

EMPLOYER BULLETIN

8 April 2024
A Weekly News Digest for Employers

EMPLOYER NEWS

Tax rate change for backdated lump sum payments

Multi-year backdated lump sum payments will now be taxed separately from other income received by a client in the same tax year. These lump sum payments will be taxed at the client's average tax rate, calculated over the past four years before receipt of payment.

Prior to this change, backdated lump sum payments received by clients were taxed in the year of receipt at the client's marginal tax rate. This meant that the lump sum payment may have moved the client into a higher tax bracket.

The amendment for this alternate tax rate was passed in the Taxation (Annual Rates for 2023-24, Multinational Tax, and Remedial Matters) Bill.

ACC [2 April 2024]

To read further, please [click here](#).

Final changes to ACC's Accredited Employers Programme confirmed

Changes to ACC's Accredited Employers Programme (AEP) aim to deliver a better experience for businesses and workers whose work injury claims are handled by the organisation directly, rather than through ACC.

Accredited employers will be given better insights into their performance, more support and guidance to help them improve their worker's experience as well as injured workers being better supported by their employers.

These changes will modernise health and safety assessment requirements, removing excessive compliance and increasing flexibility for accredited employers.

Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment [2 April 2024]

To read further, please [click here](#).

Consultation opens proposing more time to comply with plumbing products changes under the Building Code

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) has today opened a consultation proposing to extend the transition period end date for the lead and dezincification plumbing product provisions published last year, from 1 September 2025 to 1 May 2026.

“The most recent Building Code update consultation included a proposal to further reduce the allowable amount of lead in plumbing products which was met with an overwhelmingly positive response,” says Dr Dave Gittings, Manager Building Performance and Engineering.

“When we consulted on and announced the changes to lead in copper alloy plumbing products, the transition period end date of 1 September 2025 was in alignment with the introduction of equivalent lead-free plumbing product changes in Australia. However, in April last year, Australia extended their transition period end date by 8-months, to 1 May 2026.”

Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment [2 April 2024]

To read further, please click here.

Government continues to deliver for New Zealand

Prime Minister Christopher Luxon has launched the Government’s next action plan to deliver for New Zealand – setting out key steps to be taken by June 30 to rebuild the economy, restore law and order and improve public services.

“Just like our 100-Day Plan, this next action plan is focused on three key areas to make life better for Kiwis:

- Rebuilding the economy and easing the cost of living
- Restoring law and order, and
- Delivering better public services.

“Having a clear plan with specific actions and timeframes for delivery creates momentum and drives focus.”

New Zealand Government [2 April 2024]

To read further, please click here.

Secondary teachers moving to New Zealand fast tracked to residence

Secondary teachers moving to New Zealand will be put on a fast track to residency to help address workforce shortages, Immigration and Education Minister Erica Stanford has announced.

“Shortages in secondary teachers, especially those in specific regions and subject skills such as Science, Technology, and Mathematics, have been an ongoing challenge for the New Zealand education workforce.

“This Government is committed to turning around declining levels of achievement and ensuring that every child in New Zealand receives a world-class education,” Ms Stanford said.

“To attract skilled teachers New Zealand must be a highly competitive destination for overseas talent so that all schools have the best people with the right experience. To achieve this, the Government will move secondary teachers from the Green List Work to Residence pathway to the Straight to Residence pathway.”

New Zealand Government [2 April 2024]

To read further, please click here.

New tools strengthen immigration law enforcement

Starting 11 April 2024 Immigration New Zealand (INZ) will be able to issue infringement notices to employers with the aim of addressing lower-level immigration non-compliance and deter those who take advantage of migrant workers.

Infringement penalties can include: a minimum fine of \$1,000, loss of accredited employer or Recognised Seasonal Employer status, and being banned (stood-down) from supporting further visas for migrant workers for a period of time depending on the number of infringement notices the employer receives. More serious breaches may result in criminal charges.

Being stood-down means employers cannot get their accreditation back or support visa applications during the stand-down period. Stand-down periods include: 6-month stand-down for a single infringement notice, an extra 6-month stand-down for each subsequent infringement notice and a 12-month maximum stand-down for multiple notices issued at one time.

Employers can hire migrants on open work visas while on the stand-down list. When the stand-down ends the employer must show they have rectified the matter and done what is needed to stop it happening again before they can get accredited again under the AEWV.

Immigration New Zealand [2 April 2024]

To read further, please click here.

New Zealand “open for business” for Build To Rent

Associate Finance Ministers David Seymour and Chris Bishop say overseas investment in Build To Rent housing will be welcomed in New Zealand under a new directive letter they have issued to Land Information New Zealand (LINZ), the regulator for the Overseas Investment Act.

Build To Rent (BTR) is a type of medium to high-density residential development, specifically built for long-term rental housing.

“The letter will give BTR developers confidence by setting out the government’s policy approach to overseas investment in BTR and clarifying the existing pathways available to investors,” Mr Bishop says

“New Zealand has a shortage of quality rental housing, which is exacerbating housing affordability issues.

“This directive recognises that Build To Rent has the potential to boost the supply of good quality and secure housing in New Zealand and could benefit from overseas capital to build at large-scale.

New Zealand Government [4 April 2024]

To read further, please click here.

EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS AUTHORITY: FIVE CASES

Successful interim reinstatement after drug test was invalidated

In August 2023, Mr O'Brien was dismissed for serious misconduct by C3 Limited (C3) from his position as a stevedore. His dismissal related to an invalid urine sample he provided during a random drug and alcohol test. Mr O'Brien sought interim reinstatement while he waited for the outcome of his unjustified dismissal grievance.

C3 said its dismissal of Mr O'Brien was justified. It strongly opposed reinstatement on health and safety grounds, and on the basis that trust and confidence had been irreparably damaged, because it believed Mr O'Brien had not provided a fresh urine sample when he was tested.

In July 2023, C3 conducted random drug and alcohol testing under its drugs and alcohol policy at the Port site through its external testing agency. Mr O'Brien undertook a monitored test in the testing van. When he gave the testing technician his urine sample, the technician noticed that the cup did not feel as warm as it should have. He saw that the temperature strip on the testing cup had not been activated, which indicated that the urine sample was outside the required temperature range. The sample provided also had an abnormal level of creatinine. The testing technician advised Mr O'Brien and C3 that the issues meant the urine sample could not be processed, so the test was invalidated. Mr O'Brien was suspended and dismissed after a disciplinary process.

C3 said that the factors indicated that Mr O'Brien's urine sample had not been freshly provided by him at the time of the test. Mr O'Brien disputed that and said that the testing technician was standing nearby observing him when he provided the sample. Mr O'Brien claimed that he asked the testing technician and then his manager if he could do another test. The testing technician said in his affidavit that he did not recall that request being made, while the manager in his affidavit strongly refuted that any such request had been made.

The Employment Relations Authority (the Authority) outlined the relevant principles applying to an assessment of interim reinstatement and the three-step process, evaluating whether Mr O'Brien had an arguable case, assessing where the balance of convenience lay and assessing the overall justice of the matter.

The evaluation by the Authority of the relative strength or weakness of Mr O'Brien's case was reached from reading untested affidavit evidence and from considering the parties' submissions. The Authority said the investigation conclusions were only provisional and therefore may be subject to change once the evidence was fully tested.

The initial step required Mr O'Brien to show he had an arguable case, one with a possible, but not necessarily certain, prospect of success, meaning it must not be merely frivolous or vexatious. The Authority said there was a material dispute between the parties regarding whether Mr O'Brien asked for a second urine sample to be tested. To that extent, there was also an arguable case as to whether the request was in fact made and, if so, whether it was in the range of reasonable responses open to a fair and reasonable employer to decline such a request. There was also an arguable case as to whether C3 could fairly and reasonably have concluded that Mr O'Brien had adulterated the sample.

On the face of it, there was an issue as to whether C3 properly investigated the reasons for the invalid test, and whether it adequately considered Mr O'Brien's response to the disciplinary allegations. There was no evidence provided by the testing technician regarding the nature or extent of the monitoring that occurred.

It was a low threshold to have an arguable case in front of the Authority, and here Mr O'Brien had established he had an arguable case regarding his unjustified dismissal claim.

The balance of convenience required the Authority to weigh the potential effects of failing to reinstate Mr O'Brien against the potential effects on C3 if interim reinstatement was granted. The Authority put C3's trust and confidence concerns to one side, as it was in dispute and untested. However, the health and safety aspect of C3's concerns were highly relevant and carefully considered. The Authority concluded that its power to impose conditions on an interim reinstatement order provided an adequate mechanism for addressing C3's concerns. After weighing all the various factors, the Authority concluded that the balance of convenience weighed in favour of interim reinstatement.

The overall interests of justice in the case lay in favour of Mr O'Brien and his claim succeeded. C3 was ordered to interim reinstate Mr O'Brien, subject to the condition that he must pass a valid drug and alcohol test in the 24 hours before he was to return to work. After that, C3 could continue to manage, monitor, and test him as it is permitted to do under the drug and alcohol policy.

O'Brien v C3 Limited [[2023] NZERA 612: 18/10/23; R Lamer]

Vulnerable employee denied right to elect to transfer

Ms Milne worked as a security officer for SCS, which operated at Tiwai Point. In December 2021, Allied Investments Limited (AIL) was engaged to provide security and emergency response services at Tiwai Point. Ms Milne's role as a security officer fell within the list of occupations in the Employment Relations Act (the Act) that are vulnerable employees. In certain circumstances, vulnerable employees could elect to transfer employment from their old employer to a new employer, as was the case for Ms Milne. However, AIL did not accept Ms Milne's decision to elect to transfer despite being required to do so in accordance with the Act.

AIL supported its decision using the Private Security Personnel and Private Investigator's Act (PSPPI Act), which required businesses that offer security services to be licensed. Employees of such businesses must then have a Certificate of Approval (COA) to work as security officers. It is a breach of the PSPPI Act for a business to employ someone who did not have a COA. AIL did not accept Ms Milne's decision because it discovered she did not have a COA while working for SCS. Even though Ms Milne satisfied the conditions to hold a COA, she was never issued one. The Authority accepted SCS had been in breach of the PSPPI Act by employing Ms Milne.

The Authority then had to decide whether AIL's argument was correct, namely was Ms Milne prohibited from electing to transfer since she did not have a COA. The Authority referred to the Contract and Commercial Law Act as relevant. It provided that "a contract lawfully entered into does not become illegal or unenforceable by any party because its performance is in breach of an enactment, unless the enactment expressly so provides, or its object clearly so requires". It also noted that the PSPPI Act does not explicitly state that if it is breached, as it was in this case, it would not be enough to render the employment agreement invalid.

The Authority ultimately decided AIL's argument failed. Ms Milne was not prohibited from electing to transfer, even though at the time she was in breach of the PSPPI Act for not carrying a COA while employed with SCS.

The Authority went on to consider whether AIL's decision not to offer Ms Milne employment amounted to a personal grievance. Initially, AIL told her that if she did not get her COA by a certain date, then she would not be allowed to elect to transfer. However, the Authority found that AIL was not empowered to deny Ms Milne her right to elect to transfer, based solely on not having a COA at the time.

Upon AIL's request, SCS sent the names of employees who had elected to transfer. Ms Milne's name was included on that list. Ms Milne also directly communicated to AIL that she intended to continue working for them. This was enough to establish that she had in fact elected to transfer. Even though AIL told her that there would be work available, it attempted to offer her a new employment agreement less favourable than her original agreement. It was at that point that Ms Milne raised a personal grievance. The Authority decided that when AIL failed to accept Ms Milne's election to transfer, it terminated her employment. That failure was sufficient to sustain a personal grievance claim.

The Authority ordered three months of lost wages of \$12,875 were to be reimbursed by AIL. She also claimed compensation for humiliation, loss of dignity and injury to feelings. She provided evidence that her dismissal caused feelings of depression and low self-worth. She suffered sleepless nights, anxiety and regular migraines. The Authority looked to comparable cases and found \$18,000 was fair compensation for the proven harm.

Milne v Allied Investments Ltd t/a Allied Security [[2023] NZERA 638; 30/10/23; C Philip]

Closure of business without any consultation process leads to unjustified dismissal

Mr Clark worked as a senior hair stylist for Glitz and Glam Hair and Beauty Limited (Glitz) from 12 July 2019 until he was made redundant in November 2021. Mr Clark said his employment was terminated without notice or any process on 15 November 2021 while he was on leave from work for an injury. He raised personal grievances for unjustified dismissal and unjustified disadvantage, claiming for lost wages, compensation for hurt and humiliation, and payment of wage and holiday arrears.

On 31 July 2021, Mr Clark injured his shoulder. Medical advice recommended that he should not return to work until the cause of the injury had been investigated further and physiotherapy was underway. He stopped working from 18 August 2021. His ACC payments started on 8 September 2021. Due to the COVID-19 lockdown, Mr Clark said he was paid the wage subsidy from 17 to 30 August but he claimed he was not paid correctly, and he received less than 80 per cent of his wages at that time.

On 25 November 2021, while Mr Clark was on ACC leave, Ms Manuka, the sole director and shareholder of Glitz, notified him using Facebook messenger that she was closing the salon. Mr Clark questioned whether this was permanent as he was owed holiday pay. Ms Manuka responded saying she had no idea, and that she was already going bankrupt. On 2 March 2022, Ms Manuka offered to pay outstanding holiday pay but denied anything else was owing. Mr Clark did not receive his holiday pay.

While a legitimate collapse of a business was a genuine reason for redundancy, there was a statutory obligation to follow a fair process when making employees redundant. Mr Clark should have been given information about what was happening with the business and the likelihood of redundancy, with an opportunity to respond prior to any final decision being made. Mr Clark being on ACC did not change Glitz's obligation towards him to follow a fair process. Failure to follow due process resulted in Mr Clark being treated unfairly and was a breach of good faith. Accordingly, Mr Clark's personal grievance claim of unjustified dismissal was successful.

Mr Clark's employment agreement provided that he was to work 36.5 hours each week and his remuneration rate was \$23.50. The last pay slip Mr Clark received was dated 21 October 2021 and showed 16.25 days annual holiday leave owing at that date. The business closed on 3 December 2021. Therefore, Mr Clark was owed further annual holiday entitlements up until his last day of employment. His last day of employment, taking into account the three-week notice period, was 24 December 2021.

Mr Clark claimed he was not paid wages for the week 30 August to 7 September 2021. At this time, Mr Clark was on leave from work due to his shoulder injury. Mr Clark received ACC payments from the week of 24 August 2021.

On 25 August 2021, Mr Clark received a payment from Glitz for 80 per cent of his wages. Mr Clark said there was no discussion about dropping his wages to 80 per cent during the period the COVID-19 wage subsidy was available in August and September 2021. The Wages Protection Act 1983 sets out the requirement for employers to consult with employees before making any specific deductions from wages and to obtain their written consent. Therefore, Mr Clark was entitled to recover the unpaid portion of his wages.

The bank statements also showed Mr Clark's last wage payment from Glitz was on 20 October 2021, but his last day of employment was 24 December 2021. For this, he was owed wage arrears up until that date.

Mr Clark sought compensation for hurt and humiliation. The Authority acknowledged what Mr Clark said about the shock of the suddenness of the redundancy. However, some effects suffered by Mr Clark were likely to be a combination of his injury and his employment coming to an end. The Authority ordered Glitz to pay Mr Clark compensation of \$15,000 for hurt and humiliation.

The Authority further ordered Glitz to pay Mr Clark an amount equivalent to nine weeks' wages, an amount of annual holiday pay and public holiday pay equivalent to Mr Clark's entitlement as of 24 December 2021, and reimbursement of the 20 per cent wage reduction for the week of 25 August 2021. Costs were reserved.

Clark v Glitz and Glamour Hair and Beauty Limited (in Liquidation) [[2023] NZERA 637; 30/10/23; S Kennedy-Martin]

Long-serving employee loses his job in a restructure

From February 2002, Mr Sehji was employed as operations manager of Tasman Orient Line Ltd. In August 2009, he signed an individual employment agreement (the agreement) with Swire Shipping Pte Ltd (Swire) as a cargo planner. His employment transferred to Swire. It honoured his 2002 start date and transferred all his leave entitlements except annual leave.

On 25 March 2021, Mr Sehji received one month's notice that his position would be disestablished to restructure the business. Swire planned to reduce the number of cargo planners from three to two. It advised Mr Sehji of the entitlements he had under the agreement, which included redundancy compensation of 26 weeks' pay and an option to be paid in lieu of working out notice.

Mr Sehji challenged Swire's decision, calling the outcome a false redundancy and an unjustified dismissal. He took particular issue with the scoring approach used to select those who would be retained and those who would be made redundant. He asserted that this process was biased against him.

The Employment Relations Authority (the Authority) first considered the genuineness of the business case for the restructure. The Authority concluded that Swire acted with justification in reducing the cargo planner positions from three to two. A fair and reasonable employer could have acted in that way in the circumstances in March 2021.

The Authority turned to the question of whether there was bias in the process of assessing cargo planners against core competencies. It observed that this process was similar to one widely used in employment, provided the assessments were made fairly and without bias. Mr Sehji felt his significant experience should have received a higher weighting in the final scoring. The Authority could find no evidence of any bias against Mr Sehji. Swire was entitled to focus on what each planner demonstrated during his service with the company, however long or short that may have been. The Authority also did not find evidence of discrimination that was alleged by Mr Sehji.

However, the Authority identified two significant flaws in the process used by Swire. First, Mr Sehji was not given the opportunity to review his selection score before Swire decided to make him redundant. It denied Mr Sehji the opportunity to challenge the scores that ultimately resulted in him losing his job. The second flaw was Swire's decision to not consider Mr Sehji for redeployment. The Authority found Mr Sehji established a claim for unjustified dismissal and was entitled to remedies.

Swire denied information to Mr Sehji about his selection score and the Authority deemed this to be a breach of the Employment Relations Act 2000. Swire's breach involved a single employee, Mr Sehji, and although it was intentional it was not malicious. A relatively light penalty was appropriate.

The Authority found that if Swire properly and fully discharged its obligation to consult Mr Sehji, it was unlikely that he would have remained employed by Swire. Mr Sehji sought reinstatement, but the Authority found it was not feasible. In regard to a claim for lost wages, if Swire had undertaken full consultation with Mr Sehji, his notice of termination would have been deferred by a maximum of two weeks and his dismissal would have taken effect two weeks later, after 23 April 2021.

Mr Sehji did not succeed in a claim for unjustified disadvantage created by alleged excessive work hours. The employment agreement provided for hours over and above his usual work hours. The Authority observed that the matter related to a dispute Mr Sehji had with Swire about what hours of work were "reasonable" rather than a personal grievance. It rejected Mr Sehji's further claims for unpaid long service leave and a lost performance bonus as they were not supported by the Authority.

Swire was ordered to pay Mr Sehji compensation of \$12,000; payment of lost remuneration of two weeks, including holiday pay and KiwiSaver contributions for that period; and interest, from 26 November 2021 until paid in full. It also issued a penalty for the breach of \$3,000, of which \$1,000 was to be paid to Mr Sehji and the balance to the Authority for payment to the Crown. Costs were reserved.

Sehji v Swire Shipping Pte [[2023] NZERA 626; 25/10/23; A Dumbleton]

Scholarships do not constitute 'working'

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment declined the application by Ms Malhi and Mr Singh for parental leave payments under the Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act (the Act), for their child born on 23 December 2022. The application was declined because Ms Malhi did not meet the applicable threshold test and therefore was not eligible for parental leave payments. Since she was not eligible for parental leave payments, she could not transfer parental leave entitlements to Mr Singh. The Act allowed the Authority to review the Ministry's decision to confirm, modify, or reverse the decision.

From 14 January 2022 to 4 November 2022, Ms Malhi was employed by the University of Auckland (the University) on a few casual and fixed-term agreements as a graduate teaching assistant and a research assistant. She worked a total of 110.5 hours at an average of 6.13 hours per week. Inland Revenue (IRD) declined her parental leave application because she had not worked enough hours to meet the eligible employee parental leave payment threshold. Mr Singh's application was also declined as he did not meet the definition of 'primary carer' under the Act. He did not have permanent primary responsibility for the care, development, and upbringing of their child, to the exclusion of the biological mother.

Ms Malhi was awarded a university doctorate scholarship, which entitled her to an annual scholarship payment of \$28,984.50 (scholarship payment) for up to three years. For this she had to undertake at least 40 hours of study a week. Ms Malhi requested the Authority to consider whether her scholarship hours and payments should be added to help meet the threshold test.

To determine whether Ms Malhi's doctoral study and scholarship payments fell within the statutory definitions of employee or self-employment in accordance with the Act, the Authority needed to consider the intentions of the person and the nature of the relationship among any other matters. The intention of the scholarship was "to encourage and support academically excellent domestic and international students". The University acknowledged the scholarships were not intended as an employment relationship but were payments to students to support study.

Ms Malhi argued that the scholarship conditions limited her in two ways. It required her to study full time and limited her from undertaking paid work outside the University to 500 hours per scholarship year. The Authority said that the level of control imposed by the University was more akin to a requirement to ensure the academic criteria for qualification was met, as opposed to an employment relationship between Ms Malhi and the University.

Ms Malhi did not pay tax on her scholarship payments, such as PAYE as an employee or withholding tax as a self-employed person. Her scholarship payments were not subject to the requirements of the Minimum Wage Act 1981. Unlike a self-employed person, she was unable to gain financial profit or undertake a financial risk from her studies for the University. Therefore, her studies did not constitute "work". Ms Malhi's doctorate was not guaranteed and if she did obtain the doctorate, she would receive the main benefit of a doctorate qualification. She was also not a self-employed person under the Act.

The true nature of Ms Malhi's relationship with the University was an agreement entitling her to an award of financial study support in the form of a scholarship. The relationship was neither as an employee for the University or as self-employed person engaged to the University in her own right. Since Ms Malhi was not eligible for parental leave payments, Mr Singh would also not be eligible for the transfer of parental payments from Ms Malhi.

The Authority confirmed that neither Ms Malhi nor Mr Singh were entitled to paid parental leave. In considering the policy and purpose of the Act, the Authority chose not to exercise its discretion to modify or reverse the decision as relying on scholarship study hours conflicted with the intent of the Act, which had only anticipated employees and self-employed persons to be eligible to paid parental leave payments. Recognising a student's scholarship hours as part of the Act's eligibility criteria went beyond what the Act intended. For these reasons, the Ministry's decision to decline Ms Malhi and Mr Singh's application for parental leave payments was correct.

Malhi v Singh and Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment [[2023] NZERA 663; 09/10/23; A Leulu]

LEGISLATION

Note: Bills go through several stages before becoming an Act of Parliament: Introduction; First Reading; Referral to Select Committee; Select Committee Report, Consideration of Report; Committee Stage; Second Reading; Third Reading; and Royal Assent.

Bills open for submissions to select committee: Nine Bills

[Inquiry into the 2023 General Election](#) (15 April 2024)

[Parole \(Mandatory Completion of Rehabilitative Programmes\) Amendment Bill](#) (16 April 2024)

[Fast-Track Approvals Bill](#) (19 April 2024)

[Budget Policy Statement 2024](#) (24 April 2024)

[Companies \(Address Information\) Amendment Bill](#) (2 May 2024)

[Corrections \(Victim Protection\) Amendment Bill](#) (6 May 2024)

[Report of the Controller and Auditor-General, Making Infrastructure Investment Decisions Quickly](#) (8 May 2024)

[Regulatory Systems \(Primary Industries\) Amendment Bill](#) (9 May 2024)

[Fisheries \(International Fishing and Other Matters\) Amendment Bill](#) (15 May 2024)

Overviews of bills-and advice on how to make a select committee submission-are available at: <https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/sc/make-a-submission/>

The purpose of the Employer Bulletin is to provide and to promote best practice in employment relations.

If you would like to provide feedback about the Employer Bulletin, contact: comms@businesscentral.org.nz or for further information, call the AdviceLine on 0800 800 362



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