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Note: *The views of the contributors are not necessarily those of the IR Society of SA.*

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RECENT ACTIVITIES OF THE SOCIETY

The Annual General Meeting of the Industrial Relations Society of South Australia was held at the Holiday Inn, Adelaide, on Wednesday 20 August 2008.

The main business of the AGM was to update Members in attendance on the activities and financial affairs of the Society, and to elect a new Committee of Management for 2008-09. The Society was honoured to host as guest speaker on the night His Excellency Rear Admiral Kevin Scarce AC CSC RANR, Governor of South Australia, who discussed the State's emerging opportunities in the mining and defence industries, and how to manage the economic and social consequences of their growth.

The AGM was opened by President (and now Immediate Past President) Peter Hampton, who reported on the status and activities of the Society during 2007-08. Peter outlined the changes to the services and operation of the Society which have recently been implemented as a result of a strategic planning exercise conducted by the committee of management. These changes include the adoption of a new Society image, a revised newsletter format and a more contemporary layout for our website.

Events organised by the Society were diverse in content and well-attended during the past year. Our events have included a major pre-election seminar on the IR policies of the Federal ALP and other seminars related to equal opportunity legislation, alternative dispute resolution and award modernisation. The Society is now well advanced in planning for our State Convention, which will be held at the Stamford Grand, Glenelg, on Friday 24 October. Further details are provided later in this newsletter.

As at 30 June 2008, the Society had 245 Members and was in a sound financial position. The financial standing of the Society was elaborated at the AGM in a separate report by Treasurer David Johns. The small surplus we have accumulated means that we are able to keep our general membership subscription rates at a relatively low level, and we will continue to offer seminars and other functions at competitive prices.

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Our Society could not operate without the ongoing efforts of our Secretariat or the participation of the volunteers on our management committee. We thank Ian and Anne from the Secretariat for their continuing professional assistance and personal interest in the Society. We would also take this opportunity to thank outgoing members of the 2007-08 committee of management – President Peter Hampton, Vice President Craig Stevens, and committee members Erin McCarthy and Eleni Tsiaprakas – each of whom contributed generously to the strategic direction of the Society and the planning of specific events. In particular we thank Peter for his outstanding leadership and length of service to the Society, notably in taking over as President after the departure of his predecessor, Chris White, to Canberra. We look forward to Peter's continued involvement in future events.

In this context we also welcome to the Committee of Management two new members for 2008-09, Gary Collis and Sorna Nachiappan, and offer congratulations to those continuing members of the Committee who have taken higher offices. These are: David Johns (incoming President), Sandra Dann (Vice President) and Trevor Evans (Treasurer). We wish all three the best in their new roles.

IRSSA STATE CONVENTION IN OCTOBER

The flagship event for the Society in 2008, and one of the main events in the national IR calendar this year, will be our State Convention on **Friday 24 October 2008 at the Stamford Grand Hotel, Glenelg**.

The Convention theme is **'2010: Forward to Where?'**

We will be exploring the implications of the move towards a single national system of industrial relations, within the framework of the Rudd Labor government's 'Forward with Fairness' package. The Convention will also consider the implications of the national occupational health and safety reforms, including the commitment of all jurisdictions to adopt model OHS laws by 2011.

The Society has secured an impressive roster of local and national IR leaders and thinkers to bring the Convention theme to life. These speakers include:

- **Hon. Paul Caica MP** (SA Minister for Industrial Relations) to open the Convention
- **Professor George Williams** (Faculty of Law, University of New South Wales) on a legal framework for a 21st century industrial relations system
- **Professor Andrew Stewart** (School of Law, University of Adelaide) on whether a national IR system is good for Australia
- **Michelle Patterson** (Executive Director, Safework SA) on whether national harmonisation in OHS laws can be achieved
- **Peter Anderson** (Chief Executive, Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry) and **Cath Bowtell** (Industrial Officer, Australian Council of Trade Unions) on what employers and unions want from the new IR system
- **Vice President Michael Lawler** (Australian Industrial Relations Commission) on what role the tribunals might play in the new system
- **Shayne Bakewell** (General Manager and Director, EMA Consulting) on what changes in the IR system will actually mean for HR at the workplace level

The event will run for the full day and will be followed by Dinner in the Stamford Grand Ballroom, with **His Honour Judge Chris Kourakis** (Supreme Court of South Australia) as guest speaker, and entertainment from accomplished local ensemble **Aurora Strings**.

The 2008 Convention is not to be missed. To register your attendance, complete the forms sent to you by 17 October 2008, download the relevant forms from our website (<http://www.irssa.asn.au>), or contact the Society Secretariat directly by phone on 8278 9666.

CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENTS IN EMPLOYMENT AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

Gender Equity in the Workplace

There is considerable current interest in the topic of gender equity in the workplace and the scope for policy changes to affect female earnings and rates of participation in the paid workforce.

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations is in the middle of an 'Inquiry into pay equity and associated issues relating to increasing female participation in workforce'. The Inquiry is considering what initiatives have been implemented so far to progress the cause of pay equity, whether current statistical data sources are adequate for describing the underlying trends in female pay and conditions, and what changes to legislation may be necessary to improve women's outcomes. While the opportunity to make formal submissions to the Inquiry has passed, the investigation is ongoing and the House Committee will be conducting hearings into next year. A full list of the submissions received by the Inquiry is available from the Parliamentary website (see reference below), where the 114 separate submissions can be read or downloaded.

As this work proceeds, labour economists at Flinders and Deakin Universities are collaborating (via the National Institute of Labour Studies) on a research project examining the size of, trends in, and underlying causes of, gender pay differences in the lower-paid sectors of the Australian labour market. The project was initiated by the Australian Fair Pay Commission, and will report at the end of October 2008. The project is focused on whether the gender pay gap is smaller or larger in the industries and occupations most affected by Commission decisions (such as retail and hospitality), how any such difference is related to the system under which employee pay is set (awards versus agreements), and to what extent any remaining pay gap is 'explained' by individual differences in age, education and other attributes. The final project report will be published on the AFPC website at the time of the Commission's next general wage-setting decision.

Given the current interest in the topic of gender equity, the Society is considering organising an event addressing this theme early in the new year.

In the meantime, Members interested in progress of the Parliamentary Inquiry or the forthcoming NILS research report for the AFPC are directed to the following websites:

<http://www.apf.gov.au/House/committee/ewr/payequity/index.htm>

<http://www.fairpay.gov.au/fairpay/NewsPublications/Commissionedresearch/Commissionedresearch.htm>

Consultation on Paid Maternity Leave

On 29 September 2008, the Productivity Commission released the interim results of its Inquiry into 'Paid Parental Leave: Support for Parents with Newborn Children', following a round of hearings and public submissions.

In brief, the report proposes a publicly-funded scheme of 18 weeks paid post-natal leave, at the level of the current adult Federal Minimum Wage (\$543.78 per week), to be shared between the eligible parents of the newborn child. The scheme would extend to all workers 'with a reasonable degree of attachment to the labour force', and so would include casual workers and contractors, in addition to those which the labour law defines as 'employees'. Ineligible families would continue to receive the equivalent of the current Baby Bonus in the form of a Maternity Allowance.

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The Productivity Commission has invited comments on its draft report, which it has indicated must reach the Commission by close of business on Friday 14 November 2008. Details about the report and how to make a submission to the Productivity Commission are provided at the website below:

<http://www.pc.gov.au/projects/inquiry/parentalsupport/draft>

There is also an opportunity for interested Members to attend a special public forum organised by the Working Women's Centre, in conjunction with the National Foundation of Australian Women (NFAW) and the Commonwealth Office for Women. The event will happen on Friday 7 November, from 9.30am to 12.30pm at Women's Health Statewide, 64 Pennington Terrace, North Adelaide, and morning tea will be provided.

The guest speaker at the forum will be Marie Coleman from the NFAW, who will summarise the key findings of the Productivity Commission report and discuss how its proposals for a paid maternity leave scheme have been received so far by Australian women. The event will provide a lively forum for attendees to debate the adequacy of the proposed scheme and its likely impact on female employment in paid work, the balancing of care responsibilities in the home, the well-being of children, and other issues related to the establishment and maintenance of the scheme.

Interested Members are asked to register their attendance, by contacting the Working Women's Centre by email wwc@wwc.org.au

The Use and Treatment of Migrant Labour

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship has commissioned Barbara Deegan to review the 457 visa program, under which employers are able to sponsor skilled workers to work in Australia on a temporary basis. The review is focused on the 'integrity' of the program, following allegations of exploitation and mistreatment of some migrants brought to Australia under the 457 scheme.

The Deegan Review is due to report to the Minister, Senator Chris Evans, by the end of October 2008. In the meantime, three issues papers produced as part of the Review are able for download from the link to the Immigration Department website given below. The first paper deals with wage levels and agreements, the second deals with English proficiency and occupational health and safety issues, and the third deals with questions of integrity and current compliance arrangements.

It is likely that the final report of the Integrity review will lead to legislative changes affecting some employer Members of the Society. We are in the process of planning a special event on this topic, for which we hope to secure the Minister in charge, Senator Evans, and/or the chair of the Review, Ms Deegan. We are currently looking at an event to run in November, although this will depend on the availability of the two potential speakers who are both in very high demand.

<http://www.immi.gov.au/skilled/457-integrity-review.htm>

NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTIONS WELCOME

The editors invite contributions to the newsletter from members of the Society. These contributions might include opinion pieces, reviews of books or articles relevant to the Industrial Relations profession, or updates on significant tribunal or legislative developments.

Contributions should be supplied in electronic (Word) format, via the Society's Secretariat. As you would expect, the editors reserve the right to determine the ultimate content of the newsletter.