Business case: funding a better way to handle workplace complaints

A fill-in-the-blanks template. Replace everything in [square brackets]. Grey italic text is an example to show the level of detail, so delete it once you've written your own.

How to use this template

- **Your finance team will read this as a decision about where money goes,** not as an HR improvement. So it needs three things: what today costs, a fair comparison of options, and a clear line between the savings you can stand behind and the benefits you hope for.
- **Tag every number** so no one mistakes an estimate for a fact. **CONFIRMED:** you have the figure (for example, from your complaint tracker or legal invoices). **TO CONFIRM:** you still need to get it; a placeholder is more credible than a guess. **CALCULATED:** worked out from confirmed figures. **INDICATIVE:** a rough estimate; always show the working, for example "~2 hrs × 20 complaints × 12 months = ~480 hrs a year".
- **Ask for approval to evaluate, not for the money.** A first paper that asks to confirm costs and compare options is far easier to approve than one asking for full funding.
- **The options are open.** The answer might be a system, an extra hire, outside support, something you already own, or a mix, alongside policy and process changes. The case is about fixing the problem, not buying a particular product.
- **Each section starts with a "Purpose" line** so busy executives can skim. Keep them in.

Your one-liner for the executive team

Purpose: one sentence you could say out loud to your CEO.
[We are handling [number] complaints a month through [email, spreadsheets, paper files], and it is costing us [time, money, risk]. We are asking for approval to [evaluate options / fund X] so we can [outcome].]

Example: "Complaints have gone from one a week to five, they now arrive as long, legal-sounding documents, and we're handling them through a shared inbox and a spreadsheet. We're asking for approval to compare three options so we can respond faster and keep the records that protect us."

1. Summary and the decision we need

Purpose: give the decision-maker everything they need in one glance.

At a glance

- [What has changed: volume, length or type of complaints]
- [How we handle them today, naming the actual tools and people]
- [The three biggest effects: time, cost, risk, staff experience]
- [What we're proposing to evaluate]
- [How quickly it could make a difference]

Decision sought

[Approval to proceed with a structured evaluation, including:]

1. [Confirm current complaint volumes, handling time and external costs]
2. [Get firm pricing for the shortlisted options]
3. [Return with a costed recommendation and implementation plan by [date]]

This paper does not seek funding approval at this stage.

Why it matters to the business

[Up to four points that link this to priorities your executives already care about: cost control, legal risk, psychosocial safety obligations, staff retention, reputation.]

2. Where we are today, in numbers

Purpose: set a baseline everyone can agree on. The "Numbers for your business case" section on your complaint tracker's Themes tab gives you most of these.

Measure	Figure	Status	Where it comes from
Complaints per month (formal and informal)	[ ]	[ ]	Complaint tracker
Change on 12 months ago	[ ]	[ ]	Tracker, inbox, HR files
Average hours to handle one complaint (HR plus managers)	[ ]	[ ]	Tracker (HR hours spent), plus a manager estimate
Average days from received to resolved	[ ]	[ ]	Complaint tracker
Complaints that went to an external body (FWC, FWO, other)	[ ]	[ ]	Tracker, legal files
External legal and consultant spend on complaints (last 12 months)	[ ]	[ ]	Finance, legal invoices
Settlements or payouts (last 12 months)	[ ]	[ ]	Finance
People who spend part of their week on complaints	[ ]	[ ]	HR team

Working example (INDICATIVE): ~6 hrs per complaint × ~20 complaints a month × 12 months =

~1,440 hrs a year. At ~60anhour, that's~$60 an hour, that's about $86,000 a year of HR and manager time. This is the cost of running the current model, not a promised saving. Check the inputs with your team.

3. What isn't working

Purpose: turn day-to-day frustration into business impact. Start with what your tracker shows: your top three themes and what people most often asked for (Themes tab). If one site, team or issue keeps coming up, say so. The fix may be a process or culture change as well as a tool.

Tool or process we use today	What it's used for	The problem
[e.g. shared HR inbox]	[Receiving complaints]	[No log, no owner, easy to miss a deadline]
[e.g. spreadsheet]	[Tracking]	[Out of date, no link to the evidence]
[e.g. payroll and rostering system]	[Pay and hours records]	[Takes days to pull the records for one claim]
[e.g. managers' notes, emails, memory]	[Informal conversations, warnings]	[Not written down, so we can't prove what was said]

Our legal exposure

[Explain in plain words why the records matter. For example: in a general protections claim, the employer has to prove its reasons; where pay records are missing, the employer has to disprove an underpayment claim; and the Fair Work Commission now requires anyone using AI in a case, employers included, to disclose it and check it.]

4. The cost of standing still

Purpose: show what happens if nothing changes, without overstating it.

A. Costs that will keep recurring

[Time spent per complaint, delays, repeat manual work. If the only way we cope today is by adding people, say so: "Our current approach scales by adding HR capacity rather than by reducing the effort per complaint."]

B. Legal and external costs (to be confirmed)

[Legal fees, settlements, the cost of a lost claim. Mark these TO CONFIRM until Finance or Legal has validated them.]

C. Time we could give back

[Manager and HR hours that could go back into higher-value work. These benefits are real but not yet measured, and should be confirmed during evaluation.]

5. The options we looked at

Purpose: show the decision-maker we considered every reasonable path.

Option	What it involves	Indicative cost	Strengths	Weaknesses
1. Keep doing what we do	No change	$0 upfront, current costs continue	No disruption	Costs and risk grow with volume
2. Hire more people	An additional HR or employee relations role	[Salary plus on-costs]	Quick to add capacity	Adds cost without fixing the process or the records
3. Outsource	HR consultancy or legal retainer for complaint handling	[Retainer or hourly]	Expert support on hard cases	Ongoing cost; internal records still scattered
4. Use what we already own	A complaints or case module in our current HR system	[ ]	Familiar, may be low cost	[Check whether it links to pay, rosters and conversation notes]
5. A dedicated system	A case management or workforce system that keeps complaints, conversations and pay and roster records together	[Get two or three quotes]	One record, faster answers, reporting	Implementation effort and change management

Recommended for evaluation: [option numbers], because [reason]. Options can be combined, for example a system plus an updated AI policy, clearer speak-up channels and manager training from your HR consultant or law firm.

6. What changes: before and after

Purpose: make the benefit concrete. Name real tasks your team does today. The rows below are examples.

Today	After
A complaint lands in a shared inbox and may sit for days	*Every complaint is logged, acknowledged within a day and has a named owner*
Finding the pay, roster and timesheet records for one claim takes two days	*The records are found in minutes*

Today	After
Informal conversations and warnings live in managers' heads	*A short note of every conversation is kept with the person's record*
No one can say how many complaints we have or how old they are	*A weekly view of volume and overdue items, and a monthly view of themes and what people want*
Each 15-page complaint is read and answered from scratch	*A quick scan, a conversation first, then a one-page summary played back to the person*
Deadlines such as the 21-day lodgement window are tracked by memory	*Due dates and escalations are visible and flagged*

7. The value we expect

Purpose: separate what we can stand behind from what we hope for.

Minimum value case (what the approval rests on)

- [HR and manager hours saved, using the baseline in section 2]
- [An extra hire avoided, if that's the alternative]
- [Faster acknowledgement and resolution times]

This is the floor. The case stands on these items alone.

Potential upside (not relied on for approval)

- [Fewer complaints escalating to external bodies, because people are heard early and told the outcome]
- [Lower legal spend]
- [Better staff experience and retention; stronger psychosocial safety]

These are genuine potential benefits, but they're excluded from the minimum case so the approval doesn't depend on them.

8. Cost overview

Purpose: put today and the proposed future side by side.

Cost	Today (per year)	Proposed (per year)	One-off	Status
HR and manager time on complaints	[ ]	[ ]	-	[ ]
Additional headcount	[ ]	[ ]	-	[ ]

Cost	Today (per year)	Proposed (per year)	One-off	Status
Software or service fees	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
External legal and consultants	[ ]	[ ]	-	[ ]
Implementation and training	-	-	[ ]	[ ]
Total	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

Final figures to be confirmed through quotes and Finance review.

9. Getting it done

Purpose: show we've thought about delivery and risk.

Item	Detail
Timeframe	[Weeks to set up; phased or all at once]
People needed	[HR, IT, payroll, a manager champion]
Privacy and security	[Where data is stored, who can see complaints, and how AI is used by HR, managers and any consultant working with your people's information. Note the Privacy Act changes from 10 December 2026 on transparency about automated decisions, and check how they apply to you]
Consultation	[Introducing new technology can trigger consultation obligations under awards or agreements]
Adoption	[How managers will be trained to log conversations and use templates]
Key risks and how we'll manage them	[ ]

10. Recommendation, timing and next steps

Purpose: make the next step clear and tie it to a real deadline.

Recommendation: [Two or three sentences: the problem, the minimum value case, and why an evaluation is the right next step.]

Why now: [Tie the decision to a real window: the budget cycle, the start of peak season, a contract renewal, or the end of a review period. For example: "A decision by [date] lets us have a new process running before [peak period], when complaint volumes are highest."]

Next steps

1. [Confirm the baseline figures in section 2, with owners and dates]
2. [Get quotes or proposals for the shortlisted options]

3. [Bring a costed recommendation to [forum] on [date]]

Appendix: questions to ask any provider

Purpose: compare options fairly, whoever they're from.

1. Where is our data stored, who can access it, and is there an audit trail of who viewed or changed a record?
2. Can complaints, conversation notes and warnings sit with the same employee record as their pay, hours and roster history?
3. How does it help us meet deadlines such as acknowledging within a day or the 21-day lodgement window?
4. Does it use AI? If so, what for, does a person make every decision, and does our data train anyone's model?
5. What reporting do we get on volume, age and outcomes?
6. How long does implementation take, and what do you need from us?
7. What does it cost in year one and each year after, including set-up and training?
8. Can we speak to two customers of a similar size and industry?