

**Ai Group Head of National Workplace Relations Policy, Steve Smith
With Rebecca Levingston
ABC Radio Brisbane
Discussing the proposed Christmas Eve public holiday in QLD**

Levingston: The proposed Christmas Eve public holiday is going to be 3 times more expensive than originally thought – that's according to a peak employer group who have crunched the numbers on this plan to make Christmas Eve a public holiday from 6 pm, so that means penalty rates for workers. This employer group says the State Government should abandon the idea. Steve Smith is the head of national workplace relations policy with the Australian Industry Group. Steve, how do you determine that this will be 3 times more expensive than originally thought?

Smith: Well the analysis that the Government has put out literally looks at Christmas Day public holiday and then extrapolates that out and states that Christmas Eve would have a similar number of people working as Christmas day and that assumption just seems so completely wrong. Obviously a lot more people work on Christmas Eve than work on Christmas Day and we've calculated the cost of this public holiday would be anywhere up to about \$410 million dollars.

Levingston: So the briefing documents the Government was looking at calculate the extra wages would be between \$41 and \$137 million dollars. You say that's completely wrong?

Smith: Well it's based on the assumption that a Christmas Day public holiday has a certain number of people working and a certain number of people not working. And you know that day goes for 24 hours so this additional public holiday for a more limited number of hours has been calculated as a portion of that Christmas Day outcome but...

Levingston: It's pretty basic accounting. I mean even you just explaining that this morning surely that should have occurred to someone?

Smith: Yes these things are very difficult to calculate but the Government's literature about this proposal is all based around cafes and retail and of course there's a lot of other businesses working on Christmas Day and every other day: Airlines; emergency services; hospitals; manufacturers. It is an extremely expensive proposition.

Levingston: So Steve even the concept that businesses would be able to recoup the extra cost of wages with surcharges presumably that doesn't apply to some of those in transport, health, emergency services, that you are talking about there?

Smith: Yes that's right. The Government's statements about this talk about cafes that could put an extra couple of dollars on the cost of a meal or a coffee but how is that of any relevance at all to most of the businesses that this is going to impact like Airlines and even retailers? People are not going to pay any more for their Christmas presents on Christmas Eve than they would on any other day.

Levingston: Steve Smith, head of the national workplace relations policy with the Australian Industry Group, they've crunched the numbers saying this Christmas Eve public holiday will be 3 times more expensive than originally thought. Could there be winners out of this too? Extra money paid to those working between 6 pm and midnight – could they splash it generally being more generous with perhaps Christmas presents?

Smith: There will be some winners out of it but there will also be a lot of losers. If you look at it from the point of view of the workers, a lot of workers are casual and on public holidays if people choose to close then those people are not going to get any work at all. So even looking at it from the point of view of workers, yes some will do well out of a public holiday but some will lose income at a time when they really need income.

Levingston: South Australia and the Northern Territory, they pay their workers extra to turn up Christmas Eve don't they?

Smith: Yes, several years ago the South Australian government decided to implement a Christmas Eve public holiday between 7 pm and midnight. That was copied by the Northern Territory a few years later. This proposal in Queensland is for a holiday from 6 pm until midnight. It just seems these days that State and Territory Governments are all trying to outbid each other with generosity to the community at the expense of business.

Levingston: What do you want the State Government to do?

Smith: Abandon this idea. It really has no merit and is completely unnecessary. It seems to be driven by the SDA, the shop assistants' union, and we're urging the government to put the economy first and to abandon the whole idea.

Levingston: Steve Smith, head of national workplace relations policy at the Australian Industry Group. Thanks so much for your time.