

Media Release

Senator Bridget McKenzie

Senator for Victoria

20 May 2016

PROTECTING VULNERABLE WORKERS

Nationals Senator for Victoria, Bridget McKenzie today applauded moves to strengthen existing workplace laws to ensure better protection for workers and to stamp out exploitation by unscrupulous employers.

Senator McKenzie said the Coalition's focus on jobs and growth will be complemented by increased safeguards for workers who have been let down in recent times as a result of blatant noncompliance with workplace laws by employers across a number of industries who ignore their obligations under Australian laws.

"As Deputy Chair of the Education and Employment References Committee, I heard of many cases of workers being ripped off by companies who underpay their employees.

The Committee conducted an inquiry into the temporary work visa programs which Senator McKenzie said highlighted cases of exploitation.

There is the recent, well publicised case of 7-Eleven but there are many others who came to our attention.

"The Government has no tolerance for those who do the wrong thing and this announcement by Minister Cash is very welcome.

"I am particularly pleased of the Minister's announcement of a \$20 million funding increase for the Fair Work Ombudsman to improve its ability to hold unscrupulous employers to account," Senator McKenzie said.

Under the new tougher penalties, a new higher penalty category of 'serious contraventions' will be introduced and will apply to any employer who has intentionally ripped off workers, regardless of the employer's size.

New offence provisions that capture franchisors and parent companies who fail to deal with exploitation by their franchisees will also be introduced along with the strengthening of the powers of the Fair Work Ombudsman so that it can more effectively deal with employers who intentionally exploit workers by compelling them to produce information and answer questions.

A Migrant Workers Taskforce in the Fair Work Ombudsman will target employers who exploit migrant workers.

Senator McKenzie said the Coalition's commitment will protect vulnerable workers and help ensure better workplaces in Australia.