



Energy News

Lawyers & Consultants

The GOC Choice of First Resort

There has been considerable publicity and criticism concerning the Energy profits that have been utilised by Government over the last few years however there appears to be no criticism concerning the hundreds of thousands of dollars expended annually by GOCs on external industrial relations consultants, solicitors and barristers.

Despite employing a plethora of employee and/or *'workplace relation'* officers on salaries exceeding \$100,000 p.a., electricity industry GOCs such as Powerlink, Stanwell, CS Energy, Ergon Energy and Tarong Energy all continue to engage external consultancy firms and lawyers to perform the most basic HR functions. The only electricity GOC that seems capable of handling basic industrial relations without external legal assistance is currently Energex; however with Powerlink's CEO now in charge of Energex, this could very well change.

Tarong Energy has so little faith in its HR personnel that they have twice engaged IR consultants to represent them on **consent** proceedings before the Industrial Relations Commission. It makes no difference whether the matter concerns a dispute over the non payment of an allowance or merely having to appear as part of the certification process for an Enterprise Agreement; Tarong Energy engages and pays for the services of an outside consultant to represent them.

To their credit Stanwell has in the past, utilised the simple certification process of enterprise agreements to provide inexperienced HR employees Commission experience in an entirely non adversarial environment. However, in the last 12 months Stanwell has also followed the lead of others and can no longer even negotiate an agreement or handle reclassification issues, without engaging the services of consultants, solicitors and barristers.

Of course Powerlink does not have a Human Resource or Employee Relations Office, Powerlink has, as is their conservative way, retained the Coalition Government's IR ideal of a *Workplace Relations Office*, staffed by any number of degree based professionals. However, and while Powerlink is happy to allow *workplace relation* staff to moonlight as agent provocateurs for TV Current Affair Shows, when it comes to solving in house *workplace relation* issues, Powerlink's is swift to call in the outside Cavalry of consultants and lawyers.

Whilst the Union is confident that it's staff are more than competent to face off with the hired guns, the fact remains that the GOC's who are so willing to expend public money duplicating one corporate function, are also the very first to cry poor when we seek pay rises for the majority of employees who are expected to Competently perform all of the duties associated with their position.

While Stanwell would appear to be in the lead for the inaugural "*Corporate HR Sook of the Year Award*", the QSU will initiate Freedom of Information applications to establish the exact amounts that Stanwell and other GOC's have unnecessarily expended on lawyers to do what should be, the routine work of their highly paid in house personnel.