

NATIONAL WAGE CASE, IMPORTANCE TO BASIC LIVING STANDARDS

**635. Mr A.P. O'GORMAN to the Minister for Consumer and Employment Protection:**

Given the national wage case currently being considered by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission, can the minister inform the House how important this adjustment to minimum pay standards is for maintaining the basic living standards of Western Australian workers?

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE replied:**

I thank the member for the question, and I know he has a keen interest in ensuring that his constituents who are on low wages receive a decent minimum wage.

When the Labor Party came to government, it found that the minimum wage in this State was over \$50 a week below that which applied in the rest of Australia. The policy of the Liberal Party when it was in government was to see lower wages in Western Australia. The Liberal Party wanted the workers in Western Australia - a State which in so many other ways is leading Australia economically - to receive the lowest wages in Australia. Fortunately, under the previous Government's legislation, as minister I increased the minimum state wage by \$32.40 a week to immediately bring it up to the national award minimum of \$400.40 a week. In the following two years we ensured that we climbed on the back of national wage cases, so that the wage was both the minimum state wage - if I can call it that - and the minimum wage under the Minimum Conditions of Employment Act. We have sought to be a party to the whole process of a national wage case, which is usually led by the Australian Council of Trade Unions to ensure that people on the lowest pay get a decent wage. In this case we are talking about a living wage case which is currently before the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. The claim being made by the ACTU is for an increase of \$24.60 a week. We have joined with the other Labor States in recommending an \$18 a week increase. We will see what the commission decides, but the ramification for Western Australia is that the changes that were made in the Labour Relations Reform Bill require that the state wage case then be taken up within 30 days of the national wage case. We must ensure that those parties that are involved - we have already written to them - are ready to make their submissions, so that whatever increase is granted as a result of the national wage case can flow on very quickly to ensure that the wages of Western Australian workers are increased to the minimum wage in the shortest possible time. The previous Government dragged out the process as long as possible because it wanted to make sure that Western Australian workers were the lowest paid workers in Australia. That is very different from the current situation, whereby the Gallop Government wants to ensure that the minimum wage means something and that the ordinary working men and women of this State get a fair deal.