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Improvements for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises

In December 2007 the Government released a discussion document containing proposals aimed at reducing compliance costs for small and medium-sized enterprises. Two sets of proposals were included. The first looked at increasing various tax thresholds. The second involved changes that require greater pre-implementation work, such as proposals to:

- introduce a 'de minimis' threshold under which all legal expenses and entertainment expenses will be deductible
- create a Government database to simplify acquiring information from businesses
- reduce the time for which business records must be held, and
- make changes to GST invoicing.



Draft legislation introduced in July 2008 includes various threshold increases that are likely to take effect from 1 April 2009. The increases have resulted from the submission and discussion document process.

The proposed new thresholds are.

- PAYE returns can be filed monthly, and FBT returns annually, where annual PAYE deductions are less than \$250,000 (formerly \$100,000).
- Closely-held businesses will be able to file their FBT returns annually if their FBT liability arises solely due to 1 or 2 vehicles being made available for private use, regardless of their annual PAYE deduction amount.
- Currently, if an individual's residual income tax payable is less than \$35,000, the tax is not payable until their terminal tax due date. Where this threshold is exceeded, IRD interest is

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effectively backdated based on the provisional tax due dates (depending on the timing and amount of tax credits). This threshold is being raised to \$50,000.

- The compulsory GST registration threshold is increasing from a turnover of \$40,000 to \$50,000.
- Currently, taxpayers may file their GST returns six monthly if their turnover is \$250,000 or less. This is being increased to \$500,000.
- The threshold enabling a person to use their opening stock valuation to value their closing stock is being increased from a

stock value of \$5000 to \$10,000.

- Currently, only a natural person can qualify as a 'cash basis person' under the financial arrangement rules. This concession is being extended to companies and trusts. In addition, the threshold to account for arrangements on a straight-line basis is being increased from \$1.5M to \$1.85M.

These changes are likely to reduce compliance costs and are welcomed. Further changes, as proposed in the discussion document, are expected to be introduced in a Bill next year, and are likely to take effect from 1 April 2010.

The IRD; Umpiring its Own Game?

Being investigated by the IRD is an unfortunate likelihood for any business. If the IRD proposes an adjustment that a taxpayer disagrees with the 'disputes process' is often the final and only option. The disputes process consists of legislated stages that are designed to produce a 'cards on the table' approach, as follows. The IRD will issue a written Notice of Proposed Adjustment ("NOPA"), outlining its view. Within two months, the taxpayer must issue a Notice of Response ("NOR"), which outlines the taxpayer's position. If a NOR is not issued within two months the taxpayer is deemed to have accepted the IRD's proposed adjustment.



on the basis that it does not comply. The Court also noted that it would be unusual for the IRD to have such a power when it was itself a party in the disputes process. Whether or not the NOR was valid was a question of statutory interpretation for the Courts. The Court stated that the IRD would need to apply to the Court in order to challenge the validity of a taxpayer's NOR.

The Court reviewed the requirements for a valid NOR and concluded that the taxpayer's NOR was, in fact, valid, despite it being extremely brief. The Court did not appear to consider the NOR's brevity to be an issue. It took a practical approach in assessing the merits of the NOR. The Court noted that the taxpayer's NOR did not have to comprise an arguable case against what the IRD was asserting. The Court stated that a taxpayer is entitled to challenge the IRD's proposed reassessment even if the taxpayer does not have a substantial case. Furthermore, in some cases a taxpayer might not have any more information to put forward in a NOR, however the taxpayer could still have a genuine position to be advanced through the disputes process.

In a recent dispute, the IRD rejected a taxpayer's NOR based on the view of one of its investigators. The investigator "seriously doubted" that the NOR was a valid notice and after discussing the matter with other officers, rejected it. In the IRD's view the NOR did not meet legislative requirements. Based on this rejection, the taxpayer was deemed to have accepted the adjustments.

The taxpayer responded by applying for a judicial review of the IRD's decision. The matter was recently heard before the High Court. The Court not only discussed whether the taxpayer's NOR was valid, but also whether the IRD even had the power to deem the NOR to be invalid.

The Court concluded that the IRD does not have legislative authority to determine if a NOR complies with the legislation, and then to reject it

The IRD is a large and powerful organisation and taxpayers often feel overwhelmed trying to deal with it on a day to day basis, let alone in the context of a dispute. Due to the IRD's perceived position of strength it can be easy for taxpayers to feel like they are playing against the umpire. The High Court's decision reinforces the proposition that when push comes to shove, the Court will provide an independent interpretation of the law.

Income Splitting

In April this year, the Government released a discussion document inviting views on whether

'income splitting' is the most effective way to provide additional support to families with

children. The objective of income splitting is to create greater fairness by ensuring families with the same total income pay the same amount of tax. Currently, because of New Zealand's progressive tax rate structure, one family could pay more tax than another family with the same total income because of who is earning the money within each family.



The discussion document suggests two ways that income splitting could be achieved. These are:

- adding the income of both partners together, splitting the combined income evenly, and then calculating each partner's tax liability based on the standard marginal tax rates
- the use of a separate tax rate schedule for families, that is, not individuals, where the tax rate thresholds are twice as high as the thresholds that apply for individuals

Both these options would provide the same outcome in terms of tax liability.

Income splitting alters the total tax payable by shifting a portion of income from a higher tax bracket to a lower tax bracket. For example, Jack earns \$120,000 per year and Jill earns nil. Currently, Jack's income, which is over \$60,000 is taxed at 39%. Under an income splitting

approach, half of Jack's income, or \$60,000, is taxed in Jill's name at the lower 19.5% and 33% rather than 39%. They are taxed as if they had earned \$60,000 each.

The above scenario represents the maximum possible tax saving of \$8730. This is because any situation where the income for each partner is greater than \$60,000 (currently), will not be able to take advantage of a lower tax bracket, as both Jack and Jill would be facing the tax rate of 39% on any extra income.

A family is likely to be defined as including married, civil union and de facto partners with one or more dependants (children). A child is likely to be considered a dependant until they are 18 years of age, receive a benefit themselves or are in full time employment. Under the proposals, single parents will not be eligible for any form of income splitting.

There has been considerable debate in recent times around the merits of recent increases in family assistance levels and the use of the tax system for social engineering. The prospect of income splitting is likely to add to that debate. Although, in this case, income splitting is likely to provide relief to families that have higher, rather than lower, incomes. The discussion document poses the question "would the introduction of income splitting lead to a fairer income for families than is currently the case?" The only certain answer is that there won't be a unanimous opinion.

Take Control of Your Own Destiny

Employment recruiters in New Zealand have recently seen a rise in the number of employees looking to move from their current employer. The indicators are an increase in the number of candidates applying for advertised vacancies who are already in employment, and a jump in the number of executives registered for potential employment opportunities. What are some of the contributing factors behind this increase and what can employers do to avoid costly and time consuming recruitment?

The push and pull factors of decision-making

When making a decision to move to new employment, staff may consciously or unconsciously review the push and pull factors at play. Push factors are those things that are present in their current job or workplace, which are driving the employee to think beyond their current employer; such as deteriorating employment conditions. Pull factors are those forces attracting employees to another employer, such as more training opportunities or better pay.

Applying for jobs is time consuming; so why do people bother? Individuals will have their own reasons but anecdotal evidence suggests that employees:

- are becoming increasingly conscious of their job security
- want to work in open and encouraging environments, and
- will become de-motivated when their job stagnates or goes backwards.

What can be learnt?

Clinical psychologist Frederick Herzberg proposed a two-factor theory in the 1960's that continues to be referred to today. He noted that the key determinants of job satisfaction were achievement, recognition, responsibility, advancement and work itself. However, the key dissatisfiers were company policy and administration, supervision, salary, work conditions and interpersonal relationships.

Often when accepting a job offer with another employer there is an expectation of better employment conditions and a higher salary. As the idea of a job for life is long gone, some individuals have considered that in order to keep moving forward it often means having to keep moving organisations.

Employer strategies for retention

Even though the economy is supposedly slowing, there remains a skills shortage. Veterinarians, farm managers, educators and engineers all appear in the Skilled Migrant Category. As a result, the retention of skilled and high performing staff has become an issue

foremost on the minds and strategic plans of many organisations.

The answer could be to reduce those factors pushing staff away and increase those factors that will satisfy and retain them in the job or with the employer. A good place to start is to consider what motivates high performing staff. Then consider what type of boss would achieve that extra discretionary effort from their staff and make the necessary adjustments. After all, people enjoy working for people whom they like and respect, which is likely to result in better retention.

Snippets

Personal Tax Rate Change

A significant announcement made during this year’s budget was the alteration to personal income tax rates.

The changes will be introduced progressively from the current income tax year through to the 2011 – 2012 year. Both the rates of tax and the thresholds to which the rates apply, will change.

The changes are as follows:

Date applicable	Threshold (\$)	Rate (%)
Now	0 – 38,000	19.5
	38,001 - 60,000	33
	60,001 +	39
From 01/10/2008	0 - 14,000	12.5
	14,001 - 40,000	21
	40,001 - 70,000	33
	70,001 +	39
From 01/04/2010	0 - 17,500	12.5
	17,501 - 40,000	21
	40,001 - 75,000	33
	75,001 +	39
From 01/04/2011	0 - 20,000	12.5
	20,001 - 42,500	21
	42,501 - 80,000	33
	80,001 +	39

Got Your Books in Yet?

We’re nearly halfway through the financial year so the sooner you can get your financial information together and meet with us to go through the books the quicker we can give you an indication of your financial progress, tax payments, and/or key areas of your business that may need attention.

As your tax agent we’ve got an extension to file your 2008 tax returns to the 31 March 2009. However it’s always a good idea to have your books in before then.

Don’t forget to complete your checklist and make an appointment to meet with us to go through your papers – need a checklist? Download one at www.plusca.co.nz

Recognition of Trans-Tasman Dividend Credit

At present, when a New Zealand company distributes its profits by dividend to an investor across the Tasman, tax credits attached to the dividend cannot be used by the investor; as dividend credits arising in Australia and New Zealand are not recognised by the other country.



On 18 July 2008, Dr Cullen announced that the Australian and New Zealand Governments have agreed to consider proposals for the mutual recognition of dividend credits. This decision acknowledges that the current distortion of investment flows between the two countries does not sit well with wider moves towards a Single Economic Market.

The New Zealand Treasury will make a formal submission on mutual recognition to the ‘Australia’s Future Tax System’ review and is anticipated to issue its final report by the end of 2009.

If you have any questions about the newsletter items, please contact us, we are here to help