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# THE AGE

## **Pay could drop to \$7 an hour, warns Hulls**

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WORKERS could be paid as little as \$7 an hour under WorkChoices legislation coming into effect tomorrow, Victorian Attorney-General Rob Hulls said..

The new rules would hurt low-paid workers because there are no guarantees on minimum wage conditions, Mr Hulls said.

"We now learn through these regulations that WorkChoices allows the minimum wage to be averaged over 12 months. This will really hurt low-paid workers and, in particular, regional workers such as fruit pickers, who experience seasonal downturns."

Mr Hulls said the changes meant that if a minimum wage is \$13 an hour, a worker can be paid \$7 an hour for six months of the year at the whim of the employer as long as the minimum wage averages \$13 over the full year.

"When you include the removal of unfair-dismissal rights, it means that the worker whose wages have been grossly undercut for six months of the year can also be sacked at the whim of the employer after those six months," he said.

Ian Hanke, spokesman for federal **Employment** and **Workplace** Relations Minister **Kevin Andrews**, scoffed at Mr Hulls' claims, saying it was against the law to pay below the minimum wage and a worker would be entitled to be paid money owing to average out their wage to the minimum level if their **employment** were terminated.

"It is an absolute lie that Mr Hulls is propagating and we have come to expect these falsehoods from Mr Hulls.

"Clearly, Mr Hulls is trying to make political capital out of these falsehoods."

At the start of March, Mr Hulls launched the **Workplace** Rights Advocate to monitor working conditions and report to Parliament on "unfair

**employment** practices".

A **Workplace** Rights Advocate telephone advice service has been averaging about 20 calls a week. "We have had one or two where people have been offered Australian **Workplace** Agreements and then people have tried to remove the conditions at a later stage," the interim **Workplace** Rights Advocate, Brian Corney, said.

He expects many more calls when the new laws come into effect tomorrow.

The advocate service also has a salary estimator that employees can use to determine if they are worse off under a new agreement.

"The idea of the estimator is people have their award conditions and, if they do an AWA, they have a bundled up hourly rate . . . What this estimator does is provide an indicative rate of how many dollars you are going to be giving up," Mr Corney said. "You may be giving up about \$40 or \$50 worth of entitlements and you are only going to get another \$10 for it."

He said the **Workplace** Rights Advocate would monitor conditions under the new system and report to State Parliament on any "illegal, unfair, or otherwise inappropriate **industrial** practices". An \$800,000 State Government ad campaign on the role of the **Workplace** Rights Advocate will start soon.

The **workplace** revolution

From Tomorrow:

- Unfair dismissal laws will no longer count for companies with fewer than 100 employees
- Small businesses with 15 or fewer workers will be exempt from redundancy payouts
- Wages can be averaged out over a 12-month period by agreement between employees and employer
- There will be no disadvantage test when signing an Australian **Workplace** Agreement
- Employees will no longer be protected from legal action when taking **industrial** action during the term of an AWA
- The five minimum conditions will be:
  - Minimum wage
  - A maximum of 38 ordinary hours of work a week
  - Four weeks of paid annual leave
  - 10 days of paid personal/carer's leave
  - 52 weeks of unpaid parental leave

Caption :PHOTO

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