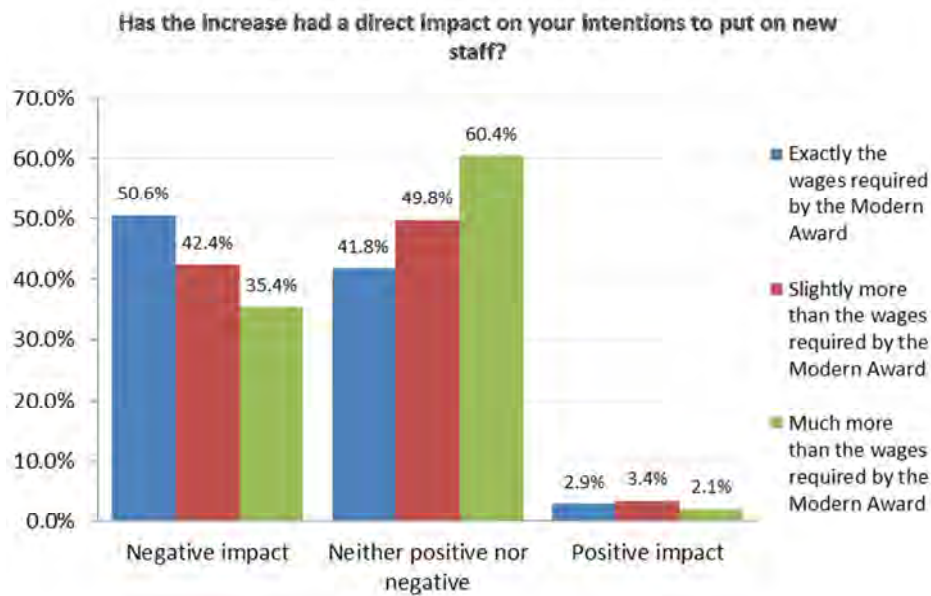
59. These results remain consistent regardless of whether the employees covered by a modern award are paid “*exactly the wages required by the Modern Award*”; “*slightly more than wages required by the Modern Award*”; or “*much more than the wages required by the Modern Award*”.

3.4.4 Hiring Intentions

60. The majority of employers indicated that the decision had neither a positive nor negative effect on their intentions to put on new staff (47.7%), the second most reported effect was that it had a negative impact on employers' intentions to put on new staff (44.9%).



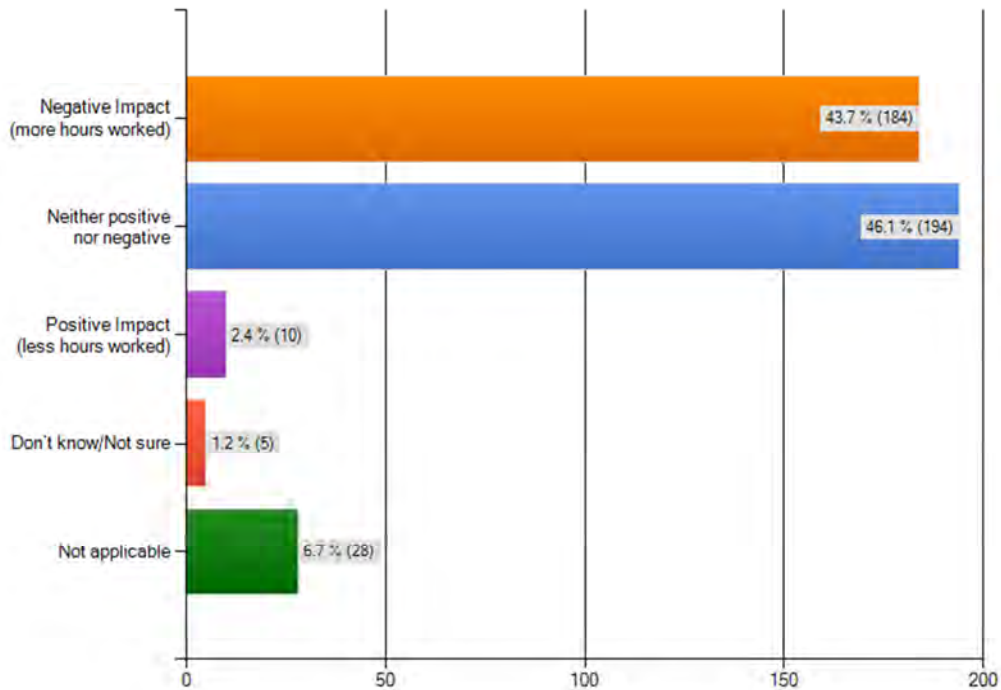
61. 50.6 per cent of employers who indicated that they paid their employees “*exactly the wages required by the Modern Award*” reported that the increase of the 2010 AWR decision had a negative impact on their intentions to put on new staff.



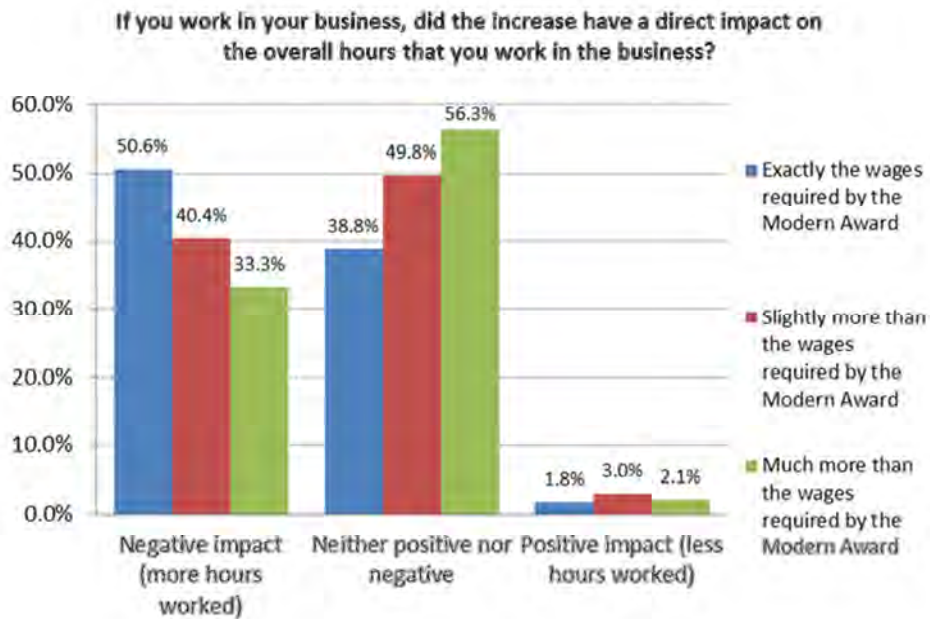
3.4.5 Owner's Hours of Work

62. Similarly, the majority of employers indicated that the decision had neither a positive nor negative effect on the overall hours worked in the business (46.1%), however, the second most reported effect was that it had a negative impact (more hours worked in their own business) (43.7%).

If you work in your business, did the increase have a direct impact on the overall hours that you work in the business?



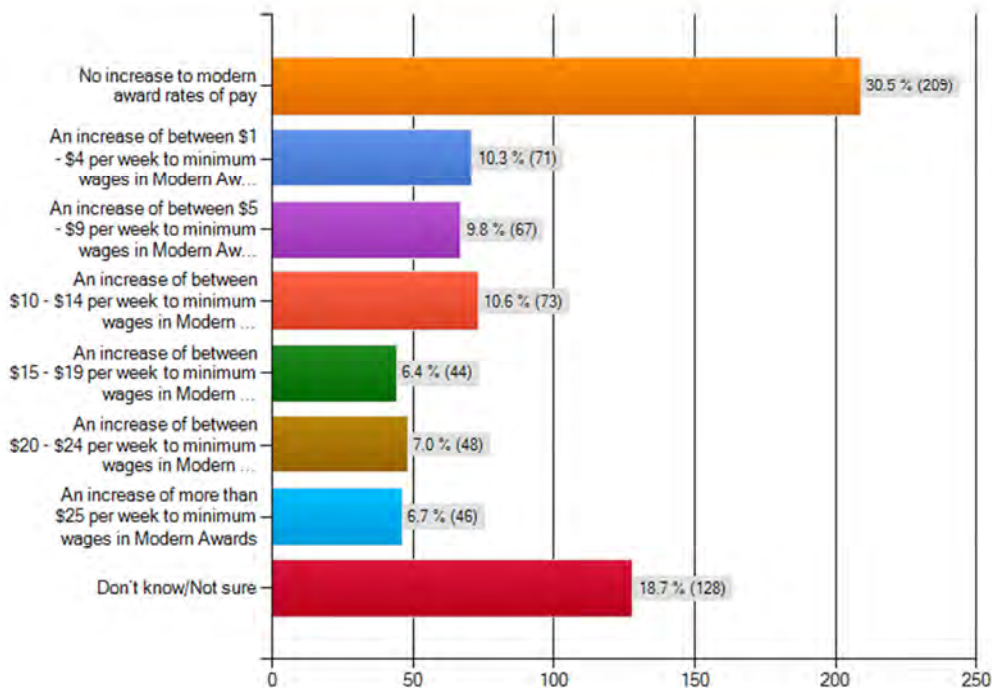
63. 50.6 per cent of owner managers who indicated that they paid their employees “*exactly the wages required by the Modern Award*” reported that they worked more hours in the business as a result of the 2010 AWR decision.



3.4.6 Quantum of 2011 AWR

64. The majority of employers indicated that there should be no increase to modern award rates of pay (30.5%).
65. This was followed by: don't know/not sure (18.7%), an increase of between \$10-\$14 per week (10.6%), an increase of between \$1-4 per week (10.3%) and an increase of between \$5-9 per week (9.8%).

Do you support a decision by Fair Work Australia in this year's Annual Wage Review which gives:



3.4.7 Qualitative Data

66. A total of 181 employers responded to an optional question and asked "Are there any comments you wish to make in relation to either last year's 2010 Annual Wage Review or this year's Annual Wage Review?".
67. The majority of respondents who provided comments were firms that employed between 1-19 employees (55% comments received) followed by employers with between 20 – 99 employees (33.7%), employers with 200 or more employees (6.6%) and employers with between 100 – 199 employees (4.4%).
68. An overwhelming majority of comments were negative or critical about the process of minimum wage determinations and the impact minimum wages have on their business.
69. The next largest proportion of comments were critical of the impact of the award modernisation process, the impact of modern awards, and the calculations of transitional provisions.

70. There were also significant number of comments about the general conditions a number of businesses are experiencing the impact of other non-labour related cost pressures.
71. The comments below are a representative sample of the comments provided by respondents. The size of the business is noted in parenthesis.

There seems to be a much smaller gap between salaried skilled staff and part time unskilled staff than their used to be. All that happens when staff wages go up is prices go up. This increases inflation so interest rates go up and staff are no better off. (200 and over)

Increased costs of electricity and other overheads have impacted and if there is a wage increase business owners will be working longer hours at a lower hourly rate than employees (1-19)

Significant impact in tough economic times. (20-99)

These awards are a backward step and will cause unemployment in future years (1-19)

Intentions should be published by March each year so all "society" can budget with some degree of certainty. (200 and over).

Due to the increase in wages we have had to increase our rates. Which has reduced the amount of contracts we have acquired. We have increased our casual employees due to work in flood affected areas but this will not be ongoing once the clean up is complete. I am hoping the type of company that we contract to have by that time realised the increases are necessary and will continue to use our services. (20-99)

Government needs to provide incentives to small business to encourage more employment and take on apprentices (1-19)

As a subcontractor in the building industry we are pressured to pay the correct rates of pay, and we do, but the bigger builders don't want to pay the higher charge out rates associated with increased rates to do business. (1-19)

Its interesting how all products are getting cheaper yet employees are expecting a wage increase. I own a new car yard and most models are cheaper than 10 years ago with more content. (20-99)

The increase in Superannuation levy (SGA) should be taken into account. Also, the rise in interest rates are adding pressure to wage rises. (1-19)

We tried to negotiate with Ms Gillard as we are in a regional area and the penalty rates for weekend and after hours are ridiculous and killing our business. Many other businesses close rather than pay penalties and lose money. We are a tourist destination and hence the demand for weekend services is great. I am very disappointed with the penalty system. Also the additional time it takes to do wages is also prohibitive. Maybe dollars to pay for software program would help. (20-99)

The wage award system has many levels of pay. Let the employer chose which workers should be rewarded by moving them up the pay scale appropriate to their performance as many workers are not really entitled to be paid more if they have poor performance record. This should be taken into account. (1-19)

Business conditions are difficult with many rising costs other than wages, largely due to Federal, State and local government imposts. We are trying to reduce casual staff hours and not increasing (1-19)

The more wages rise the more businesses will go off shore (1-19)

Customers are not willing to pay increases so this puts business and jobs in jeopardy (20-99)

We are price takers selling large volumes of meat produced on our farms. Our key inputs, feed grain, wages, electricity and gas have all increased in cost in the last 12 months. We are also price takers in all these markets. Our input and output markets are also volatile, making risk and cash flow management a significant issue. Our margins are increasingly tight as a result of wages increasing every year. Our sale price does not increase in response. We are attempting to make productivity improvements to stay in front but this is easier said than done! And we have a lot of cost increases to keep pace with. Living costs have not increased to the degree wages have increased in the last 5 or so years. Productivity improvements have not increased in the last 5 or so years at the same rate. We cannot afford further wage increases. (20-99)

Australian wages are one of the highest in the world and now making Australia one of the most expensive in the world. This is bad for tourism and is harder for small businesses to survive. (20-99)

The overall economic situation appears somewhat volatile at present with the potential consequences of recent flooding still uncertain. Moreover, with the announced increases in the Superannuation to start impacting soon, any wage increase ought be considered in the context of other rising costs (which are unlikely to be offset by productivity gains), and err on the side of conservatism less their be a major adverse impact on employment. Within our specific sector (i.e. charitable services sector providing employment related services for people with disabilities) I am aware that many longstanding organisations have incurred substantial deficits over the last 2 years, and would almost certainly experience major difficulty absorbing significantly increased wages costs. (200 and over)

Transition calculations are too complicated. (20-99)

The review has led to a total review of staffing and rostering and has significantly disadvantaged employees by removing flexibility in roster swaps for young staff as well as reducing total shift lengths (20-99)

Employment costs have risen dramatically in a difficult trading environment. (20-99)

Despite the performance of some of the majors (banks and miners), business is tough - costs keep rising (we are a relatively large electricity user) and prices we can get in the marketplace haven't. We are carrying excess labour for the level of work we have (hoping things will improve) - but additional costs with current activity will mean reduced personnel will continue to be employed. (1-19)

When the Government is giving their business to overseas owned companies and increasing wages to Australian companies something has to give and it is Australian owned business particularly small business. (20-99)

Wages will go up in July with the transitioning. (20-99)

The main problem I have with the award is the requirement to employ people for a minimum number of hours. We trade untill 6:30pm and need help from 4:00 to 6:00 for after school rush. Students would be ideal to employ to fulfil this role but I am not allowed to pay someone for 3 hours and students are unable to be at work by 3:30pm. Hence we run short of staff. Customer service suffers and a student misses out on an employment opportunity. (1-19)

It has created less flexibility for employers and employees. We now have the reward of paying payroll tax as a penalty for employing people!. (1-19)

Minimum start of 3 hours is a real issue with us (1-19)

We work in a competitive market place and need to offer better service and reduced prices to compete with Woolworths etc. Therefore our costs go up and profit down. (20-99)

I have to pay two school kids from 3 hours work when they are employed after school for two hours. They cannot do three hours work after school. It is industrial correctness gone mad. (1-19)

The recent substantial pay increases and their effects are still flowing through. As well, economic conditions and government legislation/PBS reductions have negatively impacted the business. Recovery is required. (100-199)

It was probably to much and should have been halved. (20-99)

The complexity of the awards are a complete nightmare for the small businesses who can't afford HR. It feels like a personal attack on us and we are the most generous. (1-19)

Manufacturing in Australia is difficult with the high AUD and cheap product from Asia. By increasing all wages, it makes us even more uncompetitive. (20-99)

I do not agree with making casual staff with regular hour go part-time as this is not suitable for both employees and employers under many circumstances (20-99)

Penalty rates in a profession such as pharmacy are unrealistic due to the hours the public expect us to be open (1-19)

We have ALWAYS paid our employees 25% to 50% ABOVE the minimum award wages; determined by responsibility, qualifications, experience and loyalty. (1-19)

Business is down once again in the cinema industry. We cannot afford any increase in wages (1-19)

They should take care with this decision, an increase in wages may well mean I may need to reduce either the number of employees or

the hours available to them. That will not help employment, or help my business give good service to the community, or help my profitability to enable me to repay my loan. There would be a follow-on effect if wage costs increased. (1-19)

There was a large difference going from a glazier award to a joinery award which impacted on wages e.g. tool allowance and special allowance (1-19)

The award simplification is a joke and certainly not Gillard's finest achievement as she claims. The award is now 8 pages of detail when it was once 4 and much more complicated. Apart from the increase in occasions where penalty rates apply, the laundry allowance and the overall complexity of applying the changes at a time of low retail interest, increasing rent, government cuts to PBS and increases to interest rates it is just another nail in the coffin. At the age of 54 I am working harder and longer for less. Where is my pay increase? (1-19)

Minimum of 3 hours employment is very inconvenient and causes some problems (1-19)

Casual loadings on public holidays have forced us to close on all public holidays as 2.5 times normal pay is unsustainable. As a result all our young people miss out on working on those days and have no pay and I don't have a real day off as owner. (1-19)

We will decrease essential services as we will no longer open public holidays and we will reduce weekend trading hours (20-99)

Any further increase we will need to cut our trading hours and reduce casuals further . With all the retails challenges and price war it is becoming difficult to trade longer hours and becoming non-sustainable. (1-19)

Pay rates are only one issue, accruals like 2 weeks sick/carers leave is a huge impost too (20-99)

We are a late trading pharmacy and have been for more than 40 years and the effect will force us to either reduce hours or staff or both (20-99)

Modern awards upped the wages for my staff, so I would like a couple of years where they plateau. (1-19)

We open to provide a service in a remote area and at best break even. Further, we try to employ pharmacy students and school students to give them experience, but this gets challenging when wages have penalty rates attached as well – it defeats the purpose. Also, the three hour minimum payment has detrimentally affected our ability to employ and train younger staff for after school work. The earliest most can get to work is 4-4.30pm and we shut at 6.15pm. This minimum needs to be removed as it creates a barrier to employing younger staff. (20-99)

As a responsible sympathetic employer, we realise an increase may be necessary for people/families to survive these economic times. However, as an Australian manufacturer, we are facing an increasingly difficult situation with the high AUD and ridiculously low offshore wage costs leading to extreme competition from (sometimes inferior) imported products. (20-99)

It is difficult to pass on the costs of a wage increase due to competition in the industry (1-19)

Even though we need to pay above award to attract staff we do not absorb increases and are forced to keep relativity with any FWA increase. The FWA is too generous in giving increases. (20-99)

Further wage increases will just make us non competitive and have more job losses (20-99)

It is hard enough to run a small business and plan for the future without constant changes – No government authority takes into account that small business owners work in general in excess of 60-80 hours per week (1-19)

Australia's cost of labour is relatively high in global terms and will put increasing pressure on the competitiveness of our export market. (1-19)

We must make sure that pay increases are directly related to productivity increases and not allowed to become an expectation. Our award shifted from 40 hours to 38. We have now lost productive hours in the week and paying more through increases in award rates for less hours worked. (20-99)

I have been self-employed for 30 years and it has become harder to afford staff, not just their wage, but the many add on benefits & rights they now have. These modern awards are the last straw. My plan is to

work harder myself with the 3 key staff I have left in my small business & control demand for our products by increasing (1-19)

Minimum hours worked per shift for junior casuals should be reduced from 3 hours to 2 hours under the General Retail Industry Award to encourage employment of those who are students and can only work a 2 hour shift and not a 3 hour one because it encroached on their studies (1-19)

If wages are increased we will cut staff. (20-99)

Last year's increase was too big a 'hit' as it also added to super contributions; work cover levies, and 17.5% leave loading which when added together, is a sizable jump in overheads. (1-19)

The modern award system cost our business \$8-10k in lawyers fees & wasted downtime! Very expensive for small business! (1-19)

We rely on government funding and any increase without the same commitment from the government will impact badly on our organisation (20-99)

Too many increases and we can't increase our fees or we lose the contracts (1-19)

Putting up wages is always a vicious circle. Wages go up, everything else goes up. For employers this means the price of goods/materials goes up by double the percentage. This helps to increase more manufacturing overseas, less jobs here. Small businesses are hit the hardest. (1-19)

I am not opposed to wage increases BUT they MUST be offset by productivity improvements/trade-offs (20-99)

There will already be a wage increase in our modern award due to transitional increases. A year of no other rises would ease the pressure a bit. (20-99)

Pay rates should reflect the pressures placed on businesses ie when times are less profitable, pay rises should be on hold. (1-19)

Casual costs are 'blowing out' - transitioning towards a 25% loading is not financially viable. Also, keep adult apprentice rates low - the only effect that increasing their rates has, is to discourage employment of

adult apprentices. Higher base level rates are really discouraging my business from the employment of unskilled, inexperienced and junior staff (in turn, not giving them the experience that they need). (20-99)

I understand the need to protect the worker and give a fair wage, but it is now all about the worker and there is very little protection to the employer. (1-19)

Business is very hard for us and increases in pay would make it harder still (1-19)

Any significant increase to the minimum wage (e.g. again +\$20) will directly affect the number of hours offered to our casual staff and full time staff will work longer and harder to compensate. Across most small businesses this will impact the predominantly junior casual work force - what is the point of increasing wages if this results in less hours or even worse less jobs to be had? (1-19)

Different rates, penalty rates, loadings are a administration nightmare (20-99)

Any wage increase will make it harder for Australian companies to compete with China and India which will inevitably lead to loss of jobs. (1-19)

It would make life a lot better if there was just one system and a decent minimum wage, and let the employer come to an agreed wage, (1-19)

The modern awards are very hard to understand which can easily lead to mistakes made. (1-19)

Impact that casuals are paid 25% loading when they are already compensated by flat 13% tax schedule for seasonal work. Also that penalty rates apply to +38 hours p/w and weekend work when the opportunity to harvest is just 13 weeks and casuals have always wanted to work as many hours as possible. We cannot afford to pay penalty rates hence have had to source more staff (often less reliable than our regular seasonal casuals) they are as upset as us! Government has no idea how wages continue to cost small business out of the market place! (1-19)

As a business that acquires annual contracts renewable each year some with low margins as they are primarily man power/labour based, it is difficult to determine cost with little or no notice of the increases

employers can be faced with during the period of contract. I think 6 mths notice at least would prepare employers with a basis for costing works without compromising profits or spending in the business. (1-19)

Penalty rates paid to employees in the hospitality industry on weekends and in particular on public holidays especially in tourist regions is counter productive. It is impossible for our restaurant to make a profit paying double time and a half to staff on public holidays. We either close the doors or we operate with essential staff ie. chef backed up by family members. Staff are unemployed on days when they would be very happy to work for a fair wage and the general public who flock to tourist towns during these times have trouble finding somewhere to eat. For workers choosing to work in hospitality weekends and public holidays are normal working days. (1-19)

We are not mean people and would like to pay more but because no one will spend money at the moment it is hard to even pay the bills and more wage increase means we can not have as many full time staff and have to work harder and longer hours our selves. It is just not a good time to put up wages. It will cost jobs. (1-19)

It's not just the wages, but the other concessions that the award brings that are hard to manage. (1-19)

Employee has been on high wages already, and not much more increase in productivity. With a high competitive in market place, it exerts a negative impact on employer. (1-19)

We are currently thinking on the lines of doing away with our office and workshop and doing mobile service. Our staff wages are a significant part of our expenditure and we can reduce this by reducing staff unfortunately. (1-19)

The Reserve Bank, by increasing interest rates has increased the AUD & severely damaged exporters with no or limited cover and import replacement businesses. It has, by increasing the exchange rate, reduced cost increases for employees. Other countries protect their exporters, NOT Australia. A small pay increase would be some help (1-19)

The calculations for an employee's pay is very very complicated with the Modern Award taking into account transitional rules. Another pay increase will make this even worse. This is a cost to business to get it right. (1-19)

How much more pain can small businesses absorb to wage increases, power bills, cost of doing business and if this continues there will be no more small businesses left . Wake up our Government . (1-19)

In our case, all staff received an overall increase to their wages and a reasonable one. I think that given the fact that increases will again be happening as a result of the transition process another increase facilitated as a result of the review is not necessary. (1-19)

With increases in January with transitional arrangements and increases in July with award it is difficult to keep seeking increases from clients so certain amounts need to be absorbed - making profitability and cash flow difficult to maintain (200 and over)

Small businesses are dying a very slow death as we are expected to pay big dollars for unskilled workers and as we are working harder ourselves, have little or no time available to train people. There's no incentive for employers to keep employing people (1-19)

We have seen an increase in our wage bill of a minimum of 10% since the introduction of modern awards. (1-19)

As a charity we are independent of Government or Church and all extra costs come from the kindness of donations which are principally to assist those in need. These donations are dwindling due to general costs across the board in utilities, etc. The modern award system is too prescriptive and does not allow any flexibility for us to utilise the dollars we have to the best advantage. (100-199)

The majority of our staff are on the maximum level of the Aged Care Award 2011. We are desperate to reimburse them at a maximum level (level 5/6/7) in order to keep their services especially when they can get more as a check-out chick at Coles and have less legislative, accreditation and regulatory stress. However with only a 1.8% CPI increase in 2010 in regards incoming revenue from the Commonwealth is does not match wages growth. This has been a consistent problem for many years in aged care and forcing us all to re-evaluate employment numbers when/if we are even lucky enough to have the staff in the first place. I support wage increases however it is very very hard to be viable. No employer = no job (20-99)

We are in the tourism industry and the other part of the 2 speed economy that is not booming. We have no price flexibility to increase rates due to the down turn in the market and we are being severely

impacted on by the increase in tradesmen's rates to over \$120 per hour which is increasing our expenses. We have a high casual component in our staffing and as many are backpackers, we have a high induction component per staff member as many only stay for 6 months. If we hired locals, they are difficult to maintain as there is a high expectation in the community that wages just go up but there is no increase in output. We have no flexibility in our employment options, other than my wife and I working more hours and hiring less staff. 60 hours per week is already enough for me and should there be a pay rise just for turning up to work when the cost of staples is steady or reducing. The increasing cost of utilities is an issue for the government to deal with, not one to be hand-passed to employers by a mandated increase. We already pay above award for employees that are valuable. We do not need an increase in the minimum rate for employees who are just starting and yet to prove their worth. (1-19)

Can relate to employees requiring more money in their pay packet, but the reality is that with everything increasing in price for small business we do not have the luxury of being able to afford any increases in pay (1-19)

The wage increase has put a major strain in our business. As a childcare operator, we are forced to increase fees and as such this has had a major decrease in take up of the service required from families - put simply it is no longer affordable (20-99)

As a non-profit business trying to operate with a dual purpose of providing opportunities for persons with a disability or mental illness, and operating as a successful business, while relying on funding for part of our income, if the funding doesn't increase to match the increases, our organisation's profitability is directly effected. Opportunities to offer supported employees additional hours will be even more closely scrutinised against operational needs which might limit some opportunities to more part-time offers, which is unfortunate. However, our need for good support and corporate staff will continue to be a pressure in the changing economy. (200 and over)

Consider small business already struggling before making any rises in wages. (1-19)

The current award rates make the agricultural industry highly uncompetitive and in many cases put future investment decisions into doubt. (20-99)

We are a business that has been hard hit by penalty hours and rates coming from the introduction of the Modern Award. We have had to employ more staff to try to stop staff working over 38 hours per week. Many staff want to work the extra hours, however the penalty rates, prohibit this. We cannot get an increase from our customers for our product manufactured on a weekend or public holiday or after an eight hour day. The past 12months have been very trying. An increase to the flat rate only increases the problem. The Modern Award, has many antiquated rules working against a deregulated market. With this in mind, and with the constant battle of the customer (being the major supermarkets) trying to squeeze the price at the supplier level which in turn to improve their share price, doesn't leave you much to work with, for the constant increases with wages. (100-199)

4. CONCLUSION

72. The results from the *ACCI National Employer Survey* on the impact of last year's minimum wage decision is consistent with a similar survey conducted by ACCI member, the Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce (VACC) on automotive employers in particular states.¹² The results are also consistent with the general findings reported by a Fair Work Australia commissioned report by the Workplace Research Centre (7/2010 – *Enterprise Case Studies: Effects of minimum wage-setting at an enterprise level*).¹³
73. There are a number of methodological limitations which will be considered in subsequent surveys.
74. The results from the survey suggest that decisions by the Panel which increase minimum wages do have a real and direct effect on individual employers (including reduced cash flow and profitability), the increased hours owners work and the flow-on impact for employees and customers (including the prices of goods and services).
75. The results of the *ACCI National Employer Survey* indicate that the inaugural AWR Decision did have a substantive impact on individual businesses, particularly those that are SMEs.
76. The ACTU claim in the 2011 AWR case ranges from between \$28 at the low skill level up to \$80 per week for professionals, would add at least \$3.6 billion to the annual wages bill of Australia's small and medium employers. This comes on the back of research suggesting that employers are trying to absorb higher non-productivity based labour costs, hold on to existing staff and compete in an uneven economy.
77. The Minimum Wage Panel of Fair Work Australia must be cautious in granting a significant increase following on from last year's decision in light of the findings of the first *ACCI National Employer Survey*.

¹² http://www.fwa.gov.au/sites/wagereview2011/submissions/VACC_sub_awr1011.pdf

¹³ http://www.fwa.gov.au/sites/wagereview2011/research/Enterprise_Case_Studies7_2010.pdf

INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON

International comparisons

One way of comparing minimum wages across countries is to convert their values to a common currency using nominal exchange rates (ERs) or purchasing power parity (PPP) exchange rates. The latter calculation attempts to compensate for differences in the cost of living across countries. Table D1 compares the hourly value of minimum wages across thirteen OECD countries using these methods.

Using the PPP method as the basis for comparison, Australia's basic minimum wage rate is the highest among the countries shown. Using the alternative ER conversion, Australia is ranked as having the sixth highest minimum wage among the countries shown.

Table D1: Value of gross hourly minimum wage, various countries, April 2009

Rank (based on PPP method)	Country	National currency	Hourly rate AUD (ER)	Hourly rate AUD (PPP)	Date of last change
1	Australia	AUD 14.31	14.31	14.31	Oct-2008
2	Luxembourg	EUR 9.47	17.79	14.12	Jan-2009
3	France	EUR 8.71	16.37	13.75	Jul-2008
4	Netherlands	EUR 8.39	15.76	13.59	Jan-2009
5	Belgium	EUR 8.00	15.04	12.53	Oct-2008
6	UK	GBP 5.73	11.87	12.37	Oct-2008
7	New Zealand	NZD 12.50	10.11	11.76	Apr-2009
8	Ireland	EUR 8.65	16.25	11.53	Jul-2007
9	Canada	CAD 8.80	10.09	9.99	-
10	US	USD 6.55	9.26	9.08	Jul-2008
11	Spain	EUR 4.20	7.89	7.59	Jan-2009
12	Greece	EUR 4.05	7.60	7.53	Sep-2008
13	Portugal	EUR 2.60	4.88	5.13	Jan-2009

Note: AFPC calculations based on nominal exchange rates (ER) and purchasing power parity (PPP) exchange rates. For countries that do not have an hourly rate, the minimum rate has been converted to an hourly basis assuming a working time of 8 hours per day, 40 hours per week. Average exchange rate over the month to 22 April 2009. PPPs are derived from the OECD Comparative Price Levels for February 2009. The hourly rate for Canada is the weighted average of the provincial/territorial rates. Date of last change varies between areas. The hourly rate for Spain, Greece and Portugal does not include annual supplementary pay of two additional months of salary for full-time workers.

Sources: Wage rates <<http://www.fodoo.com/minwage.html>>; <<http://www.ors.dol.govt.nz/pay/minimum.html>>; <<http://canadaonline.about.com/library/bl/blminwage.htm>>; <<http://www.dol.gov/dol/topic/wages/minimumwage.htm>>; <<http://www.lowpay.gov.uk/>>; <http://internationalezaken.szw.nl/index.cfm?fuseaction=dsp_rubriek&rubriek_id=391035#76611000>; ER <<http://www.rba.gov.au/Statistics/HistoricalExchangeRates/2009.xls>>; PPP <<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/48/18/18598721.pdf>>

Source: Appendix D, Australian Fair Pay Commission July 2009 Wage Setting-Review Decision and Reasons for Decision.

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**NATIONAL FIRE INDUSTRY
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NATIONAL RETAIL ASSOCIATION

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AUSTRALIAN HOTELS ASSOCIATION

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**PLASTICS & CHEMICALS
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