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CONTINUING CONCERNS ABOUT WORKPLACE CHANGES

The Federal Government's detailed outline of its proposed new system of workplace relations did not appear to address fundamental concerns about fairness and balance, the Catholic Church's employment relations body said today.

In its September Briefing on the Government's proposals to reform workplace relations in Australia, the Australian Catholic Commission for Employment Relations (ACCER) identified five major areas of concern – the minimum wage, unfair dismissals, minimum conditions, workplace bargaining, and the role of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission.

ACCER Executive Officer John Ryan said that the setting of the minimum wage, if based on the single adult worker as already announced by the Government, would impact on low paid families.

"A job without a fair wage will not help the unemployed successfully move off welfare," he said.

"The interaction of the day to day living costs of families with the taxation and welfare systems must be part of any understanding of the modern family wage. Government has a role to play in ensuring an appropriate balance between the worker's pay packet and the public purse."

"The security of families and their ability to provide for their future is further reduced if employment can be terminated without any fair process and reason," Mr. Ryan said. "Not just families but young single workers also need to be able to plan with some certainty for their future needs and commitments."

Mr. Ryan expressed concern that new employees in workplaces, especially industrially vulnerable and young workers without bargaining power, could be particularly exposed to the offering of reduced employment arrangements.

"This could impact on their ability to meet mortgage payments and to afford educational opportunities in the future," he said.

The issue of the future role of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission is also seen by ACCER as still being of concern.

"The changes appear to leave us without any future means of maintaining a *fair* safety net of award conditions for those who cannot bargain effectively" he said. Mr. Ryan said that ACCER will be examining the Government's proposals in further detail and a final assessment will be made after the legislation has been tabled in Parliament.

"There needs to be a balance for employers and employees if we are to achieve prosperity and fairness in our workplaces," Mr. Ryan said.

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