



25 Mar 2020

The Australian, Australia

Author: Ewin Hannan • Section: General News • Article type : News Item  
Classification : National • Audience : 94,448 • Page: 4 • Printed Size: 260.00cm<sup>2</sup>  
Region: National • Market: Australia • ASR: AUD 5,762 • Words: 571  
Item ID: 1252243796

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# Bosses, union unite to save jobs

## HOSPITALITY

EWIN HANNAN  
WORKPLACE EDITOR

Hospitality businesses will be able to cut employee hours and send workers on leave at half pay with 24 hours' notice after a groundbreaking deal was approved by the Fair Work Commission.

The agreement between the United Workers Union and the Australian Hotels Association to make significant changes to the industry award is designed to help businesses stay open and save jobs during the coronavirus pandemic.

National employers and unions are also holding urgent talks to try to get agreement on similar changes to the restaurant and clerks awards.

The UWU and the AHA jointly applied to the commission on Tuesday to vary the Hospitality Award and allow employers to reduce employees' hours and direct them at short notice to take leave at half pay for the next three months.

AHA chief executive Stephen Ferguson said the deal could be extended beyond June 30 and he expected the changes to stay in place for the duration of the pandemic. He said commission president Iain Ross had commended the AHA and the union for work-

ing co-operatively rather than being in conflict.

The union's national president, Jo-anne Schofield, said the industry was confronting a "catastrophic downturn", with close to a million hospitality workers facing cuts to their hours, being stood down, or losing their jobs.

"Altering the award temporarily is an important step to help protect workers and their shifts during this unprecedented time," she said. "We have moved quickly to ensure the ... changes provide a measured response that supports equity so that as many workers as possible can access hours of work.

"Importantly, there must be consultation with workers about

any change. And penalty rates, allowances and job security are all preserved."

The agreement allows workers to be employed across different award classifications and gives employers more flexibility to re-employ workers on reduced hours when they start scaling up businesses when the economy begins to recover.

Attorney-General Christian Porter said the joint approach was a practical, flexible, commonsense way to help businesses and save jobs during the pandemic.

"The move is specifically designed to help business stay open and workers stay in jobs, and demonstrates the level of trust and

co-operation that can save jobs if done right," he said. "This is exactly what we need right now: employers and employees working together to help each other survive this pandemic, co-operating like people's jobs depend on it, because they do.

"We are all shocked by the queues we are seeing outside Centrelink offices as the reality of this health crisis hits our economy hard and fast. The more businesses we can help keep open and the more workers we can keep in jobs, the better."

Under the agreement, employers will be able to reduce hours for full- and part-time staff to 60 per cent of full-time or regular part-

time hours. Staff can work across classifications, provided it was safe and they had the necessary qualifications, such as a Responsible Service of Alcohol certificate.

It lets employers direct workers to take annual leave, with 24 hours' notice, and gives flexibility for leave such as half pay. "This could be the difference between survival and closure for some businesses and for some workers, the difference between staying employed or not," Mr Porter said.

"Other unions and employers ... (are working) on similar approaches covering key awards and I congratulate all those working co-operatively to help each other through this current crisis."



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# Hotels, unions ditch rules for jobs

**David Marin-Guzman**  
Workplace correspondent

The hotel industry and unions have reached an extraordinary agreement to cut minimum work hours and suspend restrictions on duties to save jobs during the coronavirus crisis.

The Australian Hotels Association and the United Workers Union successfully applied to suspend workplace rules in the hospitality award yesterday for up to three months as almost 1 million workers in the sector risked losing their jobs.

The consensus position came as the hospitality industry led the sweep of job losses this week with baristas and bartenders lining the streets outside Centrelink offices and as economists

forecast the unemployment rate is set to more than double.

Other unions and employer groups were deep in discussions yesterday for further flexibility in industry awards, including the restaurants award and the clerks award which covers more than a million administrative staff across several industries.

Australian Hotel Association chief executive Stephen Ferguson said the peak body had decided to move ahead before other groups to keep businesses operating and maintain as many jobs as possible, noting it had a good relationship with the union.

“Our employer members are at the coal face of this crisis,” he said. “This agreement strikes the right balance between flexibility for employers and

protection for employees.” The hospitality award covers pubs, casinos and hotels, as well as bars and restaurants within hotels, most of which were shut down due to the government’s closure of non-essential services.

However, many hotels are still operating with a skeleton crew and just 10 to 20 per cent capacity, while some pubs and restaurants are operating on a delivery and takeaway basis.

“There’s still activity in the market but also when we start to come out of this we may not be going from zero to 100 in one day – it’s about balancing

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## Hotels and unions clip rules to save jobs

bringing people back into the workplace,” Mr Ferguson said.

“What this allows to happen is to provide work for more employees. Instead of two people getting 40 hours a week it might be three people sharing those hours.”

Fair Work Commission President Justice Iain Ross approved the application in an urgent full bench hearing on Tuesday afternoon.

The president commended the parties on the balanced nature of the agreement, saying “this is a time for cooperation not conflict”.

Under the changes, a full-time employee’s minimum ordinary hours will drop to 22.8 hours a week while a part-time employee could work an average of 60 per cent of their guaranteed hours per week.

Staff would be able to work across classifications, provided it is safe to do so and they have the necessary qualifications, such as a Responsible Serving of Alcohol certificate, while higher duties would still entail higher rates.

Employers can also direct employees to take annual leave with 24 hours’ notice, and provide flexibility for leave such as half-pay.

UWU national president Jo-anne Schofield said there were close to a million hospitality workers across the country facing cuts to hours, being stood down, or losing their jobs.

“Our hospitality members want job security and certainty above all else and we hope this variation will help to deliver this,” she said.

“We have moved quickly to ensure the temporary changes provide a measured response that supports equity so that as many workers as possible can access hours of work.”

Industrial Relations Minister Christian Porter, who backed the application before Fair Work, praised the “common sense” agreement as “exactly what we need right now”.

“This could be the difference between survival and closure for some businesses and for some workers, the difference between staying employed

or not,” he said.

The Restaurant & Catering Association confirmed it was also in talks with the union for flexibility in the restaurant award but had not yet reached an agreement. R&CA chief executive Wes Lambert said “people want to make sure we get this right”.

## This could be the difference between survival and closure for some businesses.

Christian Porter, Industrial Relations Minister