

Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE Supplementary Budget Estimates 2016 - 2017

Outcome 2 – Workplace Relations and Economic Strategy

Department of Employment Question No. EMSQ16-001062

Senator Marshall provided in writing.

Question

Community Engagement Grants Program

In its press release announcing the new CEGP, the Government states that it “builds upon” the previous CBEAS program.

However, it appears that the money will spread thinner, based on the Program Guidelines which indicate that \$1.8m per year will be provided to service all of Australia.

The PWC report into the former CBEAS program, which informed the creation of the CEGP, identified a need for high quality legal advice.

One of the centres previously funded under the CBEAS program, the Employment Law Centre of WA, operates a telephone Advice Line to provide employment law legal advice. The Employment Law Centre reports that it was only able to answer one in 7 calls in the 14/15 financial year, despite an operating budget of just over \$1m and a pro bono and volunteer contribution valued at a further \$800k.

If a budget of \$800k was grossly inadequate to service the population of Western Australia, why has the FWO only been allocated \$1.8m per year to fund this type of service for the entirety of Australia?

Why has the government allocated \$20m to the FWO for enforcement of the breaches under its policy to protect vulnerable workers, yet not adequately funded the organisations that have been identified as necessary for accessing the workers who are being exploited?

Why is the FWO being funded so lightly for community engagement, given the front-line importance of community organisations such as ELC?

Answer

The Fair Work Ombudsman undertakes community engagement through a range of avenues with the aim of optimising its reach within the community.

The Fair Work Ombudsman has a dedicated Overseas Workers Team and a dedicated Young Workers Team in recognition that these cohorts can be vulnerable and require specialist assistance. The Fair Work Ombudsman also recently launched its Anonymous Report function, which allows members of the community to alert the Agency to potential non-compliance through its website and remain anonymous.

The primary objective of the Community Engagement Grants Program (CEGP) is to facilitate the provision of assistance relating to Commonwealth workplace laws, targeted specifically at

vulnerable groups within the community. This program builds upon and is in addition to the work of the Fair Work Ombudsman as described above. This program seeks to fund new, additional or aligned services for vulnerable workers, rather than replicate existing Fair Work Ombudsman services which are provided free of charge. The objective has a particular focus on employees and small business owners from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, young or aged people, and migrant workers. Funding for the CEGP is in addition to the \$20 million additional funding provided under the Protecting Vulnerable Workers Policy.

The Fair Work Ombudsman will use the additional \$20 million provided as part of the Government's election commitment into Protecting Vulnerable Workers to enhance compliance, engagement and education programs. This commitment will target conduct that results in exploitative practices with respect to migrant and other vulnerable workers and to increase awareness and understanding of workplace obligations and entitlements in migrant communities.