



**Media Release
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Church body considers workplace reforms in light of Catholic Social Teaching

The Catholic Church's workplace relations body has issued a discussion paper on the federal government's proposed changes to industrial relations laws in which it examines the proposed changes in light of Catholic social teaching.

The director of the Australian Catholic Commission for Employment Relations (ACCER) John Ryan, said the paper was an initial assessment of the government's proposed changes, based on the information available.

Mr Ryan said final assessment of the changes must wait until the legislation has been tabled in parliament.

The government has flagged proposals to: Give greater scope for the making of direct agreements between employers and employees; Have fewer mandatory matters and standards in employment agreements; Change unfair dismissal laws; and Reduce the capacity of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission and similar state tribunals to regulate aspects of employment.

"The Catholic Church has established positions on key areas of the government's proposals. These social teachings on the dignity of work and workers are essential aspects of the Catholic faith. They are firmly rooted in the Gospel," he said.

Catholic teaching on the spiritual, economic and social aspects of work in modern industrial societies has its genesis in Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. One hundred years later, Pope John Paul II reflected on the same issues in a contemporary setting in his encyclicals *Centesimus Annus* and *Laborem Exercens*.

ACCER's briefing paper expresses concern about four aspects of the government's proposals: Wage fixing; Unfair dismissals; Minimum conditions and agreement making; The Functions of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission.

Mr Ryan said ACCER was open to a national industrial relations system provided it is based on the essential principles for a cooperative relationship between employers and employees.

"The Catholic Church is one of the biggest employers in Australia and also a major provider of services," he said. "It has experience as an employer and seeks to speak on behalf of those who are vulnerable in workplace bargaining. It has a special responsibility to be part of this important discussion.

"The Church will work with all sides of politics, as well as unions and employer groups to ensure that this balance is achieved in Australia's workplace relations system."