

QUEENSLAND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS COMMISSION

Industrial Relations Act 2016 – s 458

Queensland Council of Unions
Together Queensland, Industrial Union of Employees

Applicants

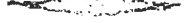
v

State of Queensland
Local Government Association of Queensland Ltd

Respondents


INDUSTRIAL REGISTRAR

17 JUL 2025


QUEENSLAND


Matter Nos. B/2026/59 and B/2026/60

**APPLICATION FOR A DECLARATION OF GENERAL RULING
2026 STATE WAGE CASE**

SUBMISSIONS OF THE QUEENSLAND COUNCIL OF UNIONS

Introduction

1. On 2 June 2026, an Expert Panel of the Fair Work Commission (**FWC**) handed down its decision for the *Annual Wage Review 2026 (AWR)* granting a 4.75% increase to federal modern award minimum wages and increasing the national minimum wage to \$1004.90 per week.¹
2. The Queensland Council of Unions (**QCU**) consider it to be fair and just for the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission (the **Commission**) to deliver a comparable increase for Queensland workers who are not national system employees.
3. Accordingly, on 2 June 2026, the QCU filed an application in the Industrial Registry seeking a general ruling about an increase to modern award minimum wages and the

¹ [2026] FWCFB 3500 ('*AWR*').

Queensland minimum wage, pursuant to s 458(1) and (2) of the *Industrial Relations Act 2016* (the **IR Act**).

4. The QCU application seeks that the Full Bench declare by way of general ruling that:
- (a) the wages or salaries for full-time adult employees in all state awards shall be increased by 4.75%;
 - (b) monetary allowances (other than expense related allowances) in all state awards that relate to work or to conditions which have not changed, and service increments, are to be increased by 4.75%;
 - (c) the minimum wage rate per week for all full-time employees in Queensland is \$1004.90; and
 - (d) the above increases operate on and from 1 September 2026.

Legislative framework

5. The legislative framework in which the Full Bench must determine the State Wage Case (SWC) is set out in ss 3, 4, 141–143, and 458–460 of the IR Act.
6. Relevantly, it is a main purpose of the IR Act to provide for a framework for cooperative industrial relations that is fair and balanced,² which is to be achieved by, *inter alia*:
- (a) providing for a fair and equitable framework of employment standards, awards, determinations, orders and agreements;³
 - (b) providing for a guaranteed safety net of fair, relevant and enforceable minimum employment conditions through the Queensland Employment Standards;⁴ and
 - (c) ensuring wages and employment conditions provide fair standards in relation to living standards prevailing in the community.⁵

² *Industrial Relations Act 2016* s 3(a).

³ *Ibid* s 4(d).

⁴ *Ibid* s 4(f).

⁵ *Ibid* s 4(g).

7. Further, in exercising its powers in relation to minimum wages in modern awards, the Commission must establish and maintain minimum wages that are fair and just,⁶ and must have regard to the following:

- (a) the prevailing employment conditions of employees covered by the modern award;⁷
- (b) relative living standards and the needs of low-paid employees;⁸
- (c) the need to promote social inclusion through increased workforce participation;⁹
- (d) the need to promote flexible modern work practices and the efficient and productive performance of work;¹⁰
- (e) the need to ensure equal remuneration for work of equal or comparable value;¹¹
- (f) the efficiency and effectiveness of the economy, including productivity, inflation and the desirability of achieving a high level of employment;¹² and
- (g) providing a comprehensive range of fair minimum wages to young employees, employees engaged as apprentices and trainees, and employees with a disability.¹³

8. The Commission must also ensure that modern awards provide fair standards for employees in the context of living standards generally prevailing in the community.¹⁴

9. Sections 458–460 of the IR Act provide the Full Bench with various powers in relation to making the general ruling sought by the QCU. Specifically, the IR Act confers the power to make:

- (a) a general ruling amending all state awards by a wage adjustment of 4.75% under ss 458(1)(a) and 460; and
- (b) a general ruling increasing the Queensland minimum wage to \$1004.90 per week under s 458(1)(b).

⁶ Ibid s 142(1).

⁷ Ibid s 142(2)(a).

⁸ Ibid ss 142(2)(b), 141(2)(a).

⁹ Ibid ss 142(2)(b), 141(2)(b).

¹⁰ Ibid ss 142(2)(b), 141(2)(c).

¹¹ Ibid ss 142(2)(b), 141(2)(d).

¹² Ibid ss 142(2)(b), 141(2)(f).

¹³ Ibid s 142(2)(c).

¹⁴ Ibid s 143(1)(i).

Evidence relied upon by the QCU

10. In support of our application, the QCU relies on the **statement of agreed facts**, and accompanying bundle of documents, jointly filed in the Industrial Registry by the parties on 16 July 2026.
11. In respect of the economic considerations, we set out in the submissions below a summary of the relevant economic indicators detailed in the statement of agreed facts to assist the Full Bench in its task of identifying and determining any relevant differences between the national and state economy that is relevant to the determination of the SWC.

Economic considerations

12. Information relevant to the Full Bench's assessment of the prevailing economic conditions in the national economy and the state economy is provided in the figures and tables set out in paragraphs 31 and 35 of the statement of agreed facts.
13. The QCU also provides the following supplementary table which identifies the 3-year average for state and federal budget forecasts of relevant economic indicators (these are referred to in the submissions below):

Table 1: Three-year average of budget forecasts (%)

	June 2026	June 2027	June 2028	3-year average*
Gross domestic product	2.25	1.75	2.25	2.1
Gross state product	2.5	1.75	2	2.1
State final demand	3	2.25	2.75	2.7
CPI – federal budget	5	2.5	2.5	3.3
CPI – state budget	4.75	3.75	2.5	3.7
Employment growth - federal budget	1.5	1.5	1.75	1.6
Employment growth - state budget	1.5	1.25	1.25	1.3
Unemployment rate – federal budget	4.25	4.5	4.5	4.4
Unemployment rate – state budget	4.25	4.75	4.75	4.6
WPI – federal budget	3.25	3.5	3.5	3.4
WPI – state budget	3.5	3.5	3.25	3.4

**Figures, other than those that are a $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{2}$, or $\frac{3}{4}$ fraction, have been rounded to one decimal place.*

Source: Statement of agreed facts, Table 3.

14. The QCU submits that a global assessment of the prevailing economic conditions demonstrates that there are no meaningful differences between the national economy and the state economy that are significant enough to warrant the Full Bench departing from the FWC decision of a 4.75% increase. We provide the following in support of this view.

Economic growth

15. Economic growth in Queensland appears to be comparable to, if not stronger than, the national economy.

16. On average across the last five years, gross state product (GSP) appears to have exceeded gross domestic product (GDP), noting the available data is not in respect of corresponding reference periods.¹⁵

17. In all recent corresponding reference periods, and on average across the last five years, state final demand (SFD) has exceeded GDP.¹⁶

18. In respect of state and federal budget forecasts:

- (a) forecasted growth in GSP is consistent with GDP across the three forecasted years (2.1% on average); and
- (b) forecasted growth in SFD is better than GDP across the three forecasted years (2.7% on average compared to 2.1% on average).¹⁷

19. On average across the last five years, GSP per capita appears to have been better than GDP per capita, noting the available data is not in respect of corresponding reference periods.¹⁸

¹⁵ Statement of agreed facts, Tables 1 and 2.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ See Table 1 at [16] of this submission.

¹⁸ Statement of agreed facts, Tables 1 and 2.

Inflation

20. Inflation appears to have been slightly higher in Queensland.
21. In all recent corresponding reference periods, and on average across the last five years (in respect of the quarterly data), all groups CPI percentage annual change for Brisbane exceeded CPI percentage annual movement for the weighted average of eight capital cities.¹⁹
22. In respect of state and federal budget forecasts, CPI is forecasted to be higher in Queensland across the three forecasted years (3.7% on average in Brisbane compared to 3.3% on average nationally).²⁰

The labour market

23. Overall, the labour market in Queensland appears to be comparable to the labour market in the national economy.
24. In respect of labour force data, the Australian Bureau of Statistics ‘considers that trend estimates provide a more reliable guide to the underlying direction of the data, and are more suitable than either the seasonally adjusted or original estimates for most business decisions and policy advice’.²¹
25. In all recent corresponding reference periods, the trend estimates indicate that employment growth in Queensland exceeded employment growth nationally, as well as on average across the last five years.²²
26. In respect of state and federal budget forecasts, across the three forecasted years, employment growth in the Queensland economy is forecasted to be not too dissimilar to

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ See Table 1 at [16] of this submission.

²¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Labour Force, Australia methodology*, May 2026.

²² Statement of agreed facts, Tables 1 and 2.

that of the national economy (1.3% on average compared to 1.6% on average, respectively).²³

27. In all recent corresponding reference periods, the trend estimates indicate that the unemployment rate has been lower in Queensland than nationally, and the same on average across the last five years.²⁴

28. In respect of state and federal budget forecasts, the unemployment rate is forecasted to be slightly higher in Queensland than nationally across the three forecasted years (4.6% on average compared to 4.4% on average, respectively).²⁵

29. In all recent corresponding reference periods, and on average across the last five years, the trend estimates indicate that the participation rate in Queensland exceeded the participation rate nationally.²⁶

30. On average across the last five years, the trend estimates indicate that the underemployment rate in Queensland exceeded the national figure.²⁷

Wages growth

31. Wages growth in Queensland appears to be slightly better than in the national economy.

32. In all recent corresponding reference periods, the percentage annual change for WPI in Queensland exceeded the percentage annual change for WPI nationally by 0.2%, and on average across the last five years by 0.3%.²⁸

33. In respect of state and federal budget forecasts, wages growth in Queensland and nationally is forecasted to be the same across the three forecasted years (3.4% on average).²⁹

²³ See Table 1 at [16] of this submission.

²⁴ Statement of agreed facts, Tables 1 and 2.

²⁵ See Table 1 at [16] of this submission.

²⁶ Statement of agreed facts, Tables 1 and 2.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid Table 1.

²⁹ See Table 1 at [16] of this submission.

Productivity

34. The parties agree that while there are a number of indicators relevant to productivity, there are no suitable comparators available at both a state and national level relevant to these proceedings.³⁰
35. In the absence of a suitable comparator, there appears to be no evidence at this stage of the proceedings to suggest that productivity is markedly different in Queensland to the national economy.
36. We note, however, that there was no productivity-related justification for the wage increase awarded by the FWC.³¹

Business conditions

37. As detailed at paragraph 31 of the statement of agreed facts, the NAB Q1 Business Survey and the NAB Q2 Business Survey indicate that business conditions and confidence are better in Queensland than in the national economy.

Prevailing employment conditions of employees covered by modern awards

38. Pursuant to s 143(1)(i) of the IR Act, modern awards must provide fair standards for employees in the context of living standards generally prevailing in the community. This is a prevailing employment condition of employees covered by all modern awards.
39. By way of the AWR, modern award-reliant national system employees in Queensland were provided with an increase to their award minimum wages ‘that is sufficient to protect [them] against any further erosion in the real value of their wages and to return such employees to the position relative to inflation achieved in the 2025 [AWR]’.³² The QCU therefore submits that the 4.75% increase determined by the FWC provides for fair standards in relation to living standards prevailing in the community.

³⁰ Statement of agreed facts, [28].

³¹ *AWR* (n 1), [135].

³² *Ibid* [138].

40. Ensuring that modern award-reliant employees in the Queensland jurisdiction, including (*inter alia*) employees of First Nations Councils in the Local Government sector, Parents and Citizens Associations employees, and Auxiliary Firefighters, are afforded the same protection against any further erosion in the real value of their wages should therefore be a relevant consideration this year. This accords with the Full Bench's overarching responsibility to ensure that employees are covered by fair and reasonable wages that allow them to participate in society and that those who do not benefit from bargaining are not left behind.³³

Relative living standards and the needs of low-paid employees

41. The FWC determined that the principal factor affecting the needs of the low-paid, and their relative living standards, has been the elevated rate of inflation over the past five years which has led to a reduction in real wages.³⁴

42. In considering the real effect of inflation upon low-paid workers, the FWC also observed that low-paid workers 'must devote a higher proportion of their income to non-discretionary expenditure items'.³⁵

43. It is evident from the available data, that the circumstances for the low-paid in Queensland are comparable, if not worse. As previously mentioned, on average across the last five years, inflation in Queensland has exceeded inflation nationally.³⁶ Housing group CPI, which is completely non-discretionary and the largest contributor to all groups CPI with a weight of 24.1%,³⁷ also exceeded the national figure in all recent corresponding reference periods:

(a) 7.7% in Brisbane compared to 6.5% nationally for the March 2026 quarterly data;³⁸

(b) 6.6% in Brisbane compared to 6.3% nationally for the April 2026 monthly data;³⁹

and

³³ *Declaration of General Ruling (State Wage Case 2025)* [2025] QIRC 229, [94] and [97].

³⁴ *AWR* (n 1), [89].

³⁵ *Ibid* [93].

³⁶ Statement of agreed facts, Table 1.

³⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Measuring Non-discretionary and Discretionary Inflation*, 25 May 2021.

³⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Consumer Price Index, Australia*, March 2026.

³⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Consumer Price Index, Australia*, April 2026.

(c) 7.2% in Brisbane compared to 6.5% nationally for the May 2026 monthly data.⁴⁰

Queensland minimum wage

44. Since 2023, the Queensland minimum wage has been aligned with the national minimum wage. The QCU seeks a continuation of this approach and submits that there is no justification for departing from it.

45. In *Declaration of General Ruling (State Wage Case 2025)*,⁴¹ the Full Bench relevantly observed the following:

[101] In this environment the QMW operates to maintain a safety net of fair minimum wages to underpin certified agreements and, in a practical sense, as the material before the Commission suggest, only a small number of employees directly rely on the QMW. Nevertheless, consistent with our obligations under IR Act we consider that regard should be had to factors that impact the relative living standards of low-paid employees and to whom the QMW may apply. Such factors include, inter alia, relative wage growth and inflation. These economic factors support an increase to the QMW.

46. It is fair and just for the Commission to maintain a safety net of fair minimum wages for Queensland workers who are not national system employees that is comparable to the safety net their national system counterparts benefit from.

47. As outlined in the submissions above, relative wage growth and inflation are once again economic factors that support an increase to the Queensland minimum wage. Inflationary pressures have had a comparable impact on the relative living standards of low-paid employees in Queensland and those to whom the Queensland minimum wage may apply, and relative wage growth remains a relevant consideration. As observed by the FWC,⁴² living standards of the low paid and their capacity to meet their needs has been particularly affected by the ‘real wage gap’ which has opened between the rate of the CPI and modern award wage rates.

⁴⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Consumer Price Index, Australia*, May 2026.

⁴¹ [2025] QIRC 229.

⁴² *AWR* (n 1), [7].

Operative date

48. Historically, the operative date for SWC general rulings has been 1 September of the relevant year, and the QCU seeks a continuation of this approach.

Conclusion

49. In determining minimum wages that are fair and just, it is incumbent on the Full Bench to make a determination that appropriately balances all of the relevant considerations in ss 141 and 142, *inter alia*, of the IR Act, and where the evidence on these matters demonstrates, on balance, that a particular increase is required to maintain fair and just minimum wages in modern awards, that increase ought to be awarded by the Full Bench.

50. For the reasons set out above, the QCU submits that this year that increase is 4.75%.

51. For the same reasons, it is fair and just for the Queensland minimum wage to be increased to \$1004.90 per week to maintain consistency with the national minimum wage.

N. Tosh
Queensland Council of Unions
17 July 2026