Industrial & Workplace Relations Conference

Thomson Reuters™

22 September 2026
Sydney & Online

8:30 am Registration opens

9:00 am Welcome from Conference Chair

Sina Zevari
Partner, Emplawyer

9:05 am AI and the Workplace - Legal, Ethical, and Practical Considerations

- AI and Employment Law: Compliance challenges, legal risks, and evolving regulatory frameworks.
- Ethics and Employee Rights: Privacy, monitoring, and addressing bias in AI-driven HR decisions.
- Workplace Productivity & Innovation: How AI is reshaping workflows, decision-making, and performance management.
- Future-Proofing the Workplace: Strategies for policy adaptation, training, and preparing for the next wave of AI innovation

Emily Baxter
Partner, Kingston Reid

9:45 am The Right to Disconnect - What is reasonable and what to do when there is a dispute

- The Right to Disconnect: Key obligations and extensions to small business in 2025
- What Counts as 'Reasonable' Contact? After-hours, leave periods, stress leave, and third-party interactions.
- Managing Workplace Disputes: Approaches to handling conflicts over the right to disconnect.
- Insights: Emerging lessons and precedents shaping employer and employee obligation

James Mattson
Partner, Bartier Perry

10:25 am Networking and refreshment break

10:50 am Workplace Psychosocial Safety - Staying Compliant and Reducing Risk

- New WHS Reforms: State and national amendments and changes to model WHS laws by SafeWork Australia
- Tougher Enforcement: Regulator actions and penalties on the rise
- Managing Remote Work Risks
- Legal Shifts in Conduct: Updates on vilification, social cohesion, and workplace conduct laws

Sina Zevari
Partner, Emplawyer

11:30 am WFH & Flexible Working Arrangements - Managing disputes and meeting your obligations

- Closing the Loop reforms and options available and entitlements for flexible working arrangements
- Who can request flexible work, employer obligations, and how to balance employee rights with operational needs
- Employers right to refuse under certain conditions
- When It Gets Disputed: FWC powers to review refusals
- FWC can review decisions to refuse requests for flexible working arrangements

Nathan Keats
Principal Lawyer, McNally Jones Staff Lawyers

12:10 pm Lunch and networking break

1:00 pm Wage Compliance - Avoiding Penalties and Pitfalls

- The Criminalization of Wage Underpayment (Jan 1, 2025) - What the new laws mean for employers, penalties for non-compliance, and strategies to prevent payroll risks.
- Practical steps and remediation strategies
- Enforcement on the Rise: Regulators, disclosures, and compliance obligations

Brigid Maher
Partner, Baker McKenzie

1:40 pm Terminations & Dismissals - preventing unfair dismissal and general protections claims

- Unfair Dismissal vs. Lawful Termination - Understanding the legal framework, eligibility criteria, and key mistakes that lead to unfair dismissal claims
- Constructive Dismissal: Recognizing the risks of forcing an employee out through unreasonable changes or mistreatment
- Managing Adverse Action Risks: Avoiding breaches during performance management
- Case Law Insights: Recent rulings and lessons for employers

Kiri Jervis
Partner, Gadens

2:20 pm Long-Term Sick Leave Abuse - How to identify and respond

- Employers' entitlements to request more information
- Directing an employee to see an Independent Medical Expert (IMEs)
- When disciplinary action can be taken
- Verification Boundaries: How far employers can go to check absences
- Case Law Lessons: When employers overstep and get it wrong

Seamus Burke
Partner, Workplace Sparke Helmore Lawyers

3:00 pm Networking and refreshment break

3:20 pm Workplace Investigations - When to act, how to run them, and managing complications

- Best practices step-by-step process
- Can you investigate without receiving a complaint or if a complainant requests that no further action be taken?
- Handling complaints and requests to halt action
- Witness Management: Engaging reluctant or challenging participants
- Trauma-Informed Reporting: Preparing findings with care and clarity

Gella Rips
Director & Principal, Workdynamic Australia

4:00 pm Privacy & Surveillance - What HR Needs to Know

- What are the changes for privacy invasion and reasonable expectation of employee privacy
- Employee Data Risks: Legal implications of mishandling personal information
- Workplace Surveillance: Rules, authorisations, and HR responsibilities
- Navigating Australian Privacy Principles and exemptions

Sarah Wood
Partner, Clyde & Co

4:40 pm Closing remarks from the Chair and end of conference