



# MEDIA RELEASE

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## **New IR regime weeks away; Rudd Government weak on explaining changes for Small Business**

The Rudd Labor Government has failed to ensure that small business operators and employees are properly informed about and prepared for changes to employment laws as a result of the award modernisation process. The new awards are set to take effect in coming weeks.

Despite promises at the last election and repeated assurances that employers and employees would be fully informed about the practical impact of the new employment laws, the Rudd Labor Government has displayed complete indifference towards the small business community about the introduction of new National Employment Standards and Labor's Modern Awards.

When initial funding was made available in June for *Fair Work Act* information and education services, the Rudd Labor Government specifically recognised that further funding would be required to support the implementation of the new National Employment Standards and so-called Modern Awards.

With just weeks to go before the key aspects of the Rudd Labor Government's re-regulated employment regime take effect, no extensive small business education and information campaign has been undertaken to explain the changes and the practical implications of the new awards in the workplace.

The January 1 changes are the 'business end' of the new workplace relations regime and with some awards only finalised in recent weeks and evolving transition arrangements, confusion about the detailed provisions adds to concerns about the risk of heavy-handed enforcement for unintended non-compliance.

Small business proprietors have been focused on coping with the economic challenges and making sure their businesses remain viable and able to continue to employ.

The least the Rudd Labor Government can do is support the small business community with relevant and reliable advice about the new employment regime. Small business people are busy people who want to do the right thing and should be supported with the new workplace regime adding to their responsibilities.

What is desperately needed by the small business community is for Labor's election promise and the Rudd Government's assurances to be honoured with the immediate funding of a National Employment Standards and Modern Awards information and education campaign.

Given that the start-up date is just days away, a commitment to emphasise collaboration to achieve compliance and not heavy-handed enforcement of new provisions few know much about is also needed.

Small businesses were given some comfort that further information and practical advice about the new National Employment Standards and Modern Awards was on the way when the Government allocated \$12.9 million in June for an information and education campaign about the Fair Work Act.

But the small business community has heard nothing since and nothing from the Small Business Minister about the urgent need to provide specific and accessible information and education about the new National Employment Standards and Modern Awards that responds to the specific needs and challenges of the small business community.

The Rudd Labor Government has made much about its new regime supposedly being easier to navigate, and replacing an 'alphabet soup' of arrangements.

Unless decisive action is taken to honour earlier promises and inform small businesses about the practical implications of the latest instalments of Labor's workplace regime, the 'alphabet soup' Labor used to complain about will simply become the Rudd Labor Government's 'mystery minestrone'.