Media release

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Equal Pay Day arrives at last for community workers

Community workers have today been handed long awaited pay rises in a historic decision by Fair Work Australia in the equal pay case.

The case was lodged by the Australian Services Union on March 11 2010 to address the gender-based undervaluation of the community services sector and deliver long overdue pay increases.

ASU Assistant National Secretary Linda White said this was a day community workers around Australia would never forget.

"After many years of appalling pay this decision finally gives them the recognition they deserve. These workers do crucial work in our communities and yet up until now they have been paid more than 30 percent less than those performing comparable work in other sectors."

Ms White said that the decision, a crucial step forward in closing the 18 per cent pay gap between men and women, would not have been possible without the support of the Federal Government.

"It is the undervaluing of female dominated sectors such as the social and community services sector that has held back improvements to this pay gap.

"The recent commitment of the Labor Government to provide the necessary funds for these pay increases was key to the success of this case. It has been 30 years since such a significant decision was last handed down for equal pay, but today we have made history."

Ms White said the decision recommended pay rises be phased in over a period of 8 years, two years longer than the joint submission put to Fair Work Australia by the ASU and the Federal Government.

"The recommended phase in time for the increases has been extended from 6 years to 8 years. This is disappointing for workers but we should not lose sight of the fact that this is the first decision that backs equal pay in a generation."

Ms White said this decision would never have been possible without the introduction of the Fair Work Act.

"Before the Fair Work Act was introduced, sixteen cases attempted to improve pay for feminised sectors such as the community services sector – every case failed.

"This decision for community workers and for women everywhere shows the Fair Work Act is delivering fair outcomes for hard working Australians."

Ms White said now it was time for community sector employers and all State and Territory Governments to support the decision.

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