

SENATE INQUIRY INTO THE BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION
INDUSTRY IMPROVEMENT AMENDMENT (TRANSITION TO FAIR WORK)
BILL 2009

My name is Greg Quinn - I am the Managing Director of J. Hutchinson Pty Ltd (Hutchinson Builders), a Brisbane based Builder operating primarily in the commercial sector of the industry. Our turnover in 2008 / 2009 was approximately \$800M, we have 850 direct employees of which 170 are Apprentices, we have offices in Brisbane, Noosa, Mooloolaba, Toowoomba, Airlie Beach, Townsville, Cairns, Tweed, Sydney and Melbourne. Hutchinsons is a 4th generation privately owned business which commenced back in 1912. Prior to joining Hutchinsons in October 2001, I was the Executive Director of the Queensland Master Builders Association and briefly held the same position with the NSW Master Builders in the 1998 / 1999 period. Despite having an Industry Association background, I haven't had a strong involvement in industry policy matters for the past 9 years and I tend to run Hutchinsons from the perspective of what is right for the prosperity of the business without being influenced greatly by external philosophical or political pressures.

To be open, I should know and understand more about the industrial relations legislation by which we are governed than I actually do. However, at Hutchinsons, we try to adopt a "do what's right and fair" approach (within the confines of the laws of the land) to almost everything we do - typically we find this approach is balanced, apolitical, fair and hard to argue. On the industrial relations front, we don't think it is sensible to change the way we do business simply because the Government of the day provides a legislative platform to suit its own objectives. Our view is that Governments come and go - Hutchinsons is a 4th generation business that is here for the long haul and has no intention of changing the way it deals with employees, workers and building industry unions every time the law changes. This approach is probably what sets us apart a little from our peers and is perhaps the reason we find ourselves invited to submit to Inquiries such as this.

Apart from the aforementioned background which I consider important for you to appreciate Hutchinson's approach to business, this Submission is relatively brief and to the point. I am happy to appear before the Senate Committee if considered necessary or important to elaborate further:

1. Hutchinsons doesn't think it should change the way it does business because the Government of the day adopts a certain approach to industrial relations. Our workforce is our lifeblood - we maintain a relationship with our large workforce that is more akin to a small family business than it is to a big business model.
2. We operate in the small project and major project end of town so we are involved in traditionally unionised sectors as well as non-unionised sectors of the industry and our relationship with our workforce is no different regardless of the sector.

3. Hutchinsons maintains a strong relationship with the Building Industry Unions at both a Management and Organiser level – this is a genuine relationship forged out of acknowledgement the Unions have a role to play, have been around for a 100 years or more and are likely to have a role for a long time into the future.
4. Hutchinson's approach to industrial relations is perceived as different by some in the industry. However, it has been successful. We have endeavoured to maintain our relationship approach but within the confines of the laws of the land.
5. Hutchinsons has its difficulties with the Unions from time to time – sometimes this is a result of radical actions by individual Organisers, sometimes it is because of the shortcomings of some of Hutchinson's on-site management and sometimes it is the result of straight out personality clashes. However, in every instance there is a solution and we adopt a policy requiring the matter be sorted out "before sunset on day 1". We see this as simply a part of doing business and we handle 100% of industrial issues ourselves without need for external parties (e.g. ABCC, Master Builders etc). We adopt the exact same approach to every other aspect of our business – subcontractor relations, client and consultant relations included.
6. Whether Hutchinson's relationship approach is the reason we have not experienced any major or catastrophic situations with the Unions, the ABCC or in fact any law enforcement Agency or Department or not, we acknowledge that our Company is not particularly exposed to the more widely recognised industrially active geographical regions of Australia. The people we deal with from all sides of the political fence, the law enforcement agencies, the Union movement and Employer representatives are balanced, typically sensible and deemed to be good and professional representatives of their respective constituents. Consequently, I might hold an entirely different point of view on industrial relations if the people we deal with adopted a more dictatorial party line approach.

Concluding, Hutchinsons is satisfied with the status quo, we'd be satisfied with what's proposed, we were satisfied with the legislative platform in the 90's and the earlier part of this decade because we haven't really changed our approach to industrial and employee relations save for complying with the laws of the day. Politicians come and go, Governments come and go, Employer and Employee leaders come and go but businesses and employees / workers will always maintain the same motives – prosperity and fairness. It is Hutchinson's intention to maintain good relationships all round, pay workers as much as we possibly can to ensure they are rewarded for their efforts in a relatively tough and unsafe industry and rely on high level productivity and worker commitment hopefully resulting in a happy and profitable business.