

MEDIA STATEMENT

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AMMA's position on industrial relations review

By Geoff Bull, AMMA Director of Workplace Policy

This morning the Federal Government's Minister for Workplace Relations Chris Evans' was quoted in the media calling for a review into the nation's workplace bargaining rules and powers of the Fair Work Act.

According to the minister himself, Mr Evans' position on the effectiveness of the current industrial relations framework has been directly altered by the actions of QANTAS over the last few weeks.

AMMA welcomes any review into the Fair Work Act, however has serious concerns about the nature and purpose of Mr Evans' proposal given he has staunchly stood by the legislation as employers' across Australia repeatedly asked for urgent IR reform.

To date, anytime employers have asked for a change to the legislation because bargaining hasn't suited them have been told by Senator Evans that there would be no change, as it is 'fair for both sides'.

AMMA has raised numerous complaints about unions' ability to undertake major industrial action at the drop of a hat.

Currently unions have the ability to embark upon strategic industrial campaigns designed to have maximum damage to the employer while limiting employees' loss of earnings. As we've seen in the Qantas case, an employer's only option is to either agree to the claims or lock their employees out.

This has occurred on a large scale for the first time and all of a sudden there's a suggestion the act needs to be changed, yet all the other difficulties raised with the act over the last two years have been ignored, including:

- Employers' inability to make pre-start greenfield agreements for resource projects without having to agree to extortionate and inflationary claims made by unions;
- The Fair Work Act's extended right of entry provisions that provide opportunities for more unions, more frequently, to visit worksites with the primary purpose of recruiting new members and adding to employers' costs;
- Industrial action taken by unions and employees where extravagant claims are being pursued and/or negotiations have not yet been exhausted; and
- The lack of restrictions against union-specific content in enterprise agreements that fail to boost the productivity of an enterprise.

Mr Evans is right in finally recognising that the Fair Work Act requires an immediate review, however simply investigating how unions are disadvantaged is not the right answer for industrial harmony.

We need to make changes but we also need to widen the agenda – let's address the real issues of the Fair Work Act and implement some positive policy reform for the benefit of the Australian economy.

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