



**GOVERNMENT OF
WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

Industrial Relations Act 1979

**IN THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN
INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS COMMISSION**

No. 1 of 2025

OF THE COMMISSION'S OWN MOTION

SUBMISSION OF THE MINISTER FOR INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

Re: 2025 STATE WAGE ORDER

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Introduction

1. In January 2025, the Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission (**WAIRC**) initiated CICS 1 of 2025 of its own motion. The application seeks to make a State Wage Order pursuant to section 50A of the *Industrial Relations Act 1979 (IR Act)* to determine rates of pay for the purposes of the *Minimum Conditions of Employment Act 1993 (MCE Act)* and State awards.
2. In making the State Wage Order, the WAIRC is required each year to consider a number of statutory criteria prescribed in section 50A(3) of the IR Act including:
 - (a) the need to —
 - (i) ensure that Western Australians have a system of fair wages and conditions of employment; and
 - (ii) meet the needs of the low paid; and
 - (iii) provide fair wage standards in the context of living standards generally prevailing in the community; and
 - (iv) contribute to improved living standards for employees; and
 - (v) protect employees who may be unable to reach an industrial agreement; and
 - (vi) encourage ongoing skills development; and
 - (vii) provide equal remuneration for men and women for work of equal or comparable value; and
 - (b) the state of the economy of Western Australia and the likely effect of its decision on that economy and, in particular, on the level of employment, inflation and productivity in Western Australia; and
 - (c) to the extent that it is relevant, the state of the national economy; and
 - (d) to the extent that it is relevant, the capacity of employers as a whole to bear the costs of increased wages, salaries, allowances and other remuneration; and
 - (e) for the purposes of [Section 50A (1)(b) and (c)], the need to ensure that the Western Australian award framework represents a system of fair wages and conditions of employment; and
 - (f) relevant decisions of other industrial courts and tribunals; and
 - (g) any other matters the Commission considers relevant.
3. This submission from the Minister for Industrial Relations (**the Minister**) canvasses economic and labour market data relevant to this year's State Wage Case proceedings, as well as addressing key social and fairness criteria the WAIRC is required to consider under section 50A of the IR Act.
4. The Minister's submission also addresses another specific issue the WAIRC has requested the parties to consider, regarding clause 8(b)(i) of the State Wage Order. This sets out the adjustment of trainee rates of pay following any increase in the State Minimum Wage (**SMW**) and minimum award wages.

Minister's Position

State Minimum Wage and adult award wages

5. The State Wage Case decision is critically important to employees reliant on minimum and award wages in the State jurisdiction, and the businesses which employ them.
6. Workers who depend on the outcome of the State Wage Case for an annual wage increase should have confidence they will receive a meaningful adjustment which ensures their living standards are protected.
7. Likewise, the decision should not endanger the potential for employers within the State industrial relations system to operate viable businesses that service the community.
8. The Minister's submission in this year's State Wage Case emphasises key considerations for the WAIRC in determining a fair and sustainable increase to minimum and award wages.
9. While not quantifying a specific figure, the Minister believes that any increase determined by the WAIRC should, as a minimum, meet the needs of low paid workers and keep pace with changes in the cost of living.
10. The WAIRC should also be cognisant of the need to encourage opportunities for employment and skills development, and to sustain the important role of small businesses in the ongoing success of the Western Australian economy.
11. In the 2024 State Wage Case Decision the WAIRC re-aligned the SMW to the C13 rate in the *Metal Trades (General) Award*, which increased the SMW to \$918.60 per week. The WAIRC also increased State award rates by 4 per cent, effective from the first pay period on or after 1 July 2024.
12. The Fair Work Commission (**FWC**) granted a 3.75 per cent increase in national modern award rates in the 2024 Annual Wage Review, having re-aligned the National Minimum Wage (**NMW**) to the C13 classification in the *Manufacturing and Associated Industries and Occupations Award 2020* the previous year.
13. As a result of the re-alignment in the SMW in last year's State Wage Case, the SMW went from being almost \$20 per week lower than the NMW, to being marginally higher. This outcome was welcomed by the Western Australian Government, as it closed a gap that had opened up between the jurisdictions.
14. To preserve the integrity of the State jurisdiction, and to ensure it remains modern and relevant for Western Australian employers and employees, the Minister submits it is desirable that any increase determined by the WAIRC in 2025 not be less than that awarded by the FWC in this year's Annual Wage Review.
15. In the Minister's view, there is merit in maintaining a degree of harmony in wage adjustments in the State and national systems, to provide equity and fairness for Western Australian employers and employees.

Adjustment of trainee rates of pay

16. As part of this year's proceedings, the Commission in Court Session has indicated it would like to hear from the parties in relation to clause 8(b) of the State Wage Order. This sets out the adjustment of trainee rates of pay following any increase in the SMW and minimum award wages.
17. At present, the State Wage Order provides that the highest rates for each skill level are increased by 80 per cent of any arbitrated safety net adjustment. However, in practice this only occurs when there is a flat dollar increase determined by the WAIRC. In the case of any percentage increase being awarded, the long-standing practice has been to adjust the highest rates for each skill level by the actual percentage increase and not 80 per cent as presently prescribed.
18. To enable the State Wage Order to reflect the long-standing practice, the section 50 parties have conferred and agreed on a proposed update to the wording of clause 8(b) of the State Wage Order as follows:

(b) Trainee rates be adjusted as follows:

- (i) (aa) If the arbitrated safety net adjustment ordered is a flat dollar increase, Industry/Skill Level A, B and C top rates are increased by 80% of the arbitrated safety net adjustment. Each result is then rounded to the nearest dollar.
- (bb) If the arbitrated safety net adjustment ordered is a percentage increase, Industry/Skill Level A, B and C top rates are increased by that percentage arbitrated safety net adjustment. Each result is then rounded to the nearest dollar.
- (ii) All other Industry/Skill Level A, B and C rates are increased by a percentage of the unrounded result of the first step. Each result is then rounded to the nearest dollar.
- (iii) However, if an existing rate in Industry/Skill Level B or C is the same as an existing rate in Industry/Skill Level A or B, the rates are adjusted in line with whichever is the highest rate applicable, Industry/Skill Level A, B or C, in order to maintain consistency.

The Western Australian economy and labour market

Overview

19. The Department of Treasury (**Treasury**) has provided an economic overview for the Western Australian economy, which is included as **Attachment A** to this submission. As in previous years, Mr David Christmas, Director of the Economic and Revenue Forecasting Division, will be a witness for Treasury in this year's State Wage Case. Mr Christmas' witness statement is included as **Attachment B**.
20. Western Australia's economic conditions remain buoyant. Gross State Product (**GSP**) is forecast to grow by 2.25 per cent in 2024-25, primarily underpinned by strong domestic activity, with the domestic economy forecast to expand by 3.75 per cent in 2024-25, supported by sustained household consumption and a lift in dwelling investment and government investment.¹
21. Household consumption is expected to remain resilient in the near term, buoyed by growth in employment, wages, population and wealth. Household consumption is forecast to grow by 2.5 per cent in 2024-25 and by around 3 per cent per year over the coming years.²
22. Labour market conditions also remain robust, with near record employment and a historically low unemployment rate. While the number of job advertisements has continued to ease, hiring has continued as demand for labour remains strong.³
23. Wages growth is forecast to outpace inflation from 2024-25 onward, with real wage growth to continue over the next few years. Growth in the Consumer Price Index (**CPI**) is forecast to ease to 2.75 per cent in 2024-25, from 4.7 per cent in 2023-24.⁴
24. While Western Australia's economy and labour market have remained strong, the State's economic outlook is subject to several potential risks, in particular a rapid escalation in trade protectionism, with high levels of tariffs recently implemented by the United States and its key trading partners.
25. A more in-depth analysis of Western Australia's economic performance is detailed in **Attachment A**.

¹ Government of Western Australia, Department of Treasury (2025), *Pre-Election Financial Projections Statement - February 2025*.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

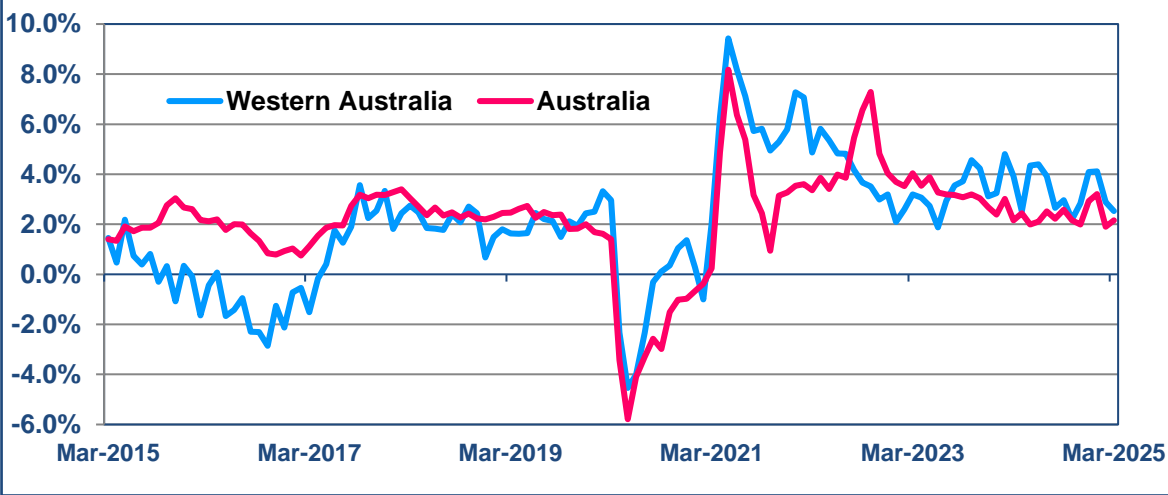
Labour market conditions in Western Australia

26. The following section presents a selection of labour market data detailing the State’s performance over recent months. As most of the data indicates, the labour market in Western Australia remains tight, with conditions remaining buoyant over the past 12 months.

Employment trends

27. Total employment rose to a record 1,642,500 people in Western Australia in March 2025. In year-ended terms, total employment rose by 2.5 per cent in the 12 months to March 2025, down from 3.9 per cent growth in the 12 months to March 2024.

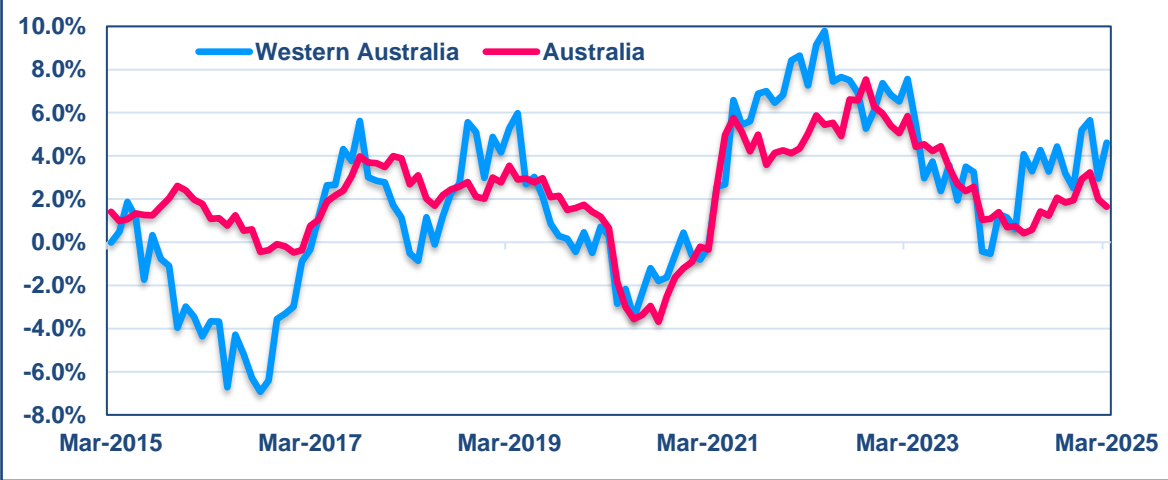
Figure 1: Annual (year-ended) total employment growth (%), WA and Australia, 2015 to 2025⁵



28. There has been a compositional shift in employment towards full time work in Western Australia over the past year, with full time employment growing strongly in the year to March 2025 and part time employment easing.

29. Nationally, full time employment growth has trailed part time jobs growth over the 12 months to March 2025.

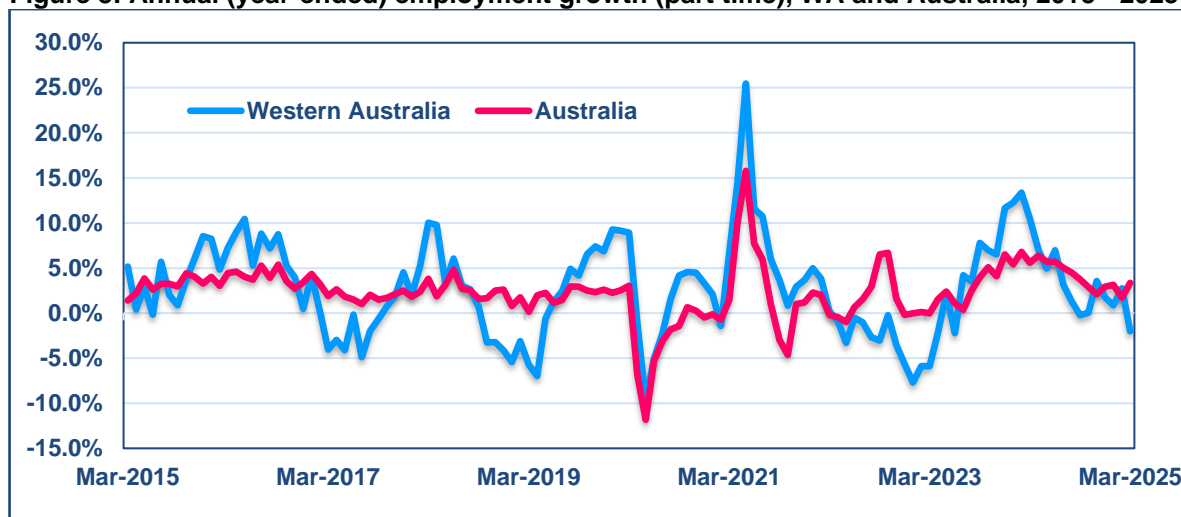
Figure 2: Annual (year-ended) employment growth (full time), WA and Australia, 2015 - 2025⁶



⁵ ABS (2025), *Labour Force, Australia, March 2025*, Cat. No. 6202.0, Tables 1 & 8 (seasonally adjusted).

⁶ Ibid.

Figure 3: Annual (year-ended) employment growth (part time), WA and Australia, 2015 - 2025⁷



30. ABS data regarding employment within Western Australia indicates the number of jobs increased in a majority of industries in the year to February 2025. Public administration and safety recorded a notable increase in total employment, while Health care and social assistance continues to be the largest employing industry by quite some margin.

Table 1 – Employment by industry in WA (000s), February 2024 – February 2025⁸

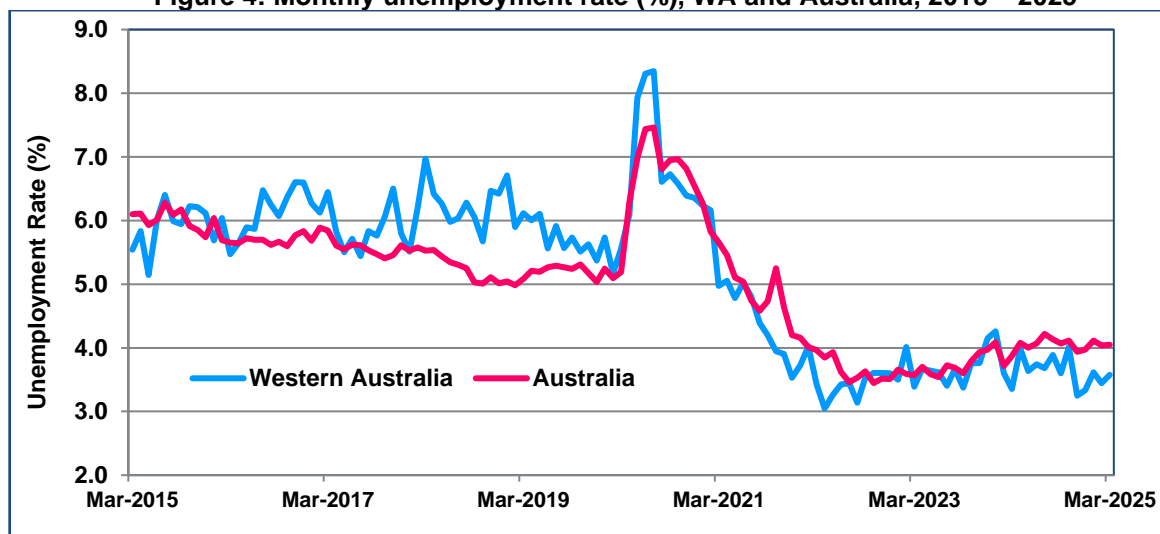
TOTAL EMPLOYED ('000)	Feb-24	Feb-25	Employment growth (000s)	Employment growth (%)
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	27.8	33.9	6.1	22.0%
Mining	159.6	154.6	-5.0	-3.1%
Manufacturing	84.1	77.0	-7.1	-8.4%
Electricity, gas, water and waste services	17.5	26.0	8.5	48.4%
Construction	144.4	155.2	10.8	7.5%
Wholesale trade	42.8	37.9	-4.9	-11.5%
Retail trade	139.3	139.6	0.3	0.2%
Accommodation and food services	96.6	104.7	8.2	8.4%
Transport, postal and warehousing	81.9	83.2	1.3	1.5%
Information media and telecommunications	13.8	15.0	1.2	8.4%
Financial and insurance services	33.0	31.8	-1.2	-3.7%
Rental, hiring and real estate services	22.3	22.2	-0.1	-0.4%
Professional, scientific and technical services	127.0	132.2	5.2	4.1%
Administrative and support services	44.8	52.0	7.2	16.1%
Public administration and safety	82.8	102.3	19.5	23.5%
Education and training	132.6	135.5	2.9	2.2%
Health care and social assistance	230.6	236.2	5.5	2.4%
Arts and recreation services	31.7	27.9	-3.8	-12.1%
Other services	66.3	62.0	-4.2	-6.4%
Total	1578.9	1629.1	50.2	3.2%

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ ABS (2025), *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, February 2025*, Catalogue 6291.0.55.003, Table 5 (original data). Note: Industry employment data is only released four times per year and is not seasonally adjusted. Figures displayed here are an average of the four quarters in the year to February 2024 and 2025 respectively. This data collection differs from the ABS monthly labour force survey, and figures may not sum to the total due to rounding.

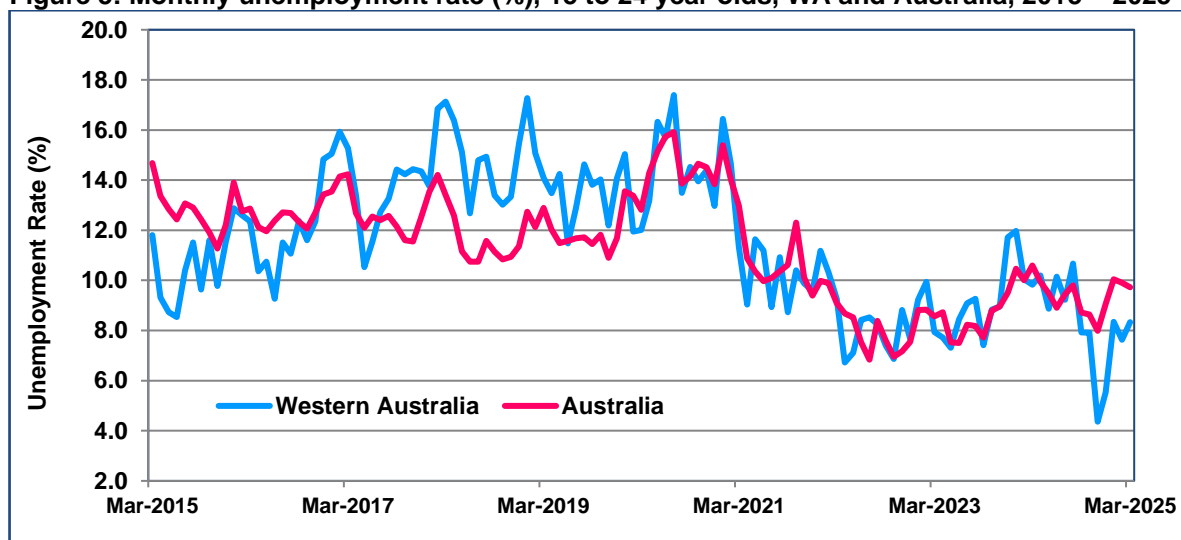
31. Western Australia's seasonally adjusted average unemployment rate declined marginally to 3.6 percent over the year to March 2025, down from 3.7 per cent in the year to March 2024. Unemployment remains very low by historic standards, with Western Australia's monthly unemployment rate tracking below the national figure for the last 12 months.

Figure 4: Monthly unemployment rate (%), WA and Australia, 2015 – 2025⁹



32. Youth unemployment in Western Australia remains low by historic standards and the average monthly youth unemployment rate has declined in the last 12 months, standing at 8.3 per cent in the year to March 2025. Nationally, youth unemployment averaged 9.3 per cent over the same period.

Figure 5: Monthly unemployment rate (%), 15 to 24 year olds, WA and Australia, 2015 – 2025¹⁰



Underemployment

33. The underemployment rate measures the number of underemployed workers (those who are employed but would like more hours of work) expressed as a percentage of the civilian labour force.

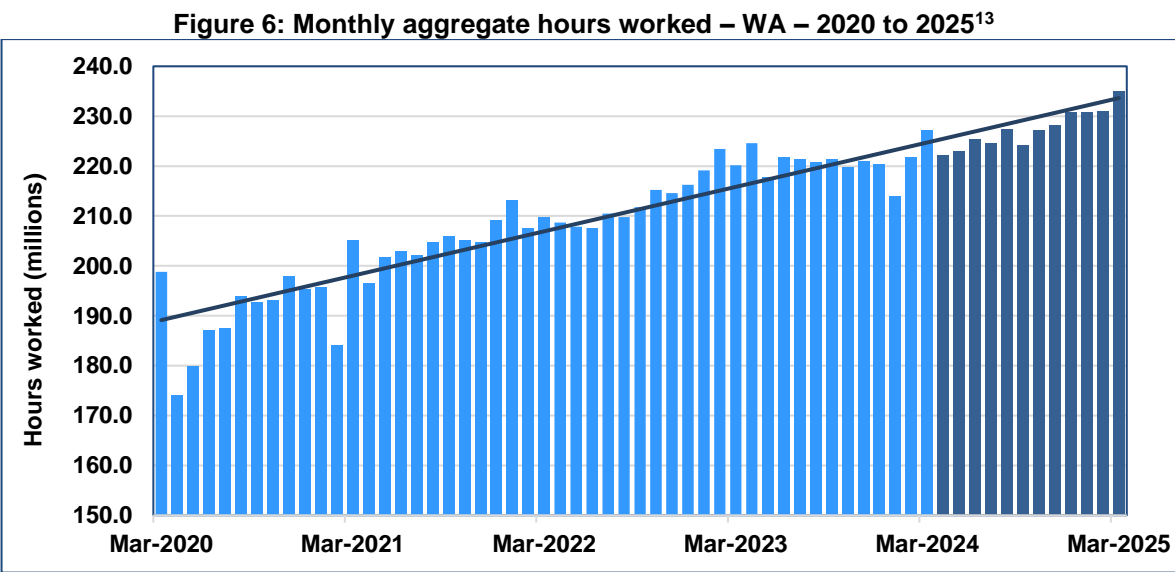
⁹ ABS (2025), *Labour Force, Australia, March 2025*, Catalogue 6202.0, Table 1 & 8 (seasonally adjusted data).

¹⁰ Ibid, Table 16 (original data).

34. Underemployment in Western Australia remains low by historic standards, as much of the spare capacity in the workforce has been absorbed. The underemployment rate has ranged between 5 and 6 percent each month over the past year, and stood at 5.8 per cent in March 2025, the equal lowest of the States.¹¹ Nationally, the underemployment rate was 5.9 per cent in March 2025.¹²

Hours worked

35. Aggregate hours worked in Western Australia increased further over the past year, reaching a high of just over 235 million hours in March 2025. This is consistent with strong full time employment growth over the same period.



Inflation

36. Perth’s CPI grew by 0.5 per cent in the March quarter 2025 and 2.8 per cent over the year to March 2025. However, when the electricity component is excluded, Perth’s CPI increased by 1.0 per cent over the quarter and 3.4 per cent over the year.¹⁴ This distinction is important, as various State Government and Australian Government electricity credits provided in recent years can significantly distort the headline rate of inflation.
37. Underlying measures of inflation at the national level (as measured by the trimmed mean and weighted median) are now within the Reserve Bank of Australia’s (RBA) target range, as they continue to trend downward.
38. The Minister notes that while headline inflation has continued to ease, cost of living pressures, particularly rental and housing prices, as well as health, education and insurance expenses, are still being felt by many households.

¹¹ Ibid, Table 23 (seasonally adjusted data).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid, Table 19.

¹⁴ ABS (2025), *Consumer Price Index – Australia, March Quarter 2025*, Catalogue 6401.0.

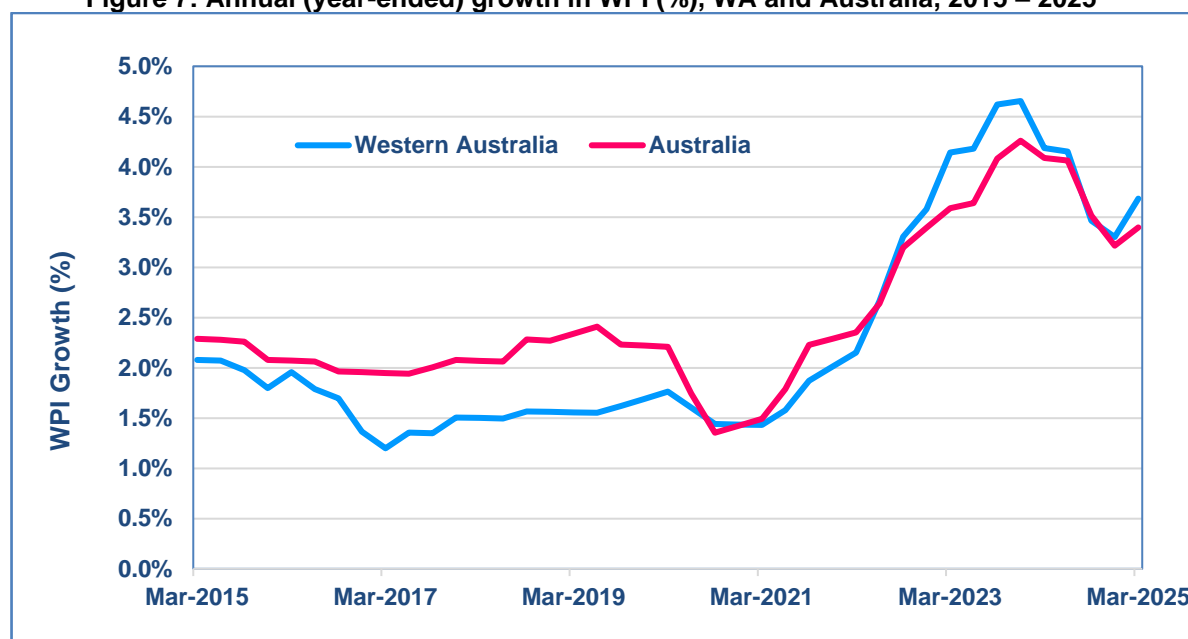
39. Price pressures affect both businesses and households. Individuals and families are often forced to use up their savings, as the price of goods and services (particularly non-discretionary items) impacts household budgets. Local businesses also face higher input costs, putting pressure on profit margins and cash reserves.
40. To control inflation, the RBA increased interest rates significantly between May 2022 and November 2023, with the official cash rate target rising from 0.1 per cent to 4.35 per cent during this period. More recently, the RBA has begun easing interest rates, with a 0.25 per cent reduction in the target rate implemented following the RBA's February 2025 board meeting.
41. At its most recent board meeting in April 2025, the RBA observed:

Inflation has fallen substantially since the peak in 2022, as higher interest rates have been working to bring aggregate demand and supply closer towards balance. Recent information suggests that underlying inflation continues to ease in line with the most recent forecasts published in the February *Statement on Monetary Policy*. Nevertheless, the Board needs to be confident that this progress will continue so that inflation returns to the midpoint of the target band on a sustainable basis. It is therefore cautious about the outlook.¹⁵

Trends in wages

42. Despite tight labour market conditions, wages growth in Western Australia has eased in recent months. The Western Australian Wage Price Index (**WPI**) grew by 3.7 per cent in the year to March 2025, down from 4.2 per cent in the year to March 2024.¹⁶
43. Growth in the WPI at the national level has also begun to ease, with the WPI for Australia increasing by 3.4 per cent in the year to March 2025, down from 4.1 per cent a year earlier.¹⁷

Figure 7: Annual (year-ended) growth in WPI (%), WA and Australia, 2015 – 2025¹⁸



¹⁵ Reserve Bank of Australia, *Statement on Monetary Policy*, 1 April 2025.

¹⁶ ABS (2025), *Wage Price Index, Australia, March Quarter 2025*, Catalogue 6345.0, Table 2b.

¹⁷ Ibid, Table 1.

¹⁸ Ibid, Tables 1 and 2b.

Table 2: Annual growth in CPI and WPI – Western Australia¹⁹

	Mar 2022	Jun 2022	Sep 2022	Dec 2022	Mar 2023	Jun 2023	Sep 2023	Dec 2023	Mar 2024	Jun 2024	Sep 2024	Dec 2024	Mar 2025
CPI	6.2	7.2	8.5	8.6	5.9	5.0	4.8	3.9	4.2	4.7	4.1	3.5	3.4
WPI	2.2	2.7	3.3	3.6	4.1	4.2	4.6	4.7	4.2	4.2	3.5	3.3	3.7

44. The WPI measures the change in wages and salaries by controlling the quantity and quality of jobs and excluding compositional factors, such as the growth in part time work. Due to the control for changes in labour market composition, the WPI is the preferred measure for wages growth.
45. While the WPI is generally considered the most useful indicator of wage inflation, the ABS Average Weekly Earnings series is used to provide an indication of earnings in dollar amounts.
46. The latest figures indicate that full time Average Weekly Ordinary Time Earnings (**AWOTE**) in Western Australia rose by 2.3 per cent over the 12 months to November 2024, from \$2,107.70 to \$2156.80.²⁰
47. Across the whole workforce, average weekly total earnings (**AWE**) in Western Australia increased by 3.2 per cent over the year to November 2024, rising from \$1,542.30 to \$1,591.50.²¹

¹⁹ ABS (2025), *Consumer Price Index – Australia, March Quarter 2025*, Catalogue 6401.0 and ABS (2025), *Wage Price Index – Australia, March Quarter 2025*, Catalogue 6345.0. CPI figures relate to Perth, excluding the electricity subcomponent.

²⁰ ABS (2025), *Average Weekly Earnings, Australia, November 2024*, Catalogue 6302.0, Table 12E (seasonally adjusted data).

²¹ Ibid.

Equal remuneration

48. The *Industrial Relations Legislation Amendment Act 2024* amended the objects of the IR Act to include a more specific focus for gender equality, with section 6(ac) now identifying that the principal objects of the Act include “to promote gender equality in the workplace through equal remuneration and eliminating gender-based undervaluation of work”.
49. The intention of this amendment was to more accurately reflect the purpose of the equal remuneration provisions of the IR Act, with the objects guiding the setting of the wage fixing principles under section 50A(1)(d) that must be applied and followed when the WAIRC exercises its jurisdiction to ensure employees receive equal remuneration.
50. The provision of equal remuneration for work of equal or comparable value is also a matter which must form part of the WAIRC’s considerations in the annual State Wage Case, under section 50A(3)(a) of the IR Act.
51. While minimum and award wages apply irrespective of gender, women are more likely than men to be paid at these rates and this has been identified as one factor contributing to persistent gender pay gaps in Australia. In May 2023, nearly 60 per cent of award only non-managerial employees were female.²²
52. As indicated in Table 3 below, the gender pay gap in Western Australia decreased from 21.7 per cent to 20.2 per cent in the year to November 2024, as female earnings grew at a faster pace than male earnings. Nationally, the gender pay gap remained steady, reducing slightly from 12.0 per cent to 11.9 per cent over the same period.

Table 3: Average weekly ordinary time earnings and the gender pay gap (GPG), WA and Australia, November 2023 and November 2024 ²³

		Nov 2023	Nov 2024	Change over year
WA	Males	\$2,301.60	\$2,330.10	1.2%
	Females	\$1,802.00	\$1,860.30	3.2%
	GPG	21.7%	20.2%	-1.5 pp
Australia	Males	\$1,982.80	\$2,072.70	4.5%
	Females	\$1,744.80	\$1,826.40	4.7%
	GPG	12.0%	11.9%	-0.1 pp

53. Despite a reduction over the year to November 2024, Western Australia continues to have the nation’s largest gender pay gap, as measured by AWOTE. Notwithstanding this, Western Australian women have the second highest average weekly earnings of any jurisdiction after the Australian Capital Territory. The gender pay gap is largely the product of Western Australian men having considerably higher earnings than those in other States and Territories.

²² ABS (2024), *Employee Earnings and Hours, Australia, May 2023*, Catalogue 6306.0, Datacube 5.

²³ ABS (2025), *Average Weekly Earnings, Australia, November 2024*, Catalogue 6302.0, Table 2 and 12E (seasonally adjusted data).

Table 4: Gender Pay Gap by State / Territory, November 2024²⁴

State / Territory	Male AWOTE	Female AWOTE	Gender Pay Gap
NSW	\$2,080.40	\$1,842.00	11.5%
VIC	\$2,013.10	\$1,794.80	10.8%
QLD	\$2,039.60	\$1,819.30	10.8%
SA	\$1,930.30	\$1,736.20	10.1%
WA	\$2,330.10	\$1,860.30	20.2%
TAS	\$1,799.70	\$1,705.00	5.3%
NT	\$2,000.00	\$1,771.80	11.4%
ACT	\$2,246.80	\$2,085.10	7.2%
AUS	\$2,072.70	\$1,826.40	11.9%

54. Greater reliance by women on the minimum and award wages safety net underlines the importance of the State Wage Case decision in helping to address gender inequality, and the Minister submits this should be a key focus for the WAIRC in its deliberations.

²⁴ Ibid, Tables 2 and 12A-12H (seasonally adjusted data).

Operating conditions for Western Australian businesses

Gross operating surplus plus gross mixed income

55. The criteria in section 50A(3) of the IR Act require the WAIRC to consider the capacity of employers as a whole to bear the cost of increased wages and the likely effect of its State Wage Order on the economy and employment levels.
56. While there is limited specific data available to assess the health of those businesses likely to be affected by the State Wage Order, select macroeconomic figures can be used to gauge the profitability of Western Australian businesses by industry in a given year. The figures below relate to the 2023-24 financial year.
57. Figures produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (**ABS**) indicate that Gross Operating Surplus (**GOS**) plus Gross Mixed Income (**GMI**) increased across a majority of industries over the course of the 2023-24 financial year, with a notable increase observed in Construction. While it is important to note that this data reveals little about the profitability or otherwise of individual businesses, the measure provides some broad insight into local conditions at the aggregate industry level.
58. As illustrated in Table 5, 14 out of 19 industries recorded a rise in GOS plus GMI, led by Construction (up 24.4 per cent), Education and training (up 17.2 per cent), and Public administration and safety (up 14.8 per cent).²⁵
59. Conversely, GOS plus GMI declined across several industries, in particular Agriculture, forestry and fishing (due to less grain production following bumper harvests the previous year) and Mining (due to less production of metal ores as weather disruptions impacted operations and logistics as well as less production of oil and gas due to weather disruptions and maintenance activities).²⁶
60. Across all industries, GOS plus GMI declined by 1.9 per cent in 2023-24.²⁷ As in previous years, the Mining industry accounted for the bulk of this figure, given the magnitude of this industry on the Western Australian economy.

²⁵ ABS (2024), *Australian National Accounts: State Accounts, 2023-24*, Catalogue 5220.0, Table 6 (original data).

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

Table 5: Gross Operating Surplus (GOS) and Gross Mixed Income (GMI) by industry, WA, current prices, 2023 and 2024²⁸

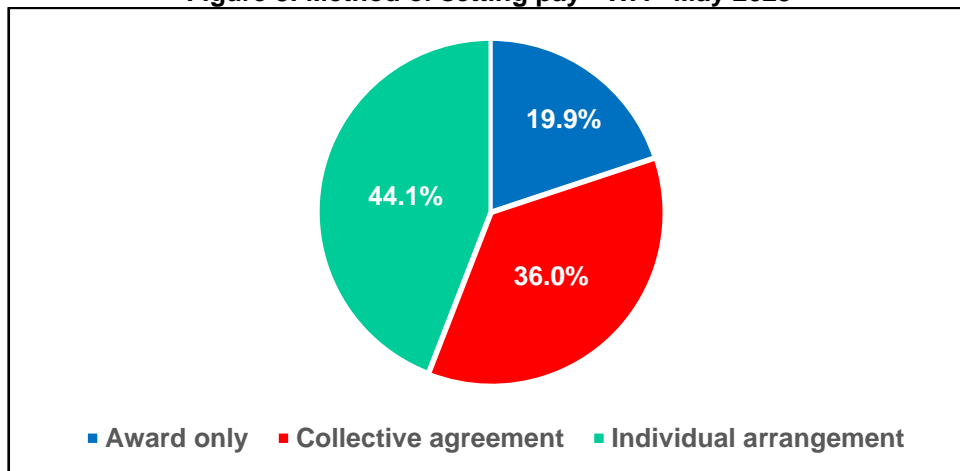
Industry	GOS + GMI June 2023 (\$m)	GOS + GMI June 2024 (\$m)	Annual Increase (\$m)	Annual Increase (%)
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	8,101	5,632	-2,469	-30.5%
Mining	181,379	172,044	-9,335	-5.1%
Manufacturing	8,559	8,701	142	1.7%
Electricity, gas, water and waste services	2,791	3,152	361	12.9%
Construction	6,805	8,463	1,658	24.4%
Wholesale trade	5,276	5,151	-125	-2.4%
Retail trade	4,773	4,976	203	4.3%
Accommodation and food services	2,344	2,165	-179	-7.6%
Transport, postal and warehousing	6,305	6,326	21	0.3%
Information media and telecommunications	1,884	2,011	127	6.7%
Financial and insurance services	9,349	9,494	145	1.6%
Rental, hiring and real estate services	3,583	3,696	113	3.2%
Professional, scientific and technical services	4,325	4,348	23	0.5%
Administrative and support services	857	687	-170	-19.8%
Public administration and safety	2,269	2,605	336	14.8%
Education and training	1,586	1,858	272	17.2%
Health care and social assistance	2,820	3,165	345	12.2%
Arts and recreation services	634	671	37	5.8%
Other services	1,973	2,105	132	6.7%
Total all industries	275,108	269,898	-5,210	-1.9%

²⁸ Ibid.

Coverage of the State Wage Order

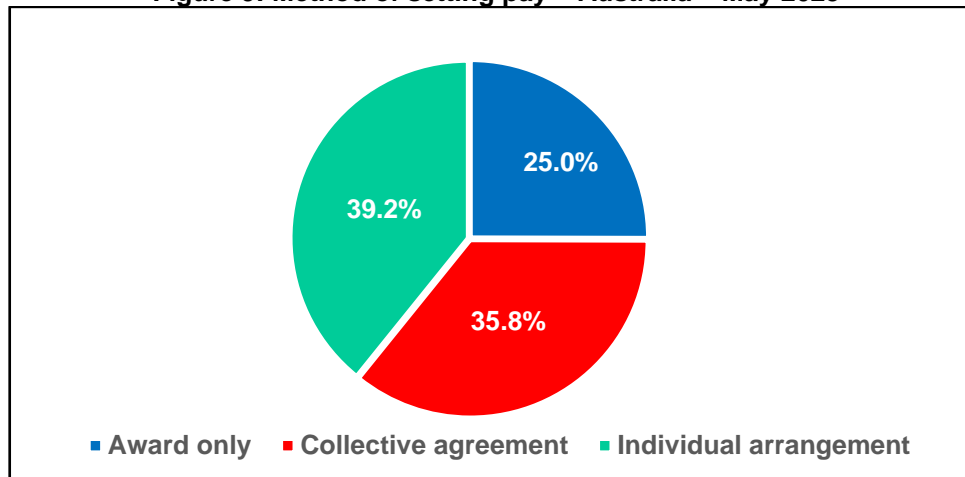
61. The most recent 'Employee Earnings and Hours' (EEH) data from 2023 indicates award reliance has increased in Western Australia, albeit it remains at lower levels than for Australia as a whole.²⁹
62. Award reliance in Western Australia increased marginally, from 19.6 per cent in May 2021 to 19.9 per cent in May 2023.³⁰ This equates to approximately 256,000 employees being paid entirely in accordance with a State or national award in 2023.

Figure 8: Method of setting pay - WA - May 2023³¹



63. Nationally, award reliance also rose between 2021 and 2023, increasing from 24.7 per cent to 25.0 per cent of non-managerial employees.³² As at May 2023, approximately 2.92 million Australian employees were paid entirely in accordance with an award.

Figure 9: Method of setting pay – Australia – May 2023³³



²⁹ ABS (2024), *Employee Earnings and Hours, Australia, May 2023*, Catalogue 6306.0.

³⁰ ABS (2024), *Employee, Earnings and Hours, Australia, May 2023*, Catalogue 6306.0 and ABS (2022), *Employee Earnings and Hours, Australia, May 2021*, Catalogue 6306.0.

³¹ ABS (2024), *Employee Earnings and Hours, Australia, May 2023*, Catalogue 6306.0.

³² ABS (2024), *Employee, Earnings and Hours, Australia, May 2023*, Catalogue 6306.0 and ABS (2022), *Employee Earnings and Hours, Australia, May 2021*, Catalogue 6306.0.

³³ ABS (2024), *Employee Earnings and Hours, Australia, May 2023*, Catalogue 6306.0.

64. The Minister notes that as of 1 January 2023, all local government employers and employees are now subject to the State industrial relations system, following passage of the *Industrial Relations Legislation Amendment Act 2021*. These reforms are estimated to have added more than 20,000 employees to the State system.
65. Table 6 illustrates proportions of employment by industry in Western Australia and shows that those industries known to have a high degree of award reliance (such as Accommodation and food services; Health care and social assistance; and Retail trade) make up a sizable portion of the State's workforce.

Table 6: Employment by industry - WA, February 2025³⁴

Industry	WA: Proportion of Workforce	Australia: Proportion of Workforce
Accommodation and Food Services	6.4%	6.6%
Administrative and Support Services	3.2%	3.1%
Retail Trade	8.6%	9.2%
Health Care and Social Assistance	14.5%	15.7%
Arts and Recreation Services	1.7%	1.9%
Other Services	3.8%	3.7%
Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services	1.4%	1.7%
Manufacturing	4.7%	6.1%
Construction	9.5%	9.3%
Public Administration and Safety	6.3%	6.7%
Transport, Postal and Warehousing	5.1%	5.1%
Wholesale Trade	2.3%	2.5%
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	8.1%	9.0%
Information Media and Telecommunications	0.9%	1.3%
Education and Training	8.3%	8.7%
Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services	1.6%	1.4%
Financial and Insurance Services	2.0%	3.7%
Mining	9.5%	2.1%
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	2.1%	2.2%
All industries	100.0%	100.0%

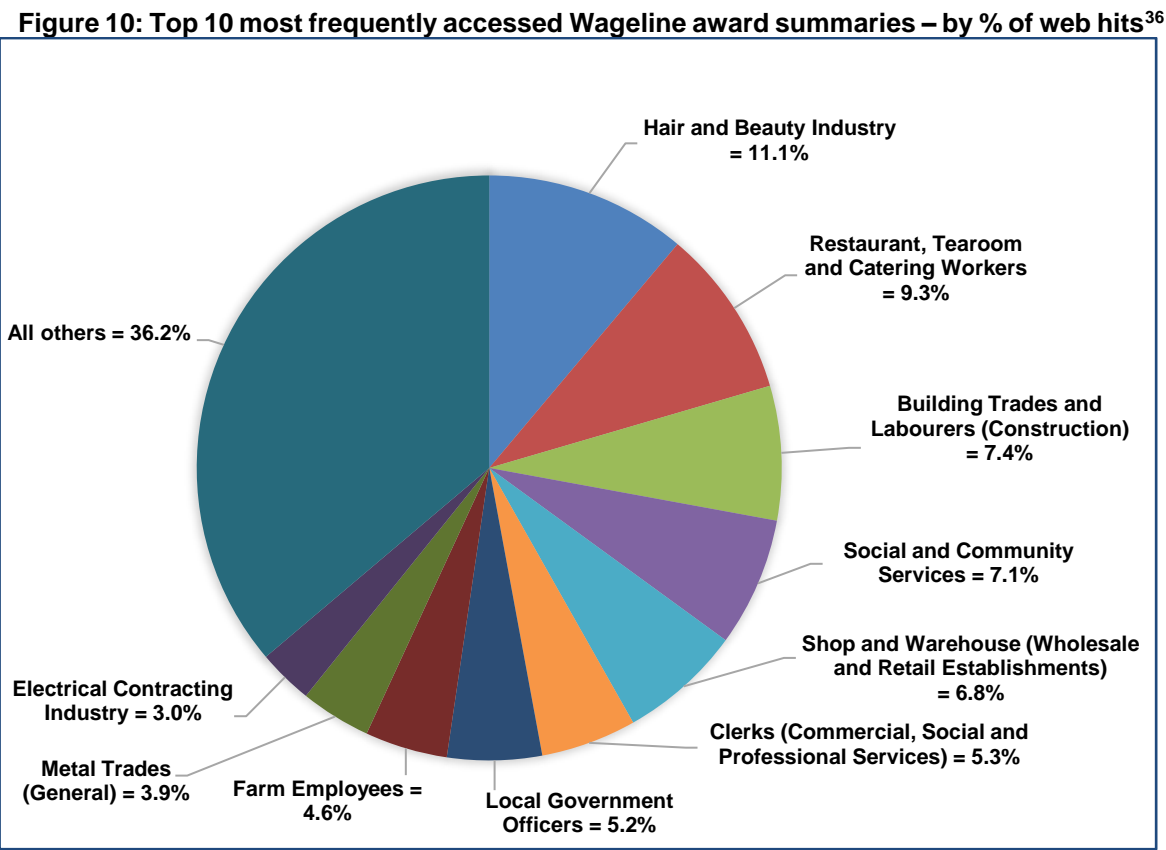
66. The Minister notes that employees in the State industrial relations system receiving wage rates only marginally above the relevant award minimum may also be impacted by the WAIRC's decision in this year's State Wage Case.
67. Other employees may likewise be affected where their wages are informally linked to State awards, such as where an employee is paid a particular margin above the award, or where industrial agreements link pay increases to the outcome of the State Wage Case. The reach of the State Wage Case is therefore likely to extend beyond just those employees paid entirely in accordance with a State award.

³⁴ ABS (2025), *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, February 2025*, Catalogue 6291.0.55.001. Industry employment figures are an average of the four quarters ending February 2025.

68. The Department of Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety (**DEMIRS**) has analysed the top 10 mostly frequently accessed WA Award Summaries for private sector awards on its website, which are outlined in Table 7 below.

Table 7 – Top 10 most frequently accessed award summaries prepared by Wageline ³⁵	
Rank	Award
1	Hair and Beauty Industry (WA) Award
2	Restaurant, Tearoom and Catering Workers' Award
3	Building Trades and Labourers (Construction) Award
4	Social and Community Services (Western Australian) Interim Award
5	Shop and Warehouse (Wholesale and Retail Establishments) Award
6	Clerks (Commercial, Social and Professional Services) Award
7	Local Government Officers' (Western Australia) Award
8	Farm Employees' Award
9	Metal Trades (General) Award
10	Electrical Contracting Industry Award

69. Figure 10 charts the top 10 most frequently accessed award summaries as a percentage of all award summaries accessed. As can be seen, the top 10 award summaries account for almost two thirds of all the award summaries accessed.



³⁵ Refers to the award summaries produced by the Department’s Wageline service that were the most frequently viewed between 1 November 2024 (when the Department moved to a new website) and 30 April 2025. The data relates to unique visits by individuals, including multiple visits to award summaries by the same individuals. It should be noted information produced by Wageline for award free employees is also generally viewed quite extensively.

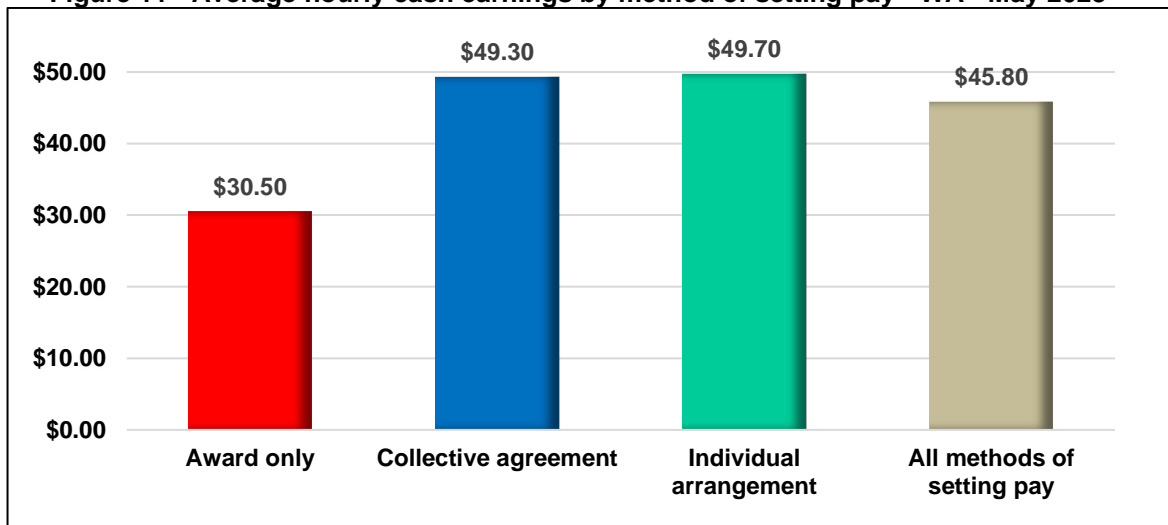
³⁶ Ibid. Wageline currently produces 49 award summaries for the most commonly used awards. It should be noted this information relates only to the number of web hits recorded for each award summary, and is not a measure of the number of employees employed under each award.

70. The above table and chart indicate that State awards in the hospitality, social and community services, retail (including hairdressing), building trades, metal trades, clerical, local government and agricultural sectors are some of the more widely utilised. It is also known that the cleaning and transport industries employ a number of State system employees.
71. While there are still a number of award free employees in the State industrial relations system, a variety of applications initiated by the WAIRC under section 37D of the IR Act to expand award scope in recent times have reduced the number of award free employees.

Fairness, living standards and the needs of the low paid

72. The Minister notes the essential role the minimum and award wage framework plays in protecting the needs of the low paid and ensuring their living standards are maintained and improved in line with those in the broader community.
73. The Minister submits that in meeting the objectives of the IR Act, the WAIRC should balance its statutory functions, so that economic, social and fairness criteria are all given due consideration.
74. As illustrated in Figure 11 below, the most recent EEH data from 2023 indicates that award-reliant employees in Western Australia receive significantly lower average hourly rates of pay than those engaged under collective agreements and individual arrangements.³⁷

Figure 11 - Average hourly cash earnings by method of setting pay - WA - May 2023³⁸



75. Many low paid workers are dependent on increases awarded in the State Wage Case to meet their everyday living costs, particularly when many households have been faced with significant cost of living pressures.
76. As noted above, there remain sections of the workforce that are currently award free in the State jurisdiction, including workers engaged in occupations that would traditionally be considered award type work. Employees who are award free have significantly fewer protections than those who are covered by an award and are particularly reliant on adjustments to the statutory minimum pay rates that occur as part of the State Wage Case process.
77. As at August 2024, the SMW equated to 49.9 per cent of median earnings for full time Western Australian workers.³⁹ This was a marginal decline from August 2023, when the Minimum Wage Bite stood at 50.8 per cent. However, the Minimum Wage Bite has remained relatively steady in recent years, apart from a dip in 2020 when the Covid-19 pandemic was significantly impacting workers and businesses throughout the State.

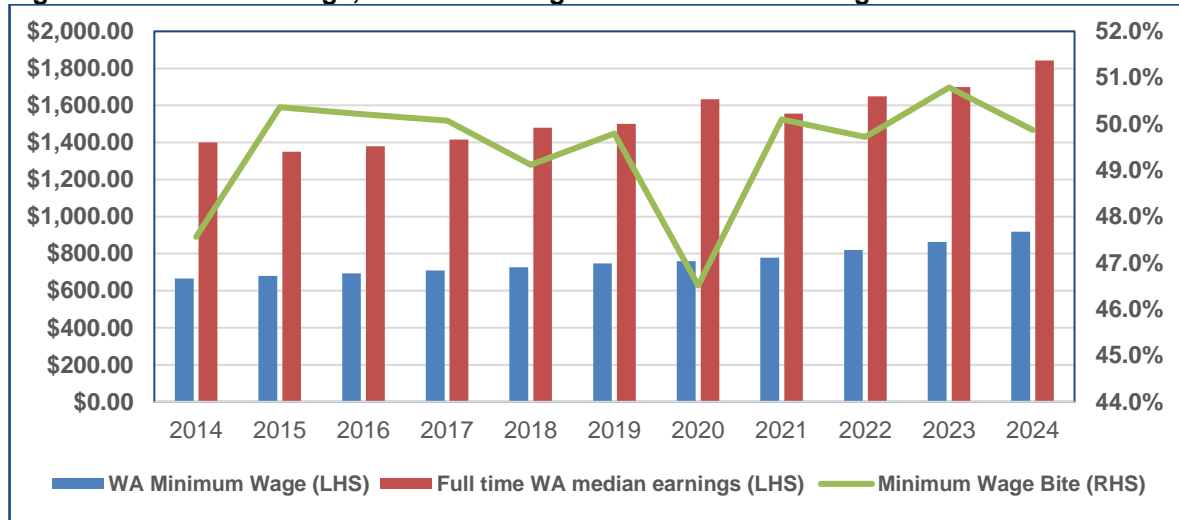
³⁷ ABS (2024), *Employee Earnings and Hours, Australia, May 2023*, Catalogue. No. 6306.0, Datacube 5, Table 5.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ ABS (2024) *Employee Earnings*, August 2024, Catalogue 6337.0.

78. By all conventional measures, employees receiving the SMW would be classed as low paid. However, the WAIRC's decision to re-align the SMW to the C13 classification in 2024 significantly improved the standing of the lowest paid workers in the State industrial relations system.

Figure 12 – Minimum Wage, Median Earnings and the Minimum Wage Bite - WA - 2014-2024⁴⁰



79. In the national industrial relations system, the NMW (\$915.90) currently equates to 53.9 per cent of national median earnings (\$1,700). The Minimum Wage Bite is higher in the national system primarily due to the higher median earnings in Western Australia (which lowers the Minimum Wage Bite in the State jurisdiction).

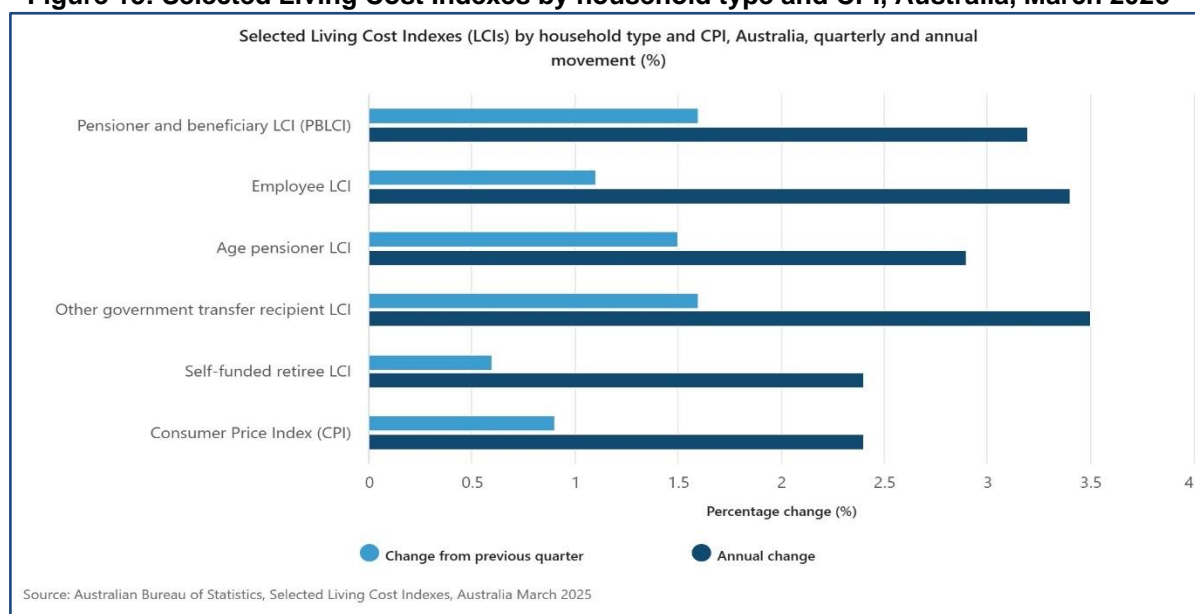
Living Cost Indexes

80. The ABS recently released Selected Living Cost Indexes (**LCIs**) relating to the March quarter 2025. LCIs measure the price change of goods and services and its effect on living expenses of selected household types, and are published at the national level only.
81. There are five LCIs in total, concerning the following household types:
- Pensioner and beneficiary LCI
 - Employee LCI
 - Age pensioner LCI
 - Other government transfer recipient LCI
 - Self-funded retiree LCI
82. The Employee LCI is the most relevant when it comes to minimum and award wage adjustments, as it reflects the purchasing power of households whose primary source of income is wages and salaries.
83. LCIs differ from the CPI, as an LCI reflects changes over time in the purchasing power of the after-tax incomes of households. It measures the impact of changes in prices on the out-of-pocket expenses incurred by households to gain access to a fixed basket of consumer goods and services. The CPI, on the other hand, is designed to measure price inflation for the household sector as a whole and is not the conceptually ideal measure for assessing the changes in the purchasing power of the disposable incomes of households.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

84. Another important distinction between the LCIs and the CPI is the LCIs include mortgage interest payments – something that is not included in the CPI.
85. In the March quarter 2025 all five LCIs rose, with the quarterly increases ranging from 0.6 per cent for Self-funded retirees, to 1.6 per cent for Other government transfer recipient households and Pensioner and beneficiary households. Over the 12 months to the March quarter 2025, all LCIs rose, with the annual increases ranging from 2.4 per cent for Self-funded retirees, to 3.5 per cent for Other government transfer recipient households.
86. Of relevance for the State Wage Case, the LCI for Employee households rose by 1.1 per cent in the March quarter 2025, and 3.4 per cent in the year to March 2025.

Figure 13: Selected Living Cost Indexes by household type and CPI, Australia, March 2025⁴¹



87. The 3.4 per cent annual increase experienced by Employee households in the year to March 2025 was much lower than the 6.5 per cent increase in the year to March 2024. However, the Employee household LCI was still in excess of annual headline inflation (2.4 per cent) during the same period.
88. The ABS advises that mortgage interest charges were the most significant contributor to the increase in Employee households' living costs, rising 8.8 per cent in the year to March 2025. Mortgage interest charges inflation has continued to ease from a peak of 91.6 per cent in the June 2023 quarter. The RBA's decision to keep the cash rate on hold between December 2023 and January 2025 and the slowdown in the rollover of low fixed rate loans into higher variable rate loans led to the easing in annual growth of mortgage interest charges.
89. The Minister notes that elevated living costs have been particularly challenging for low income employee households. Many employees reliant on minimum and award wages are unable to negotiate higher rates of pay, either individually or through collective agreements. These workers are particularly susceptible to experiencing poverty, debt and/or homelessness, and a fair and sustainable increase in wages is essential to help safeguard their interests.

⁴¹ ABS (2025), *Selected Living Cost Indexes, Australia, March Quarter 2025*. Catalogue 6467.0. Note: living cost indexes are only available at the national level.

Protecting employees who are unable to bargain

90. Section 50A of the IR Act requires that, when making the State Wage Order, the WAIRC considers the need to protect employees who may be unable to reach an industrial agreement.
91. An analysis of current industrial agreements registered by the WAIRC that have yet to reach their nominal expiry date reveals that almost all agreements are concentrated in the following sectors:
 - Western Australian public sector;
 - private schools;
 - social, community, health and disability support organisations;
 - local government;
 - registered political parties;
 - security services; and
 - unions / labour organisations.
92. It is noted that the sectors outlined above exclude several industries known to have high levels of award reliance - in particular Accommodation and food services and Retail trade. As a result smaller, unincorporated businesses in the hospitality and retail sectors are more likely to be guided by State awards (either directly or indirectly) in regard to wage determination for their employees. A fair and sustainable increase in award rates will help to protect such employees.

Skills development

93. The WAIRC is required under section 50A(3) of the IR Act to consider the need to encourage ongoing skills development when making the State Wage Order. This section provides key data on commencements of apprenticeships and traineeships for 2024 and previous years. Data on the total number of apprentices and trainees in training is also presented.⁴²
94. This data has been supplied by the Department of Training and Workforce Development (**DTWD**) and is included to provide guidance on longer-term trends in the take up of apprenticeships and traineeships in Western Australia.
95. To assist the WAIRC with the State Wage Order, the Minister has included an updated list of Industry Skill Levels for training packages at **Attachment C**.
96. In developing the updated list of Industry Skill Levels, DTWD has reviewed the 2024 Industry / Skill List and updated the list to align with the national database of training packages and the traineeships identified in the *Classification of Prescribed Vocational Education and Training Qualifications (1 April 2025)*.

Training Packages

97. Training packages are reviewed on a regular basis. When qualifications are superseded, there is a 12 month transition period (unless additional time is allowed by the regulator) and trainees who are unable to complete their training contract before this period are enrolled in the newer qualification. As per previous years' arrangements, the updated Industry/Skill List only shows current training packages.

Accredited courses

98. The majority of traineeships align to a qualification in a training package. Where an industry's training need is not met by a training package qualification, a specialised accredited course may be developed and registered through an accreditation agency. DTWD has identified six traineeships offered through an accredited course:
 - (1) 52904WA Certificate III in Defence Industry Pathways, nominal duration 12 months (replaced 52864WA Certificate III in Defence Industry Pathways);
 - (2) 52922WA Certificate II in Building and Construction Technical Support, nominal duration 12 months (previously 52825WA - Certificate II in Building and Construction (Pathway - Para Professional);
 - (3) 22460VIC - Diploma of Applied Technologies, nominal duration, 36 months, (non-active, expired 31 December 2023);
 - (4) 52893WA - Certificate II in Building and Construction (Pathway - Trades), nominal duration, 12 months;
 - (5) 2889WA - Diploma of Civil and Structural Engineering, nominal duration 36 months;
 - (6) 22603VIC - Certificate IV in Cyber Security, nominal duration 24 months (replaced 22334VIC Certificate IV in Cyber Security).
99. As these traineeships do not align with a training package they are not identified in the 2025 Industry/Skill List.

⁴² Data is for apprentices and trainees in both the State and national industrial relations systems. It does not break down the proportion of these employees working in the State jurisdiction.

Commencements

100. Training commencements increased significantly during 2021 and 2022 as a result of the Commonwealth Government's investment in wage subsidy incentives, which led to elevated levels of apprentices and trainees in training. The reduction of Commonwealth incentives in July 2022 saw commencements drop, particularly for traineeships, affecting the overall number in training.

Apprenticeship commencements

101. As shown in Table 8 below, apprenticeship commencements remained largely unchanged in 2024, declining marginally from 11,054 to 10,927.

Table 8: Apprenticeships commenced in WA, 2014 to 2024⁴³

Year	Total
2014	8,705
2015	7,887
2016	6,424
2017	6,440
2018	6,852
2019	7,076
2020	8,677
2021	12,414
2022	12,547
2023	11,054
2024	10,927

102. After falling to a low in 2016, apprenticeship commencements rose sharply until 2022, and although they have declined in the last two years, they remain much higher than they were a few years ago.

Table 9 – Apprenticeship commencements by trade category⁴⁴

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Total Apprenticeships	8,705	7,887	6,424	6,440	6,852	7,076	8,677	12,414	12,547	11,054	10,927
Arts, Sport & Recreation		5	2	3	2	1	2	3	2	2	1
Automotive	1,225	1,048	1,026	1,253	1,538	1,744	2,044	2,910	3,007	2,730	2,790
Building & Construction	2,635	2,330	1,499	1,277	1,142	1,153	1,603	2,688	2,624	2,262	2,323
Community Services, Health & Education	8	6	10	11	16	7	17	29	29	27	16
Electrical	1,537	1,493	1,116	1,157	1,199	1,241	1,502	2,169	2,262	2,083	2,126
Food	212	217	206	203	181	167	186	240	197	157	152
Hospitality & Tourism	492	428	481	370	391	362	360	544	482	337	259
Light Manufacturing	317	319	242	202	195	197	276	320	328	304	273
Metals, Manufacturing & Services	1,390	1,231	1,071	1,275	1,440	1,417	1,718	2,250	2,357	2,062	1,991
Primary Industry	79	78	73	74	53	60	103	126	186	166	140
Process Manufacturing			17	6	11	37	32	28	54	38	57
Utilities, Electrotechnology & Printing	153	108	93	77	122	177	157	231	257	195	171
Wholesale, Retail & Personal Services	657	624	588	532	562	513	677	876	762	691	628

⁴³ Department of Training and Workforce Development, 23 April 2025.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Traineeship commencements

103. As outlined in Tables 10 and 11 below, traineeship commencements are significantly lower than they were two years ago.

Table 10: Traineeships commenced in WA, 2014 to 2024⁴⁵

Year	Total
2014	20,776
2015	19,437
2016	15,085
2017	14,686
2018	11,490
2019	10,944
2020	12,821
2021	17,921
2022	19,264
2023	12,669
2024	10,814

Table 11 – Traineeship commencements by trade category⁴⁶

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Total Traineeships	20,776	19,437	15,085	14,686	11,490	10,944	12,821	17,921	19,264	12,669	10,814
Arts, Sport & Recreation	351	252	268	323	302	320	310	376	388	127	121
Automotive	185	143	136	135	122	124	174	244	239	225	178
Building & Construction	613	744	405	557	420	386	541	560	276	204	251
Community Services, Health & Education	2,471	1,776	1,337	1,239	1,150	1,464	1,885	2,739	3,525	3,503	2,658
Electrical						1	1	3	40		4
Finance, Property & Business Services	5,110	4,608	3,800	3,290	1,933	2,391	2,771	3,990	3,696	1,433	1,120
Food	352	295	227	219	223	191	385	200	400	98	93
Hospitality & Tourism	2,876	2,836	2,560	2,241	1,970	1,386	1,116	2,130	2,354	1,461	1,170
Light Manufacturing	71	52	77	41	51	27	34	43	25	24	59
Metals, Manufacturing & Services	319	259	105	127	175	124	323	273	335	382	339
Mining Industry	1,382	1,550	1,327	1,885	2,087	1,961	2,094	2,746	2,939	2,067	1,616
Other		2									
Primary Industry	632	500	440	409	471	347	409	504	512	437	343
Process Manufacturing	2,204	2,529	958	1,111	344	353	393	368	511	396	802
Public Administration	266	218	213	199	153	165	167	212	254	369	360
Transport & Storage	1,638	1,480	1,350	1,111	763	505	533	1,241	1,186	646	571
Utilities, Electrotechnology & Printing	652	536	429	395	172	125	323	390	496	303	224
Wholesale, Retail & Personal Services	1,654	1,657	1,453	1,404	1,154	1,074	1,362	1,902	2,088	994	905

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Total numbers in training

104. The total number of **apprentices in training** increased marginally between 2023 and 2024, from 25,950 to 26,152. This is the seventh year in a row that total apprenticeship numbers have risen in Western Australia.
105. In contrast to apprentices, the total number of **trainees in training** declined further between 2023 and 2024, from 15,002 to 12,800.
106. Across Western Australia, the total number of **people in training** (apprentices and trainees) fell from 40,952 to 38,952 between 2023 and 2024.

Table 12 - Apprentices and trainees in training by trade category⁴⁷

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Total apprentices in training	17,862	17,320	15,697	15,082	15,225	15,703	18,288	22,171	24,600	25,950	26,152
Arts, Sport & Recreation	1	6	6	8	6	6	4	5	4	4	3
Automotive	3,044	2,665	2,462	2,702	3,171	3,750	4,529	5,491	6,120	6,436	6,609
Building & Construction	4,018	4,379	3,797	3,301	2,887	2,627	3,042	4,132	4,784	5,049	5,024
Community Services, Health & Education	25	21	21	22	27	28	37	46	57	62	57
Electrical	4,113	4,089	3,649	3,453	3,283	3,233	3,630	4,368	5,017	5,561	5,887
Food	371	358	389	391	367	298	355	405	399	351	317
Hospitality & Tourism	614	600	666	619	609	562	610	718	778	566	496
Light Manufacturing	572	587	533	487	457	401	498	577	642	650	614
Metals, Manufacturing & Services	3,657	3,168	2,785	2,856	3,169	3,438	3,974	4,554	4,658	5,165	5,171
Primary Industry	207	176	164	151	140	130	176	219	293	329	315
Process Manufacturing			16	22	33	67	71	68	97	90	111
Utilities, Electrotechnology & Printing	307	294	258	181	199	305	358	424	492	483	452
Wholesale, Retail & Personal Services	933	977	951	889	877	858	1,004	1,164	1,259	1,204	1,096
Total trainees in training	22,494	21,978	19,044	17,002	13,560	11,554	14,092	18,216	19,462	15,002	12,800
Arts, Sport & Recreation	143	90	87	111	93	86	75	124	151	94	83
Automotive	219	193	107	126	102	120	178	199	205	193	178
Building & Construction	692	855	657	629	496	450	631	633	402	207	208
Community Services, Health & Education	2,494	2,307	1,761	1,500	1,308	1,516	2,239	3,072	3,683	4,294	4,064
Electrical						1	1	3	34	16	5
Finance, Property & Business Services	5,280	5,350	4,699	4,290	2,506	2,118	2,851	4,015	3,878	1,991	1,187
Food	355	329	288	217	227	206	410	356	443	290	151
Hospitality & Tourism	2,490	2,571	2,704	2,336	2,146	1,475	1,226	1,877	2,169	1,443	1,316
Light Manufacturing	54	54	71	56	59	41	39	37	31	11	35
Metals, Manufacturing & Services	278	301	183	133	189	154	334	301	324	421	386
Mining Industry	1,486	1,638	1,604	2,036	2,329	2,297	2,355	2,623	2,767	2,223	1,742
Other		2									
Primary Industry	434	395	349	327	395	334	413	513	492	361	319
Process Manufacturing	3,834	3,378	2,245	1,439	918	558	660	669	591	558	860
Public Administration	319	195	215	165	113	133	143	171	193	276	275
Transport & Storage	2,370	2,228	2,260	2,007	1,387	883	819	1,274	1,445	1,054	821
Utilities, Electrotechnology & Printing	591	490	448	415	190	148	330	507	649	439	277
Wholesale, Retail & Personal Services	1,455	1,602	1,366	1,215	1,102	1,034	1,388	1,842	2,005	1,131	893
Total apprentices and trainees in training	40,356	39,298	34,741	32,084	28,785	27,257	32,380	40,387	44,062	40,952	38,952

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Conclusion

107. The annual State Wage Case proceedings are an important part of the State industrial relations framework. Many low paid employees rely on annual adjustments to minimum and award wages to meet their everyday living costs and make ends meet.
108. The Minister supports a minimum wage framework that protects the interests of Western Australian workers and provides fair remuneration, whilst ensuring that any increases are sustainable and take account of the prevailing economic conditions.
109. Last year's State Wage Order provided welcome relief for many low paid workers, both through the yearly increase and particularly through the re-alignment of the SMW to a higher base. This re-alignment was done without adversely affecting Western Australia's economic progress.
110. Western Australia's labour market has remained resilient in the past 12 months, with low unemployment, solid employment growth and high levels of workforce participation.
111. This year's State Wage Case proceedings take place in a period of economic uncertainty, amid rapidly shifting global conditions. Key concerns include the ongoing trajectory of inflation and the potential for further economic slowdowns across major advanced economies.
112. Despite Western Australia's relatively buoyant labour market conditions, many workers have faced challenging cost of living pressures in recent years. Although inflation has moderated considerably, elevated housing costs, rising mortgage repayments and higher costs for many non-discretionary items continue to affect low-and middle-income households.
113. Similarly, notwithstanding the relative strength of the State's domestic economy, many local businesses still face challenges, with higher input costs, cash flow and payment difficulties, and an uncertain global trading environment being some of the issues at play.
114. The Minister supports the WAIRC delivering a fair and sustainable increase in minimum and award wages in this year's State Wage Case, that protects Western Australian workers and supports growth and opportunity for local businesses. Any such increase should, as a minimum, keep pace with changes in the cost of living, whilst also being sustainable.
115. To preserve the integrity of the State jurisdiction, the Minister also submits it is desirable that any increase determined by the WAIRC in 2025 not be less than that awarded by the FWC in this year's Annual Wage Review.
116. The Minister looks forward to making further contributions to this year's State Wage Case proceedings in due course.