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Topic 5

**AUSTRALIAN DATA SOURCES FOR MEASURING THE COVERAGE OF
COLLECTIVE BARGAINING MECHANISMS AND INDUSTRIAL AWARDS**

Supporting paper submitted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics

Summary

1. This paper discusses the changing industrial relations environment in Australia, and the key surveys conducted to measure the impact of some of these changes. Whilst administrative data may provide an alternative data source to the direct collection of data from employers, these data sources are not discussed in this paper.
2. Pay and employment conditions have historically been set in Australia by industrial awards, sometimes supplemented by industrial agreements negotiated by trade unions and employers or employer organisations. In recent years, the method of wage determination has moved away from award-based, centralised wage fixing, towards agreements at enterprise, workplace and individual employee level. With this industrial relations transformation, individual and collective agreements have become increasingly important means of setting pay and working conditions, whilst reliance on the award system has declined. These industrial changes have also coincided with a decline in union membership over the same period.
3. With the industrial bargaining reform, there has been an increasing demand for reliable and up-to-date information on wage outcomes and employee coverage by the various bargaining streams used in setting pay and conditions such as awards, registered individual and collective agreements, and informal arrangements. This and other related information has to now been largely collected through irregular and/or one-off surveys of employers.

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4. One important source in measuring the impact of the shift in industrial relations towards bargaining at enterprise/workplace level is the Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (AWIRS) conducted in 1990 and 1995 by an Australian government department, Department of Industrial Relations (DIR). These surveys provided comprehensive data on Enterprise Bargaining, and are currently used as benchmarks against which on-going changes in industrial relations can be assessed.

5. In order to provide more up-to-date information on the spread and coverage of the different industrial bargaining instruments, the Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business (formerly DIR) conducted an employer survey entitled 'Award and Agreements Coverage Survey' around mid 1999. In addition, the ABS will be collecting further information on the spread and coverage of the industrial instruments used in setting pay as part of its biennial Employee Earnings and Hours (EEH) survey, in May 2000. These data sources will assist in overcoming the current information void on the extent of the shift from centralised wage fixing to decentralised wage fixing which has occurred during the 1990s. Results from the EEH survey are published in *Employee Earnings and Hours, Australia, Preliminary (Cat. No. 6305.0)* and in *Employee Earnings and Hours, Australia (Cat. No. 6306.0)*.

6. As the industrial relations environment and negotiation processes change, information on industrial dispute is an important consideration when assessing the impact of these changes. Statistics on industrial disputes are currently collected in a monthly Industrial Disputes collection conducted by the ABS. This 'census' collects statistical information on a range of industrial disputes, including strikes and lockouts. However, no separate details on the different types of disputes are available for release. In addition, whilst the incidence of other forms of labour action such as bans, go slows and work to rule appear to be increasing, such types of disputes will continue to be excluded from the Industrial Disputes collection as they are inherently difficult to identify and measure, and accurate records on such events are not kept by data providers. Results from the Industrial Disputes collection are released through a monthly publication *Industrial Disputes, Australia (Cat No. 6321.0)*.

7. Coinciding with the industrial reform in Australia has been a decline in trade union membership. Statistics on trade union membership are obtained from a supplementary survey to the labour force survey conducted in August each year. Results from the survey on union membership are published in *Employee Earnings, Benefits and Trade Union Membership, Australia (Cat. No. 6310.0)*.
