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Wage theft is becoming a business model in the media industry

The alleged underpayment of 23 journalists by a Queensland digital media company is further evidence that the rules protecting young workers need to be changed, says the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance.

The director of MEAA Media, Katelin McInerney said the journalists, including some recruited directly from university, were the victims of shocking exploitation.

The Fair Work Ombudsman is taking action in the Federal Circuit Court over the alleged underpayments totalling more than \$300,000 by Touchpoint Media Pty Ltd and its director, Laurence Bernard Ward.

It is alleged that in total Touchpoint Media underpaid 23 journalists \$305,780 between January 2015 and June 2016.

Touchpoint Media operates a group of hyper-local news websites in regional Queensland under the 'OurTown Plus More' moniker.

"Unfortunately, it is increasingly a business model for unscrupulous media companies to underpay and exploit vulnerable young workers keen to build a career in the industry," Ms McInerney said.

"How appalling that for some of these young people, their first experience of working as journalists is to be the victims of blatant wage theft.

"This media company has stolen money from these workers' pockets and it will be close to two years before it is brought to justice.

"This is one of the worst cases, but far from the first of this type that has come to our attention in the past few years.

"The stories of young people being unpaid and exploited during internships at media companies are also far too common.

"The current industrial laws make wage theft too easy and recovering wages through the courts is a long and difficult process."

Together with Interns Australia, MEAA has developed a set of ethical internship guidelines which are available at meaa.org/campaigns/ethical-internships/

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