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Wednesday 12 April 2006

THE Daily Telegraph

Extra day off for all workers in NSW - EXCLUSIVE

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Publication: The Daily Telegraph (003,Wed 12 Apr 2006)

Edition: 2 - Extended Metro

Keywords: **Workplace (5),Industrial (1),Union (2),Kevin (1),Andrews (1),industry (1)**

EVERY worker in NSW will get a new public holiday under a State Government proposal to stop a million employees losing a day off under the federal **workplace** laws.

Industrial Relations Minister John Della Bosca has conducted a review and found NSW could feasibly add an extra public holiday.

An estimated one million workers whose awards include "union picnic days" -- effectively a day off -- will lose them under the Federal Government's **workplace** laws, which makes them illegal.

The proposal came on another day of dramatic developments in the wake of the **workplace** changes, as:

* OPTUS sacked 60 field workers to cut costs -- only to offer some jobs back under private agreements; and

* A BACKDOWN on the **workplace** laws could remove the requirement for employers to keep records of all employees' working hours after business groups complained the new rules are onerous and create added red tape.

Workplace Relations Minister **Kevin Andrews** hinted yesterday the Government was looking at ways to amend the rules.

With regard to the extra public holiday proposal, some awards include Easter Tuesday, which are no longer protected by law.

As revealed by The Daily Telegraph in February, the State Government had contemplated reinstating these days through law, as has been done in the ACT.

Currently, up to 44,000 manufacturing workers could lose their Easter Tuesday benefit.

The holiday is in awards for workers in the printing and metalwork **industry** but is not a public holiday by state law and can be struck out

under WorkChoices.

The Australian Manufacturing Workers **Union** said it had received calls from workers saying their bosses wanted to axe the holiday.

NSW has 11 public holidays, the same as Victoria and Queensland but one less than South Australia, Northern Territory and the ACT.

No final decision has been made but the Government has made it clear it intends to act.

`` We can see no reason why we should allow WorkChoices to remove a day off for over a million workers under awards and consideration is being given," Mr Della Bosca said.

`` A preliminary review has shown that NSW would appear to have one fewer public holidays than some other states and the issue is being examined."

It is understood a potential date has already been suggested but Mr Della Bosca's office said the Government had yet to lock it in.

Employer groups said a new day off for workers would cost money and could drive business interstate.

`` If the State Government introduces such a measure, I expect the big winners will be Peter Beattie and Steve Bracks," Australian Business Limited chief executive Mark Bethwaite said.

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