

# Ai GROUP Submission

## Review of the Child Employment Act 2003

19 March 2021



### **About Australian Industry Group**

The Australian Industry Group (Ai Group) is a peak industry association in Australia which along with its affiliates represents the interests of more than 60,000 businesses in an expanding range of sectors including: manufacturing, engineering, construction, automotive, food, transport, information technology, telecommunications, call centres, labour hire, printing, defence, mining equipment and supplies, airlines, health, community services and other industries. The businesses which we represent employ more than one million people. Ai Group members operate small, medium and large businesses across a range of industries. Ai Group is closely affiliated with many other employer groups and directly manages a number of those organisations.

### **Australian Industry Group contact for this submission**

Vasuki Paul, National Manager – Workplace Relations Policy

Telephone: 0407 654 090

Email: [vasuki.paul@aigroup.com.au](mailto:vasuki.paul@aigroup.com.au)

## **Introduction**

Ai Group appreciates the opportunity to provide input to the consultation paper regarding the Review of the Child Employment Act 2003.

Our views have been sought on the series of questions in the consultation paper. We have focused our comments on the following issues.

## **Permit system**

The requirement for a permit to be issued prior to an employer being able to employ children under the age of 15 creates an unnecessary administrative burden on employers which results in a disincentive to employ this cohort.

Victoria is the only state to have a permit system in addition to the regulatory restrictions and protections which are in place. There does not appear to be any evidence to demonstrate that the safety of children is improved when compared to other states as a result of the existing permit system. Accordingly, the requirement for a permit creates an unnecessary administrative requirement, which does not provide any additional protection.

Currently, an employer needs to complete an application for a permit for every employee it employs under the age of 15. It is not uncommon for 14-year-olds, looking to get experience in the workforce, to apply for roles particularly in retail and hospitality. The administration process for obtaining a permit prior to each employment creates a disincentive for employers to employ these types of employees.

The permit system should be abolished and a more concerted effort made to educate employers about the obligations involved in employing children.

If the system needs to be retained, an exemption should be available to eligible employers which would enable them to obtain a permit that has ongoing effect for a specified period. Within this period, these employers should be allowed to employ children under the age of 15 without the need for individual permits.

## **Should the Act regulate children over the age of 15 working in certain industries or in certain situations (this could be with or without a permit)?**

Ai Group supports the retention of the current system pertaining to the employment of children over the age of 15. We believe that this provides the appropriate balance between providing employment and training opportunities for this cohort of children, without adversely impacting their choices regarding working and studying.

The current system supports the training of this cohort of children. It provides a pathway to trade and other qualifications by allowing children 15 and over to undertake school-based apprenticeships and traineeships. These apprenticeships and traineeships combine schooling with paid employment and training in an employer's workplace.

There is a distinct lack of evidence that would support disrupting the current system. It is unnecessary and would be detrimental to businesses and employees to extend the scope of the Act to cover 15-year olds. Any such action would impede traineeships and apprenticeships at a time of significant skill shortages and youth unemployment.

There is a major difference between imposing restrictions on the employment of children under 15 and those over 15. A vastly greater number of 15-year-olds are employed than 14-year-olds.