



# PUBLIC PERSPECTIVE

A Publication of the Community & Public Sector Union / Victorian Branch

[www.cpsuvic.org](http://www.cpsuvic.org)

## Officers left exposed but Victoria's marine assets protected

**It started out simply enough for DPI Fisheries Officers and CPSU members Mark Gibson and Laurie Dri, just waiting for the speeding infringement notices to arrive in the mail.** They knew they'd been detected whilst intercepting two vehicles carrying illegal quantities of abalone. It was all part of an effort that saw the officers' quick action and temerity successfully apprehend the poachers – poachers subsequently charged with serious trafficking offences and who are now serving time.

During the intercept that took place on the Geelong Rd between Werribee South and Point Cook in March of last year, the poachers threw their bags of abalone out the car window. The situation escalated as the officers chased down and apprehended the offenders on foot, delivering an outcome heralded by the media as a major success for the people of Victoria.

"The bags in the vehicles were carrying more than 500 abalone, or about 40 kilos worth," says Laurie.

"Organised criminals can fetch millions of dollars through the black market trade and this is something that we're always prepared to go the full measure to prevent," he says.

In fact, in a legal first, the convicted poachers were ordered to pay compensation to the state of Victoria in addition to the jail sentences and fines that were imposed and were also found

guilty of the offence of hindering and obstructing the Fisheries Officers.

But the last thing that Mark and Laurie expected was a drawn-out legal affair involving themselves lasting almost 12 months, whereby DPI consistently failed to provide them with any assistance to contest the speeding infringements incurred as part of the operation. Amazingly enough, their employer even pursued disciplinary action against the officers for alleged breaches of policy, citing the fact that they used their warning lights and siren during the intercepts (which apparently are not under any circumstances to be used in a 'continual' pursuit, whatever that's interpreted to be).

For Mark in particular, the worst-case scenario would be 6-month loss of license, an obviously devastating blow to him both professionally and personally.

"A fine I could live with, although I still would have disagreed with paying it, but a loss of license would dramatically affect how I can perform my job because driving is such a big component of what I do," says Mark.

**Continued Page 7**



### Legislative Protection for Fisheries Officers Now Needed

**CPSU is continuing to fight for Fisheries Officers to get a better deal.**

As the ordeal of Mark Gibson and Laurie Dri highlights, there currently exists a gaping hole between the manner in which Fisheries Officers are expected to perform scaled-up law enforcement duties, but without adequate legislative protections that should exist between their employer with Victoria Police.

This issue, clearly, must now be rectified as a matter of urgency.

With VicPol, the CPSU is pursuing an amendment of the Road Safety Act to provide the necessary exemption to cover this type of problem should it arise in the future. The union is also pursuing DPI for the costs of mounting the successful defence.

**If you suspect illegal fishing activity, call the Department's fisheries offence reporting line on 13FISH (13 3474) – operating 24/7.**

**Reports from the community have already led to the conviction of people involved in various serious offences including illegal netting and taking commercial quantities of abalone. The information will also help to target special enforcement operations and future patrols.**



# At last, some justice for Conciliation Officers



Eight Hour Day Project Coordinator Leanne Shingles accepting her award

## Work, Rest and Play wins ACTU award

It couldn't have been more appropriate that 2006 marked the 150th anniversary of the Eight Hour Day in Victoria given the current industrial climate. To celebrate this historical achievement CPSU's experienced campaigner Leanne Shingles was seconded to head up a year-long series of commemorative events across the State.

Based at Trades Hall in Melbourne, and together with the skill and support of Museum Victoria employees, a tremendous job was done by all in ensuring that public awareness was raised about this important milestone in Victoria's history, and its continuing relevance to this day. At its annual Awards ceremony in March, the ACTU provided due recognition with Leanne receiving a Commendation for her coordination of the 888 project. The Museum has also been acknowledged for its role by the Victorian Government, having already scooped an Arts Portfolio Leadership Award.

Well done Leanne! And well done to all those who assisted Leanne in this important project.



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All Accident Compensation Conciliation Officers who were up for reappointment—including those whom the previous Minister for WorkCover placed on limited ten month contracts back in May 2006 – have been reappointed for the normal 3 year term.

The actions of Minister Lenders last year saw two competent Conciliation Officers recommended for reappointment by a duly-appointed selection panel dismissed and four other competent, independent and highly effective Conciliation Officers also recommended for reappointment appointed for only a ten month term.

CPSU took the view, and still vigorously maintains, that it is inappropriate and highly unethical for the government of the day to interfere in a duly appointed selection panel's decision to appoint Conciliation Officers.

The union applauds new Minister for Finance (including WorkCover) Tim Holding for correcting the injustice dealt out to these Conciliation Officers upholding rights to decent permanency of tenure, and transparency of process regarding their appointment.

**New Minister restores some sanity to flawed appointment process**



Geoff Lewin, CPSU's WorkCover Officer, welcomes the decision, stating, "It appears Minister Holding is not afraid to make the hard decision, in this case putting right the wrong done out to Conciliation Officers."

"I applaud the Minister for taking such a courageous decision," he says.

Order a book of tickets and join the global struggle for dignity and fairness for all.

## How to help the 2007 raffle

### 1. ORDER RAFFLE BOOKS

- Buy tickets yourself and sell tickets to friends, family and colleagues
- Order books of tickets directly from Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA today. See order form overleaf, or
- Ph: 1800 888 674 Fax: (02) 9261 1118
- Email: [office@apheda.org.au](mailto:office@apheda.org.au)
- Or through our website [www.apheda.org.au](http://www.apheda.org.au)

### 2. DISPLAY THE POSTER

Please pin up the poster on the reverse side of this letter in a prominent place in your workplace, and encourage others to sell a book of tickets as well! Remember, both the seller of the winning ticket and the seller of the most tickets will receive a gift of a 51cm colour TV.

**TERMS & CONDITIONS:** Raffle closes Friday 1 June 2007. The winning ticket will be drawn at the Trades Hall Auditorium, 4 Goulburn St, Sydney on Thursday 14 June 2007 at 6:00pm. The winner will be notified, and results published in the Australian on 20/6/07. The winner will fly Qantas and British Airways, tickets to the value of \$A3,000 each are economy class ex nearest Australian capital city. One night's accommodation at Westminster Hotel in London, and \$A720 to help with other costs, but other accommodation, insurance and transfers not included. Estimated value of first prize \$A7,200. Second prize is an Acer Travelmate 2428wxmi, Pentium m 740 (512mb ram, 60 GB(4200 rpm) Harddrive, DVD burner, 14.1" WXGA LCD, wireless LAN 802.11b/g, valued at \$1599.00. Prizes are not redeemable for cash, but are transferable. 80,000 tickets are printed. APHEDA Inc. has authority to fundraise under the NSW Charitable Fundraising Act 1991 – number CFN12752; Vic permit no. 10018/07 (issued 5 January 2007); ACT permit number no. R 07/00002.

# Working women want safe, secure and fair employment

With March 2007 marking the anniversary of the IR laws that have seen workers – and women workers in particular – lose a host of wages and conditions, women celebrating this year's International Women's Day on March 8 had extra cause to demand a restoration of their working rights and fair pay and conditions.

Addressing the rally on the steps of Melbourne's GPO, Federal Labor spokeswoman for Industrial Relations Julia Gillard said that while the day is usually an opportunity to reflect on the advances that women have made over the years, that there is now little for Australian women celebrate.

"The Howard Government's unfair IR laws are holding back Australian working women," Ms Gillard said.

"The Minister (Joe) Hockey's refusal to consider family friendly workplace reforms should be condemned on International Women's Day."

Ms Gillard cited Average Weekly Earnings figures, which showed there has been a 1.7 per cent increase in the gender pay gap over the last two years – simply another blow for women already faced with the challenges of the high cost of child-care and increasing demands from the workplace.

IWD this year came days just after the release of a report by the Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission on work and family which proposes changes that include



Julia Gillard addresses the gathering in Melbourne, joined by other union and community leaders, public sector workers, fire fighters, nurses, teachers, manufacturing workers, finance workers and many others to demand the return of wages and conditions for working women.

new anti-discrimination legislation, access to parental leave and flexible workplace arrangements, changes to family tax benefits and child-care rebates, and support for early childhood education and care services.

As the Commission points out, women are very much bearing the brunt of the IR changes because they are more likely to work casually or part-time, and this is causing added strain on families trying to balance paid employment and parenting.

## Preventing Work-related Stress - Information that Can Help



**Stresswise - Preventing Work-related stress, has now been released by WorkSafe - a 36-page publication aimed for all public sector employers and employees. The publication covers WorkSafe's Occupational Health & Safety work-related stress prevention process and includes:**

- How to identify potential work-related stress hazards
- How to determine work-related stress risks
- How to control work-related stress hazards and risks, and
- Implementing continuous improvement, trial, review, and evaluation.

The guide has been produced as a result of a project involving both unions and employers in the Public sector with CPSU having an active role. A copy of is available from the WorkSafe website at [www.worksafe.vic.gov.au](http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au)

## Pay gap for women widens

**A new ACTU analysis of ABS data shows women in full time jobs now earn \$100 a week less than men and that the pay gap for working women is getting wider.**

Full time women now earn on average 10% less than men — the same gender pay gap as 1978, almost 30 years ago.

The ABS data also shows the real wages of female workers has fallen 2 per cent over the last 12 months.

With almost one in four women (23%) reliant on awards (compared to only 15% of men), the delayed low pay increase provided by the fair pay Commission and the erosion of award conditions like penalty rates, leave loading and public holiday payments is having a serious impact on women's take-home pay.

Despite the overwhelming evidence of a growing gender pay gap, Workplace Relations Minister Joe Hockey has denied there is a problem with unequal pay. The Minister should not be proud of a system where mothers returning from parental leave are expected to work in the lowest paid jobs in our country and have the least job security and least control over hours of work.

It is clear that pay equity for women will be harder to achieve under the new laws. The weakening of the award system and the preference for AWA individual contracts will especially affect women workers. There is already a 20 per cent pay gap in hourly rates between women and men on AWAs while this gap is not so for women and men on awards, where the pay gap is minimal. In additional women are being disproportionately affected by the decline in the real value of minimum wages as women are more reliant on minimum wage rates.

The broader impact for the economy is that these additional barriers to the participation of women in the workforce will discourage their rate of participation in the labour market. The new IR laws will thus not only exacerbate the existing problem of a gender wage gap, which will have long-term negative repercussions for women, their families and communities, but will also affect the future prosperity of the nation by reducing participation rates for women.

Source: *One Year On: the impact of the new IR laws on Australian working families*, ACTU, 27 March 2007

# First Anniversary of WorkChoices

## 59% of Australians oppose the laws as the federal election approaches...

**59% of voters nationally - including 25% of Coalition voters - oppose the Work Choices changes, according to an AC Nielsen opinion poll released to mark the first anniversary of the laws on Monday 26 March.**

The survey of 1,404 voters found 72% noticed no difference from the changes, 21% felt worse off and 5% said they were better off.

Meanwhile, NSW Premier Morris Lemma said WorkChoices was a major factor in his victory in the recent State election – a claim backed by exit polling released by Unions NSW.

The survey of 1,529 voters in nine NSW marginal seats found the Coalition plans to hand IR powers to Canberra was the decisive factor for 27% of Labor voters, and a significant factor for 35%. It was not a factor for 21% and a minor factor for 18%. Yet so far Prime Minister John Howard has refused to acknowledge that Work Choices was a factor in the State election, especially in marginal seats.

The results of ACTU polling, released on 27 March, reinforces the AC Nielsen findings showing that voters overwhelmingly reject the Howard Government's push to put workers on to AWA individual contracts and want unfair dismissal and collective bargaining rights for workers restored.

ACTU Secretary Greg Combet said; "After only one year many Australian working families have already been negatively affected by the Federal Government's IR laws. Unless these laws are ripped up, many more working people will also be hurt and what we will see over time is that the pay and conditions of all Australian workers will be slowly but surely worn down.

"That is why the ACTU and unions are so committed to seeing these laws thrown out at the next election. It is now very clear that what the Australian public wants is workplace laws that respects the right of workers not to be unfairly dismissed, stop workers being pushed onto pay and condition cutting AWAs, and ensures that where a majority of workers in a workplace want a collective agreement they have that right."

### One year on...

#### Reduced job security for working families

- 3,761,000 Australian workers employed in business with less than 100 staff have lost protection from being unfairly dismissed since the introduction of the new IR laws on 27 March 2006.

- 99% of all private sector employers are now exempt from all unfair dismissal laws.

- Another 6,590,000 workers employed in businesses with more than 100 staff are also not protected from unfair dismissal as long as their employer says the sacking is for so called 'operational reasons'.

- An example of this was the sacking of 29 workers at the Cowra Abattoir who were dismissed for 'operational reasons' and offered their jobs back with a 30% pay cut. The Federal Government's Office of Workplace Services found these sackings were legal under the new IR laws.

- A prominent legal adviser to big business said publicly that any large business that sacks a worker for anything but 'operational reasons' would be crazy.

- There has been a 60% increase in workplace-related complaints to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission since the new IR laws removed these unfair dismissal protections.

#### 1,000 workers a day are being pushed onto AWA individual contracts

- 1,000 workers a day are being put onto AWA individual contracts under the new IR laws, as at the end of 2006

- Under the IR laws large businesses have been specifically given the power to:

- refuse to collectively bargain with workers even where that is what a majority of workers in a workplace want
- refuse employment to any worker who won't sign an AWA in terms dictated solely by the employer; and
- refuse to increase the pay or promote any worker who won't sign an AWA individual contract.

- This increase in employers' power to put workers on AWA individual contracts has led to a jump in the number of Australian workers being put onto an AWA.

## ONE YEAR ON

### The impact of the new IR laws on Australian working families

#### AWA individual contracts cutting workers' conditions

- The new IR laws have scrapped the 'no disadvantage test' which protected workers from having their pay or conditions changed without appropriate compensation

- AWA individual contracts now only need contain 5 minimum conditions.

- The Federal Government's own report given as evidence to the Budget Senate Estimates Hearings in May 2006 shows that its new AWA individual contracts are cutting the pay and conditions of Australian workers.

- Of all AWA individual contracts surveyed in the report:

- 100% cut at least one so called 'protected award condition';
- 22% provided workers with no pay rise, some for up to 5 years;
- 51% cut Overtime Loadings;
- 63% cut Penalty Rates;
- 64% cut Annual Leave Loading;
- 46% cut Public Holiday payment;
- 52% cut Shift Work Loadings;
- 40% cut Rest Breaks;
- 46% cut incentive bases Payments and Bonuses;
- 48% cut Monetary Allowances (for employment expenses; skills; disabilities);
- 36% cut Declared Public Holidays; and
- 44% cut Days to be substituted for Public Holidays.

#### Wage rises for all full time workers falling behind inflation

- Since the new IR laws were introduced increases in total earnings for full time workers have been falling behind the rising cost of living.

- Compared to the rate of inflation total average earnings for full time adult workers have dropped by -0.6% over the past 12 months since the new IR laws came into effect.

- For full time in the private sector average total earnings have dropped by -1.1%,

- The drop in average earnings for women workers in the private sector is -1.8%.

- For more than a million workers on minimum wages, the increase granted to them by the Government's new Pay Commission saw the real value of their weekly wages fall -0.9% behind the inflation rate.

# Choices Sends a Clear Warning

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## Labour productivity in Australia (GDP per hour worked) declined by 1.6% in the first six months under the new IR laws and barely recovered in the following quarter

### Lower pay for workers on AWAs

- Even with the higher salaries paid to many workers on AWAs in the mining industry as a result of the resources boom, ABS statistics show workers on AWAs earn an average of 90 cents an hour less than workers covered by collective agreements (non-managerial workers).

### Many workers on AWAs working longer hours

- ABS data released in March 2007 shows that the average weekly hours worked has increased in the past year. Other recent ABS data also shows people in full time non-managerial jobs that are on AWA individual contracts work 2.3 hours a week more than people on registered collective agreements.

### Women workers' wages falling behind

- ABS data issued a year after the new IR laws came into effect shows the gap between full time wages for women and men has blown out to \$100 a week.
- Full time women workers now earn on average 10% a week less than their male colleagues.
- This has taken Australia back to the same pay gap in percentage terms that existed in 1978.

### 41% of Australians already know someone affected by the IR laws

- In only 12 months since the new IR laws have been introduced hundreds of workers have already publicly detailed how they have been harmed by the laws.
- Thousands more examples of workers hurt by the laws have not been detailed in public.
- 41% of NSW residents told an independent Galaxy poll published in the Sunday Telegraph (31 December, '06) that they knew a friend or family members who had been negatively affected by the new IR laws.
- 2,100 complaints from workers about the IR laws have already been received by the Victorian Workplace Rights Advocate.

### 66% of new 'Employer Greenfield' Agreements cut workers' award conditions

- Employer Greenfield Agreements introduced by the Federal Government as part of its new IR laws, allows employers to set work conditions



in any new business, part business or undertaking without reference or negotiation with affected employees or unions.

- Employer Greenfield Agreements effectively allow employers to negotiate with themselves the terms and conditions of employment of their workers.

- An estimated 14,400 Australian workers have been put on an Employer Greenfield Agreement since the new IR laws were introduced and the number of employees

covered by these 'agreements' is growing rapidly.

- 68% of these agreements eradicate workers' 'protected award conditions'.
- 75% provide no specified wage increases for workers.

### Lost productivity

- Despite the Government's claims that its IR laws would boost productivity, labour productivity in Australia (GDP per hour worked) declined by 1.6% in the first six months under the new IR laws and barely recovered in the following quarter.

To read more about how these laws have affected working families, go to the ACTU's website and where there are downloadable fact sheets and links to the advertising that will be broadcast right up until the election ([www.actu.asn.au](http://www.actu.asn.au))

## After only one year many Australian working families have already been negatively affected by the Federal Government's IR laws



# YOUR VOTE COUNTS!

**Q: Have you recently moved house and not yet updated your details with the AEC?**

**Are you gaining, or plan to gain, Australian citizenship this year?**

**Do you have someone in your household turning 18 this year?**

If you answered YES to any of these questions, then you should know that as of April 1, recent changes to the Electoral Act will make it harder for new enrollees to enrol and for people who periodically drop off the roll to re-enroll. You might even find yourself inadvertently ineligible to vote in this year's Federal election. Double-check through following this link to be on the safe side (<https://oevf.aec.gov.au/>).

Under the changes, those people enrolling or updating their details will need proof of identity requirements such as a driver's license or some other prescribed identity document such as a passport. This is by far the easiest way of doing it and, indeed, it can even be done on-line with a license and a witness to verify it but if you don't have a

license it starts to get very difficult.

The alternative to the license goes like this: You must get two witnesses, who are not related to you, who have known you for longer than one month and who can confirm their own identity with a driver's license or a prescribed original identity document of theirs.

Just as importantly, the electoral roll will close earlier thereby disadvantaging first time voters in particular. The roll will be closed three days from the time the election writs are issued to update your details - BUT - you'll only have until 8pm on the day the writs are issued to enrol if you've been taken off the roll or if you are enrolling for the first time.

Again, go to the website <https://oevf.aec.gov.au/> so you're not caught out - take the time now to ensure all your details with the AEC are up to date before the election is called later in the year, and ensure that anyone you know who may be voting for the first time is not disenfranchised of their democratic right to have their say.

## THE MEDIUM IS THE MESSAGE

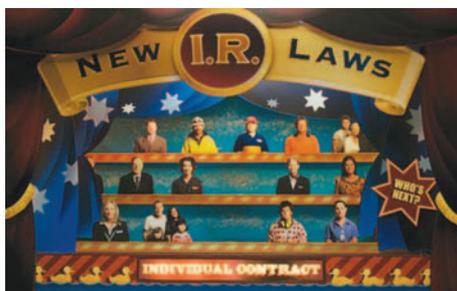
# Advocating Workers' Rights in an Electronic Age

**In today's so-called "Information Age", reliance upon the old media of newspapers, radio and TV - while still important - simply isn't enough when trying to reach and increasingly computer-savvy population and for us, younger public sector employees increasingly relying on the internet as a major source for news and entertainment.**

The ACTU, throughout its Your Right at Work Campaign, has remained ever-mindful of this fact and has been a leader in broadcasting its message every step of the way - to John Howard's detriment in this crucial election year - reaching audiences far and wide via web-based technology. For some time now the ACTU has had its own YouTube space, <http://www.youtube.com/yourrightsatwork>, which is the quickest way to view recent speeches, television advertisements and generally keep up-to-date with the campaign as it forges ahead in the effort to repeal Howard's unfair IR laws. It's well worth a look!

And now, in a first, the ACTU has officially launched its own MySpace site at <http://www.myspace.com/rightsatwork>. For those unfamiliar with MySpace, this site is essentially an online community that lets those who share

similar interests meet and exchange information via message postings, sharing of video and audio, and uploading of pictures and news relevant to what are individually themed mini-sites (or private communities). It's a media dramatically different to the top-down, one-way broadcasting of television - a technology many political scientists debate has fostered political and civic disengagement, and for whom the most optimistic pundits among us believe is a critical tool in the re-vitalisation of a vibrant, informed, and engaged democracy. NB: *Due to the nature of free and frank exchange of ideas on such internet sites, there can be some rather robust debate among postings, including those of opponents of the union movement seeking to bring us down...the nature of democracy!!!*



## GETTING INVOLVED!!! Official Your Rights at Work Community Groups

There has never been a better time to get involved in the Rights at Work campaign. Getting active in your local community is a vital part of the fight to tear up the Howard Government's industrial relations laws and put fair ones in their place. You can lend a hand in activities such as assisting community stalls at local events, barbecues, letter-boxing and much, much more...and all the while having some fun at the same time!

### Corangamite

Contact Colleen Gibbs  
Mob: 0421 028 624  
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### Deakin

Contact Linda Cargill  
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### La Trobe

Contact Katie Hall  
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[khall@actu.asn.au](mailto:khall@actu.asn.au)

## TOP FIVE BROADCASTS

**Editor's Top 5 Picks of YRAW YouTube Broadcasts, all available at [www.youtube.com/yourrightsatwork](http://www.youtube.com/yourrightsatwork). Click on the "VIDEO" tab.**

1. "Boys in the Boardroom" (probably the best ACTU TV ad so far!!)
2. "Sitting Ducks"
3. "Cuts, Cuts, Cuts"
4. "John Clarke and Bryan Dawe have a laugh at the IR laws" (as shown on November 30 at MCG)
5. "Your Rights at Work Worth Voting For!" (ACTU Secretary Greg Combet Addresses Rally on November 30 at MCG.)

# HUMAN RIGHTS IN ZIMBABWE

## ACTU and unions across Australia call for immediate release of Zimbabwe opposition leaders

**Zimbabwe was once a model African country, achieving the highest economic growth rates and the highest levels of education on the continent. But Robert Mugabe, in power since independence, has become increasingly erratic, eccentric and autocratic as he pursues policies which have crushed human rights, repressed opposition and crippled the economy. He and his corrupt allies keep themselves in power through terror and intimidation. On Valentine's Day**

**several hundred women were arrested and tortured as they were protesting against the unbearable poverty, hunger, unemployment and high inflation.**

The ACTU has joined with other trade unions around the world in condemnation of the assault and detention of Zimbabwe's opposition and trade union leaders, including Morgan Tsvangirai, leader of the main Zimbabwean opposition party, Movement for Democratic Change.

The ACTU in particular calls for the immediate release of the detainees and their

access to medical attention.

ACTU President Sharan Burrow says: "Unions around the world are deeply concerned with the latest severe breach of human rights in Zimbabwe."

It has been reported that Morgan Tsvangirai and other leaders have been arrested and badly beaten and that the trade union offices of the Zimbabwe Council of Trade Unions (ZCTU) have been raided and ransacked by government security forces. The headquarters of the Zimbabwe Trade Union Congress (ZCTU) have been raided by government security forces, as part of a "concerted effort to try and crush all civic organisations" according to ZCTU President Lovemore Matombo.

Government Central Intelligence Organisation officials and police have ransacked the union offices, assaulted three ZCTU staff members and detained the organisation's Financial Administrator Galileo Chirebvu. While it is believed that Chirebvu has later released after this unlawful detention, police removed union campaign materials for a planned peaceful protest on April 3-4.

The ZCTU had previously been in discussions with the country's Labour Minister in an effort to find solutions to the economic crisis that now besets Zimbabwe, with inflation in the country spiraling out of control at some 1,700%.

A preliminary meeting involving government, trade union and employer representatives took place on 12 March to formalise arrangements for a full tripartite meeting to occur, however the attack on the trade union offices has shattered prospects for constructive negotiations.

"The ZCTU has consistently called for dialogue and has sought tripartite discussions to help find a way out of Zimbabwe's terrible economic and social situation", says ACTU President Sharan Burrow.

"This latest attack by President Mugabe's security forces shows a determination to control the situation by force, rather than to work with civil society and unions to put an end to the suffering of the people of Zimbabwe", she adds.

The raids on the union offices and arrests follow the fatal shooting by Zimbabwe riot police of a supporter of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) at a prayer rally in Harare's Highfield township on Sunday 11 March and the detention and bashing of leaders of other civil society organisations over subsequent days.

"The ACTU calls on the Australian Government and other members of the international community to redouble efforts to ensure the Mugabe Government ends these flagrant breaches of workers' and human rights and that trade union, civil society and political leaders are released unharmed".

Access the following link to send your own electronic protest letter:

[http://www.labourstart.org/cgi-bin/solidarityforever/show\\_campaign.cgi?c=212](http://www.labourstart.org/cgi-bin/solidarityforever/show_campaign.cgi?c=212)

## Officers left exposed but Victoria's marine assets protected

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In fact, it wasn't until the eve of their scheduled Court hearing that a common-sense outcome finally prevailed for these dedicated Fisheries Officers. VicPol withdrew its charges having eventually decided that the Officers carried out their duties with professional integrity and stating that it would "not be in the public interest to proceed further".

The outcome did, however, scuttle a secret longing held by Laurie, who's served with the Department since 1989, to see DPI's refusal to back its staff publicly outed, and – as he can now state with a healthy dose of good humour – enjoy the personal vindication and gratification that this would generate.

"The fact that management is quite prepared to cut people adrift simply to save face over this, it's a message I would have liked the broader public see, and then perhaps they can better appreciate the challenges we face," he says.

For battle-weary colleague Mark, he's simply relieved the year-long process is now all over.

"I'm happy it's finally come to an end. It all played out pretty much as I suspected; I can understand the competing interests at play in regard to the public interest and public safety," he says.

Based in Geelong, Laurie and Mark are responsible for monitoring the recreational and commercial fishing activity in Port Phillip Bay stretching across to inland areas near Macedon. With its good stock of abalone by world standards, and lucrative commercial market desperate for the prized delicacy, Melbourne receives the biggest influx of poachers than any other location in Australia, and this creates a big need for appropriate law-enforcement measures to be in place.

"So much the world's stock has been severely depleted due to overfishing, and the Port Phillip Bay area, in addition to Tasmania, is one the last places left that has good, clean supply," Laurie explains.

"While the most common infringement we see is recreational fishers simply exceeding their bag limits, there are also big busts involving poachers aiming to sell on the commercial market. We're protecting what is a \$70 million industry – so as far as we're concerned the protection of abalone is now one of the highest priority species in the State".

In due recognition of this heightened threat to abalone's sustainability, the Bracks government passed in 2004 tougher laws to give Fisheries Officers more powers to search and enter boats and vehicles in order to carry out inspections.

The new laws also significantly increased the penalties for illegal poaching and fishing, making abalone poaching an indictable offence where trafficking charges can be laid. Fisheries Officers are also able to make arrests and seize assets.

"It's hard to estimate how many busts occur each year – they've reduced a lot since the new laws," Laurie says.

"There might be 3 or 4 big busts each year, although it varies according to the season. It would also be naïve to think that some don't get away with it."

Unfortunately, while Mark and Laurie got the crooks this time, they weren't provided the support they deserved from the relevant authorities but thankfully they had their union to back them up and fight their cause.

As Mark attests, "CPSU was fantastic and stood by us all the way during our ordeal, and the legal representation that was arranged was equally fantastic".

And while a battle in court has been successfully averted, the fight isn't over.

As Laurie makes the point, "I want to see that abalone is managed in a sustainable way but to do this I really do need adequate supports in place."

All over the world people live in poverty because they are unemployed, underemployed, poorly paid and exploited. **Training and education lifts people out of poverty.** Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA trains women and men in developing countries in skills for jobs, agriculture, health and workers' rights.

Union Aid Abroad APHEDA  
The overseas humanitarian aid agency of the ACTU  
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