

THE NATION

Coalition vows to end 'union red tape' for faster 457 visas

EXCLUSIVE

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THE Abbott government has vowed to slash "union red tape" on 457 visas as business steps up its demands for the reversal of Labor's crackdown on the scheme for bringing foreign skilled workers to Australia.

In a closed-door speech yesterday, Australian Mines and Metals Association chief executive Steve Knott advocated the dumping of Labor's "pre-election, last-minute, politically driven, ill-considered, unnecessary and cumbersome" labour market testing requirements for 457 visas.

The testing requirements were introduced by the Rudd government amid claims of "widespread employer rorting" and require companies to demonstrate that they have tried for four months to recruit Australians before nominating a foreign worker for a 457 visa.

The Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, Scott Morrison, said last night: "We strongly opposed these measures in opposition and will be consult-

ing on how best to cut union red tape on 457s, while maintaining legitimate protections that support the integrity of the scheme.

"The previous government made some wild and unsubstantiated claims about abuse of the scheme to ram their union-sponsored changes through the parliament.

"One of our first steps will be to put these claims to the test."

The speech by Mr Knott to resources executives, obtained by *The Australian*, comes as a slew of industry groups, including the Business Council of Australia, have lobbied for Labor's changes to the 457 visa scheme to be abandoned.

"The LMT requirement has proven in the past to be unworkable, impractical and will likely lead to a blowout in processing times and costs for 457 visas," Mr Knott said.

"AMMA will advocate for Labor's pre-election, last-minute, politically driven, ill-considered, unnecessary and cumbersome LMT to be removed by the new government to restore objectivity and confidence in the 457 visa program."

In the speech, Mr Knott said Labor's changes meant employers had not only to provide details of their advertisements for workers but also to document their participation at job fairs and fees they had paid in the course of recruitment. This came on top of a visa application system that already involved up to 50 pages of paperwork.

While the law allows ministerial exemptions from the requirements for certain occupations, Mr Knott said Labor had not indicated which occupations would receive them.

The Minerals Council of Australia has also attacked the 457 visa changes. In a brief for the incoming government, it said the changes added "additional layers of complexity, red tape and cost which will impede the minerals industry accessing the appropriate skills for a productive workforce".

'The LMT requirement has proven in the past to be unworkable'

STEVE KNOTT
MINES AND METALS ASSOCIATION