

Proposed application to the Fair Work Commission in respect of temporary changes to the General Retail Industry Award 2000 (GRA) for a limited period of time.

March 27, 2020

Due to the economic effects of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Master Grocers Australia (MGA) is proposing to seek temporary amendments to the GRA. In some areas where trading is being maintained with difficulty MGA is seeking options to enable Retailers to retain permanent staff on lesser rostered hours on a temporary basis. Also, they are seeking in some areas to provide delivery services to an increasing number of vulnerable people in local communities. This includes the collection, packing and delivery of groceries. Currently, these measures are being conducted at a loss and this has become increasingly burdensome to the Retailer, if not impossible, as the community comes to expect more from their nearest local store. Retailers want to employ more staff to assist them in their community efforts, but the cost of offering this service is prohibitive. They are seeking an opportunity to reduce penalty rates, again temporarily in order to continue to provide these services at this critical time. This measure would also enable the Retailer to provide additional hours of work.

MGA is seeking to implement in conjunction with the SDA temporary amendments to the GRA in order to provide for the following:

- A temporary reduction in the permanent working hours of retail employees from a maximum of 38 hours to a lesser number of hours over a temporary period of time. This would help to maintain staff who would then return to their full-time hours in due course.
- A temporary reduction in the number of set rostered hours for part time employees to a lesser number of hours over a temporary period of time, thereby maintaining employment for staff with the intention of returning to previous levels of work after a set period of time.
- Due to the need to employ staff temporarily, to service the needs of the community, including the elderly, the disabled and isolated customers, employees are working hours during the evening and overnight to service the community. These hours carry penalties that retailers cannot afford. However, if the payment of penalties is temporarily withheld for these hours of work it would enable the employment of staff during these times of high demand and help the community. However, employers are unable to meet the payment of high penalty rates and therefore they will not be able to service the community. We are seeking that the penalties be lifted temporarily to enable employees to be employed without payment of penalties during these times.
- It is intended that an application is made to the Fair Commission, hopefully on an agreed joint basis with the SDA, in order to achieve the objectives of providing employment which will only be possible if the employer is able to take these unprecedented steps during this difficult time.

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