

## **MODERN AWARD?**

Along with weekend footy, taking the dog for a walk or a night out at the movies-dining out (for the most part), is what we commonly refer to as a leisure activity. It's something we associate with 'down time' – it's about relaxing with friends or family in an environment we can pretty much put our feet up and let someone else do all the hard work.

Sometimes a night out at a restaurant is a planned event, booked a week or two in advance – an anticipated, highly strategized get-together organised to get people together in one place at one time. It is designed to be an oasis within a sea of busy schedules, a moment in time to grasp the precious face-to-face time we so often lack in this highly digital age. At other times however, a night out is a completely spontaneous occurrence based on a passing whim, or perhaps the result of lack-lustre ingredients lurking in the fridge. Or maybe it's a holiday experience – a case of strolling down a restaurant strip at 7:00pm, casually and unhurriedly looking to make a dining choice for the evening.

Whatever the situation may be, we have come to enjoy and expect freedom and flexibility when we choose to go out to eat. This encompasses a few things such as- having a range of dining options to choose from, choosing a particular time in which to dine, and most importantly- the convenience of being able to dine out throughout the period of our given leisure time.

For most people – (shift workers of all types excluded – sorry!), this means evenings, weekends and public holidays. In any restaurant (excluding certain urban CBD establishments), Saturday night is the jackpot of the 7 day week, unfailingly depended on in order to facilitate a solid weeks earnings.

If you think about it, Saturday night is smack bang in the middle of society's leisure time – Friday's end of working week fatigue is behind, and the prospect of a Sunday sleep-in still beckons...perfect for a night out – even a couple of drinks and up past bedtime is allowable on this **ONE** night.

It's no wonder then that many restaurants can in fact collect 70-80% of weekly takings on Saturday night alone. It's the meat on our sandwich, the cream of our crop, the icing on our cake, if you like. On this basis it's plain to see that without it, most restaurants would be unable to operate at all.

And maybe in the near future a restaurant near you won't be able to.

The reason is simple; The Federal Government has legislated a new award to bring independent restaurant, accommodation and retail operators in line with pubs. It'll be called the 'Modern Award' but in the opinion of pretty much every business it will affect –it's anything but 'modern'.

The basics are this – penalty rates paid to staff for time work after 7:00pm, higher penalties paid for weekends and public holidays and additional loadings

paid to casual workers. In other words – changes which will cripple restaurants and retailers already struggling with rising costs and falling patronage due to the economic downturn.....imagine the message to all holiday-makers, shoppers and diners in Australia, both local and international-

**“I’m sorry, we are CLOSED you silly fool, it’s the WEEKEND! “**

In restaurants, the majority of business is conducted after 7:00pm – it’s the 9-5 in the restaurant world! To place an additional wages burden at these times would have a devastating impact on the public and operator margins- in short, 1 in every 3 restaurants will close their doors on weekends and public holidays. In regional areas like the mid-north coast, relying heavily on tourist trade during these times- imagine the resounding negative impact on our burgeoning tourism industry... a holiday town on a long weekend offering nothing but a bunch of closed restaurants!

**“Once again you silly fool, you are on holiday so don’t expect to ENJOY DINING OUT because it will simply cost you too much!”**

Effectively, restaurants can simply not be pulled into line with pubs-they don’t have the capacity to pay. Poker machines and government subsidies do not boost our revenue – restaurants are mostly independent entities. They are enterprises which rise from individuals with vision, flair and creativity. They are small businesses riding at the mercy of rising costs, perishable stock, a fickle and often unforgiving public, not to mention current economic conditions already keeping patrons away.

It is already a struggle to keep labour costs down – the Modern Award would discourage employment, and ultimately force closures. Prices on menus would need to be raised so high in order to cover costs that dining out would simply be prohibitive. Imagine...\$60 mains becoming the norm, or what about a 15% surcharge to eat out after 7:00pm...modern?

And forget about choosing between 15 different establishments in town, there will be only 5 left if you’re lucky. Also banish the thought of fresh, local cuisine and great service – costs will be kept down by using cheaper, frozen ingredients and staff will be younger and more inexperienced.

Can you hear it? Visitors from around the globe will crown us as the “Processed Food Nation” because OUR Government insists on making our industry commercially unviable and non-compliant!

**In a nutshell, the Modern Award will obliterate Australia's dining scene as we know it today. Passion, creativity and individuality will be replaced by cost effective, processed food practices in order to meet these unviable labour costs. The diversity which is currently inherent in our cuisine will disappear. The damage will not just be felt by those in the industry and diners themselves – but will have an enormous negative impact on the emergence of Australia's international reputation in terms of its cultural identity-at present so encouraging and raking in tourist dollars.**

**Restaurant owners nationwide, including many here in Port Macquarie are campaigning against the Modern Award. We can only hope that you feel the same way..... I can see the Travel Section in foreign publications such as The New York Times or Conde Nast Traveller- "Australia, home of the supermarkets and poker machines.....learn how to pack a lunch while travelling through this fine country as dining out is simply not an option, certainly not an affordable one!!**