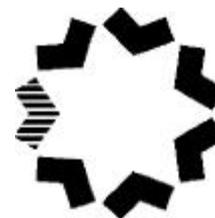


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PRESS RELEASE

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SHOP TRADING HOURS

“Legislation restricting shop trading hours has led to a range of inconsistencies across the country which confuses consumers, frustrates retail businesses and reduces freedom of choice,” Mr Graeme Samuel, President of the National Competition Council said today.

“Essentially these laws restrict competition between businesses based on their location, size and product sold.”

“While some states such as Victoria, ACT and NT have very few restrictions Queensland, Western Australia, Tasmania and South Australia remain highly regulated resulting in a range of anomalies both between and sometimes within states.

“For example in South Australia antiques can be sold outside general trading hours, other collectibles such as stamps and coins can not,” Mr Samuel said.

Mr Samuel said that the National Competition Council had today released a paper designed to assist informed public debate on shop trading hour legislation. The paper is the first in a series, to be released this year, on significant issues affecting the community that are currently being reviewed for potential reform under National Competition Policy.

“The reviews of shop trading hour legislation are an excellent opportunity for state governments to ensure that these laws are still acting in the community’s overall interest,” Mr Samuel said.

“While the reviews can and should take into account important factors such as employment and social equity concerns, the benefits to consumers of increased trading hours also requires serious contemplation.

Mr Samuel said that critics of change sometimes argue that fewer restrictions will adversely impact small businesses, their families and employment generally.

“Smaller retailers face pressures from a range of factors – not just the possibility of unrestricted trading hours. In addition to large retailers, competitive pressures also arise from other small businesses and e commerce. In these circumstances, there is a question as to whether restricting the hours that larger stores can trade will offer much protection.”

In addition Mr Samuel said that consumer choice is a main driver for extended retail trading hours.

“Consumers base their choices on a range of factors including convenience, price, quality, service, range and atmosphere. Flexible shopping hours allow consumers themselves to choose according to their individual needs and tastes,” Mr Samuel said.

“Removing restrictions does not mean that all shops will open 24 hours a day seven days a week. Rather retailers can choose to open when they and their customers wish, without breaking the law.”

“Victorian retail employment has grown since trading hour restrictions were lifted. Moreover the Productivity Commission has concluded that overall trade and employment has actually increased in those states and territories that have unrestricted shop trading hours.

“All these matters need to be carefully considered by state governments.

“It is not acceptable for restrictions to remain in place simply to protect a minority with vested interests.

“Ultimately the decision for governments is, after taking all matters into account, what arrangements are in the best interests of the community overall,” Mr Samuel concluded.

For further information contact Ms Tania Coltman, 03 9285 7497 or visit our Web Site www.ncc.gov.au