



Year in Review

2017

Australian Institute of
Employment Rights Inc.

2017 has seen the AIER continue to promote big ideas. Through our publications, engagement activities and new project we are a leading voice for fair and decent work.

New Architecture Project

AIER has embarked on an ambitious project to envisage a new workplace relations architecture.

Australia, along with the rest of the world, is facing profound and rapid changes in the way work is organised and conducted. Our current regulation of work is failing to keep up with the profound structural shifts occurring.

Now is the time for big ideas, not just reforming the edges of a broken system. AIER's bold project aims to reconfigure industrial relations, human rights and health and safety laws and regulations. We will apply the principles of the Australian Charter of Employment Rights to re-imagine a workplace relations system that respects the humanity of all people involved in work.

The project will consist of five Modules expanding on key elements of the new architecture:

- Overarching rights and obligations;
- Minimum standards;
- Workplace democracy;
- Specific IR, human rights and OHS regulation; and
- Access to justice

After releasing our [Project Plan](#) we have garnered interest in the project from leading workplace relations academics and practitioners.

The new workplace relations architecture plan will be the focus of the Institute's work over the next 18 months to 2 years.

7th Annual Ron McCallum Debate

The 2017 Ron McCallum debate topic inspired by Ron's declaration at last year's debate was "The system is broken. What is the fix?"

The Institute's seventh debate in the Justice at Work series was another great success. Former FWC and AIRC President Geoff Giudice chaired the debate, with the following speakers offering their perspectives on the topic:

- Emeritus Professor Ron McCallum
- Jo Schofield, United Voice
- Stephen Cartwright, NSW Business Chamber
- Sarah Kaine, UTS
- Lina Cabaero-Ponnambalam, Asian Women at Work

While there was general agreement amongst the panel that the workplace relations system is broken, the speakers provided a range of perspectives on why the system is broken. For example, the system is

- now just a safety net, with no chance of improvements;
- too complex, with no individual flexibility;
- actively silences workers;
- allow for too much insecurity, which makes people afraid to speak out against exploitation;
- leading to wage stagnation via a failed bargaining system.

The speakers also provided their views on what needs to happen to fix the system. A video of the event and a summary is available on the AIER [website](#).

We used slido.com to elicit questions from the audience and to poll the audience on their thoughts on the topic.

Promoting the Charter

AIER has been out and about during the year promoting our work and the Charter of Employment Rights

The Institute along with the NUW and ASU presented a workshop at the Progress Conference in June 2017 on how progressive organisations can set up fair and decent workplaces.

Despite working towards a better world in various ways, many progressive organisations fail to live up to their values when it comes to their work practices. The Progress conference offered an excellent opportunity to speak directly to a range of organisations about how they can use the Charter to ensure decent workplace cultures.

AIER was also present at the ACTU's NexGen conference. We used the opportunity to promote our new project as well as the Charter and to grow our email list. We distributed a number of copies of our latest book, *Employment Rights Now*, and had some good conversations with attendees of the conference.

We took Ron McCallum's call to be bold with ideas seriously this year, including considering the topic of universal basic income. AIER contributed to a report on universal basic income, "Can Less Work Be More Fair? A discussion paper on Universal Basic Income and a shorter working week." AIER's paper was titled, "The emancipatory potential of Universal Basic Income" and focused on the potential for reconceptualising work as part of the debate on UBI. Our contribution can be read on our website and the whole report is available [here](#)

We also made a [submission](#) to the federal parliamentary inquiry into a Modern Slavery Act for Australia, supporting a robust and enforceable model to combat slavery, with particular reference to supply chain regulation.

The Institute was invited by the Queensland Teachers Union to present a session at the Queensland Industrial Relations Society's conference. The focus of our presentation was on our "new workplace relations architecture" project and placing it in the context of the failing system. The mass exploitation of workers, insecure work, stagnant wage growth, and a continuing gender pay gap are all indicators of a system that is broken. Add to that the changing nature of work and the climate crisis, our existing workplace relations system needs an overhaul to continue to be relevant.

AIER also participated in a panel discussion at the conference on the uberisation of work and the regulatory challenges it presents.

We continued our relationship with Monash University. AIER's Executive Director gave our annual lecture to Master's students on the Charter and applying it to broader issues in workplace relations.

We continued communicating with our members and supporters through our regular newsletters and via Facebook and Twitter. Keeping people engaged with what we are doing along interesting, relevant and useful material from other sources.

We have also continued to attend various public forums on relevant issues, meet with experts in the field and connect with like-minded organisations.

Our challenges remain our small size and limited capacity to do all the things that would ensure our work had greater impact.

AIER governance

Our Executive Committee is based on the principle of tri-partite representation of employees, employers and independent persons, as exemplified by the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

The following were members of the Executive throughout 2016

Michael Harmer – President

Fiona Hardie – Vice President,
Employer

Alex Snowball – Vice President,
Employee

Sean Reidy – Vice President,
Independent

Keith Harvey – Treasurer

Michael McIver – Ordinary Member

Colleen Chen – Ordinary Member

Trevor Clarke – Ordinary Member

Tim Gunstone – Ordinary Member

Clare Ozich – Executive Director

Funding

The AIER is a membership organisation, independent of government or any particular interest group. Membership is open to individuals and organisations

Thanks to the generous support of Michael Harmer and Harmers Workplace Lawyers AIER can continue to pursue its objectives of promoting fair and decent workplace practices.

We are indebted to our members whose ongoing financial support is vital to the running the organisation.

In addition AIER would like to acknowledge the generous support of the following organisations:

Harmers Workplace Lawyers

Civil Air

National Union of Workers

Hardie Grant Publishing

Australian Education Union

Our staff

AIER has a small team of highly dedicated skilled employees and contractors.

The Executive Committee would like to recognise and thank the AIER team:

Clare Ozich – Executive Director

Jane Ponton – Business Manager

Keith Harvey – Senior Researcher

Making Contact

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