

**Senate Standing Committee on Education Employment and Workplace
Relations**

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Budget Estimates 2010-2011**

Outcome 5 - Workplace Relations

DEEWR Question No. EW0217_11

Senator Fisher asked on 31/05/2010, Hansard page 126.

Question

TERANG HARDWARE STORE

Senator FISHER—The Prime Minister said: ... we will have its officers deal with these folk, employer, employees ...' On 8 February, some six days later, a spokesman for the Deputy Prime Minister was quoted in the Australian as saying that attempts were being made to come to an arrangement that suited both the employer and the teenagers. To your knowledge was there any communication with the teenagers? Mr Kovacic—I would have to take that on notice. I do not know.

Senator FISHER—Is it news to the department that in four months since this incident first captured media attention in February no-one from government—not the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the officers, my understanding is not the Fair Work Ombudsman, not anybody—has spoken to the teenagers concerned? Would that be news to the department, despite the Prime Minister's assurances that the Office of Fair Work would work it through with the employer and young people, that they would deal with these folk, employer and employees, and the Deputy Prime Minister being reported as saying '... an arrangement that suits both employer and the teenagers ...'? How can that be so if no-one has spoken to the teenagers? Would that be news to the department? Ms Paul—We should take that on notice.

Answer

The former Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations wrote to two young workers at the Terang hardware store (Mr Mathew Spencer and Ms Leticia Harrison) on 12 May 2010. This letter was sent in response to correspondence of 23 March 2010 and a petition which was delivered to the former Minister's electorate office in Werribee on 30 April 2010.

The letter outlined the purpose and value of minimum engagement periods in protecting the rights and entitlements of workers, particularly young workers employed on a casual basis. It also noted that an application to vary the General Retail Award 2010 (modern retail award) to shorten minimum shift provisions was being considered by the independent industrial umpire, Fair Work Australia. The letter formally acknowledged the petition the Terang employees had sent and committed to providing the petition to the Speaker of the House of Representatives.