

15 December 2016

DON'T LET PUBLIC HOLIDAY PAY RUIN YOUR DAY

Christmas is calling and for most Australians their minds are turning to taking a break from work and spending time with loved ones.

While for many the holiday period is an opportunity to enjoy long lunches in the sun or seek out a bargain at the post-Christmas sales, these pleasures are dependent on businesses staying open during the Xmas period and other people continuing to work hard.

Business owners considering operating over Christmas and New Year must be aware of their obligations to their staff and weigh up whether potential income makes staying open a viable proposition.

The ACT has the most public holidays of any state or territory in Australia, with 14 scheduled in 2017. A business which opens its doors on a public holiday is generally faced with staff wage costs two and a half times greater than a usual business day.

A large number of the ACT's annual public holidays fall during the Christmas/New Year period. This year, there are additional public holidays during that time because the traditional holidays fall on weekends.

Over the 2016-17 holiday period there are public holidays on Sunday 25 December, Monday 26 December and Tuesday 27 December 2016 as well as Sunday 1 January and Monday 2 January 2017.

"For businesses to meet the wage costs associated with 14 public holidays, when other jurisdictions only have 11 or 12, is a significant burden," Canberra Business Chamber CEO, Robyn Hendry warned. "It will impact on their capacity to employ people and open on public holidays, particularly for tourism and hospitality businesses.

"It can also be difficult for small businesses, who often rely on the owner to be the bookkeeper, paymaster and HR manager, to cope with daily changes in pay scale."

"However, there are no excuses for underpaying staff. Businesses need to stay informed about public holiday requirements and ensure they pay employees appropriately if they choose to open. If a company finds it has made a mistake with pay scales, they should rectify it as quickly as possible.

"The high number of public holidays, pay rates and unpredictable customer numbers effect business viability over the Christmas period and it is for this reason many small businesses choose to close down – meaning you may not be able to book your favourite restaurant even though you finally have time to enjoy a night out."

Any business with questions about the correct rates of pay over Christmas and the New Year period should call the Chamber's Workplace Relations Hotline on 1300 277 881.

Media Contact: Robyn Hendry, CEO Canberra Business Chamber 0418 462 151