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Fair Work Commission stocked up with talent ahead of COVID-19 workplace disputes

The Australian Government has made a wise move in bolstering the senior ranks of the Fair Work Commission (FWC) ahead of an expected rise in COVID-19 related workplace disputes in the new year.

On Saturday (18 December) the Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations, Michaelia Cash, announced the appointment of two new Deputy Presidents to the FWC, Australia's national industrial relations (IR) tribunal.

"The FWC is widely expected to deal with an escalating number of workplace disputes as more employers seek to implement vaccine requirements and other COVID-19 risk mitigation policies," Steve Knott AM, CEO of the Australian Resources and Energy Group, said.

"As the nation opens up and we learn to live with this virus, so too will businesses be reconsidering their policies and procedures to ensure, as far as practical, safe and virus-free workplaces.

"Even after five high quality appointees in April this year, the FWC's resourcing remains at comparatively low levels. Prior to Saturday's announcement the FWC had 44 members, two short of the 46-member tribunal when the Australian Labor Party was last in government in 2013.

"With three aged-based retirements in the first quarter of 2022, there is a very strong argument that the Morrison Government should make further appointments in the new year to ensure the FWC has the senior resources required to deal with the expected rise in caseload.

"The national economy and the complex changes we are seeing in Australian workplaces are not going to stand still and wait for the Federal Election. AMMA strongly encourages the Government to make further appointments in the new year, with additional funding provided in the March Federal Budget if necessary."

On the two new appointees – Ms Theresa Moltoni OAM and Mr Andrew Bell – Mr Knott said both were 'fantastic additions' as Deputy Presidents of the tribunal.

"I have known Theresa Moltoni for a number of years: as leader of a highly respected IR legal consultancy; CEO of AMMA member WorkPac; and through her role on the workplace policy committee of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, of which I am a Board Director," Mr Knott said.

"Theresa is very highly respected amongst the business community and brings significant skills and experience across all aspects of industrial relations, legal and practical, to the FWC.

"Andrew Bell is also very highly respected. A Barrister at the Victorian Bar since 2010, Andrew has been involved in many of the country's recent high-profile industrial relations and employment law matters.

"In addition to his experience in legal practice Andrew has worked at the ACCC and, notably for AMMA's resources sector members, formerly as a chemical engineer. His broad life and career experiences will add much value to the FWC."

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