

The Australian Workers' Union Queensland Branch Office of Industrial Relations Submission Investigation into Proposed Christmas Eve Part-Day Public Holiday

The Australian Workers' Union Queensland Branch (AWU) welcomes and appreciates the opportunity to provide input into the State Governments' commitment to make Christmas Eve a public holiday from 6PM to midnight.

The AWU is Queensland's oldest trade union, representing members across a significant number of sectors, including public and private health, resources, aged care, local government and retail and fast food.

The AWU wholeheartedly supports the State Governments decision to make Christmas Eve night a public holiday in Queensland.

Equally, we are concerned by the public comments by various business and employer groups seeking to deprive working Queenslanders of this important development.

Christmas time, including Christmas Eve, is an incredibly important time for families and workers across Queensland. Ensuring that our members are able to enjoy this time with family and friends, and that those who aren't are fairly compensated, is unquestionably vital to ensuring a healthy work-life balance and decent quality of living.

Member Feedback

Prior to the making of this submission, the AWU sought feedback from its membership regarding the establishment of Christmas Eve night as a public holiday.

During this process, well over one-thousand AWU members took the time to participate in our survey on this subject. **Of these responders, over ninety-nine percent indicated their support for making Christmas Eve night a public holiday.**

In making this submission, the AWU wishes to highlight the very real and significant impact that Christmas Eve becoming a public holiday would have on our members, and by extension, working Queenslanders from right across the state.

While a broad range of reasons were given for wanting to make the night of Christmas Eve a public holiday, common themes included a desire to spend time with family and friends, the impact of Christmas Eve on people working stressful and demanding jobs, the cultural and religious significance of Christmas Eve and the equity of workers sharing in significant private sector profits during the Christmas period.

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Work-Life Balance

When asked specifically why they supported making Christmas Eve night a public holiday, many AWU members pointed to the significance of Christmas Eve and their desire to spend more time with family and friends and receive appropriate compensation if they are unable to do so.

For these members, Christmas time, including Christmas Eve is a special time of the year. Many pointed to the fact that spending time away from family and friends during this time can have a detrimental effect on their home life, and welcomed any move to make it easier for families to see each other over Christmas.

"I believe retail staff should be given the option to work Christmas Eve and those that do should be entitled to penalty rates. I personally have not celebrated Christmas day with my family for 7 years due to working in retail and being told I have to work. My family is a 21 hour drive from where I live and it is physically impossible to get there."

Pamela, Retail

"Christmas is about family, if you can't spend Christmas eve with your family because of work then you would think that your employer would compensate your time with better pay."

Susan, Local Government

"I work nights only, and as such I would be at work the night before Christmas. I wouldn't be there the night before, to make the morning of Christmas that special occasion for my little boy. I wouldn't be able to enjoy Christmas Day like most other people because I would be sleeping for part of the day. If I'm expected to work the day / night before Christmas, then I believe that I should be compensated for the time I worked those Socially Undesirable hours, missing those magical moments with my family so a corporation can profit."

Paul, Tourism and Hospitality

"Christmas Eve is usually a time to be home with family but for some of us it is an impossibility so why not get a little bonus for our time."

Gayle, Queensland Health

"It is a night that is meant for being with family. People who are obliged to work should be adequately compensated."

Lee, Social and Community Care

Demanding and Stressful Occupations

Many AWU members, by the nature of their occupation, are engaged to work shifts which often sees them work unsociable hours and having to spend time away from their family and friends for long stretches of time during the year, often including on Christmas Eve.

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These AWU Members are therefore at a disadvantage when compared to white-collar, 9-5 occupations where employees very rarely are made to give up public holidays and weekends.

Furthermore, many of these same members work demanding and often high-stress jobs and as such appreciate any opportunity to either spend additional time at home or at the very least, be compensated for this time spent away from family and friends.

For these AWU members, spending time away from work is essential to a healthy work-life balance and a decent quality of living.

"I work in a department that requires 7-day care for our clients. Making sacrifices with family time is standard. I have missed out on so much to care for others. To ask for something of a small nature like this would not be unreasonable. Please make my Christmas this year special."

Corey, Queensland Health

"We work hard all year for our industry. They say we need to give 50% to our work and 50% to our home life. If we're not happy with our home life, we won't be happy at work. Christmas is a very special time for all families. Our employer should reward us with some extra family time."

Andrea, Alumina Production

"Because I am sacrificing time with friends and family to keep this mining operation running over the Christmas period, that should be rewarded."

Phillip, Mining

"It is a special family time of the year and for those in our industry who work nightshift it would be compensation for having to sleep most of Christmas day and missing out on family celebration and Christian participation."

Angela, Disability Carer

Cultural and Religious Significance

Other AWU Members highlighted the cultural and religious importance of Christmas Eve, and the benefits that a Christmas Eve public holiday would provide in allowing them to participate in cultural and religious activities during this time:

"In our family we have Christmas on the eve, due to our Austrian heritage. So it is equally important and special as Christmas Day."

Isabelle, Tourism and Hospitality

"As a born and raised Filipino and a sacred Catholic, Christmas Eve 24th December and Christmas Day 25th December are the most important to us as we celebrate the feast night before Christmas day we celebrate this by having a Holy Mass and day of Vigil."

Veronica, Queensland Health

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“My family and I have always celebrated Christmas on Christmas Eve and then spent Christmas Day travelling to all the relatives. I have personally missed Christmas Eve the last two years due to being rostered on. It was quite distressing each time missing out on this important occasion to celebrate our Saviour Jesus Christ’s birth with my loved ones. Although money does not truly compensate for missed time, to be compensated for missing out on this time with my family would at least bring into our home much needed income.”

Vicki, Queensland Health

Sharing in Christmas Profits

AWU members pointed to the inherent unfairness of working additional hours at unsociable hours to increase profits for private companies while not being adequately compensated for this sacrifice.

“It’s a time workers’ should be spending with family. If businesses want to have workers spend time away from their family on Christmas Eve, then they need to properly compensate the worker.”

Blair, Department of Environment and Science

“I will be working Christmas Eve while my family will be enjoying the occasion, so I feel I should be compensated while my employer makes loads of money on last minute sales.”

Shiralee, Retail

“The shops make so much profit and people working miss out on church services and celebrations and are too tired to enjoy the next day.”

Ellen, Private Health

Conclusion

It is evident that the proposal to make Christmas Eve night a public holiday enjoys near unanimous support within the AWU’s membership.

While there are considerable, valid reasons raised by our membership as to why Christmas Eve should be a public holiday, in essence, Christmas Eve is a special time for so many Queenslanders and should be treated as such.

Accordingly, we are happy to support the introduction of Christmas Eve night as a public holiday and commend the Government on agreeing to proceed with this.

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