

Australia needs a government that works with business not against it

Statement by Steve Knott, AMMA (Australian Mines and Metals Association) chief executive

DESPITE positive statements on Wednesday night that he would work with business, our new Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's rhetoric has failed to match reality.

In less than two days, our new PM has waved through the parliament three anti-business, pro-union legislative changes – key Gillard-era legislation carried by one vote with a gaggle of independents.

This marks an immediate disappointing start to his second chance at governing for all Australians, given business had hoped for a change to sound investment, job creation and economic policies.

These legislative changes, with some provisions effective from next Monday, are all rushed, bad for business and smack of a demanded political payment by Mr Rudd to the union movement.

If he was serious about forging stronger ties with the Australian business community, the new PM would have stopped these irresponsible laws in their tracks. On the back of ramming these anti business laws through parliament, restoring some form of confidence with the business community will be a steep climb.

Our country has rich natural resources and world-class technical expertise, yet the legacy of this Labor Government has been failure in workplace relations and regulatory/taxation management that has seen Australia become the most difficult and expensive place in the world to build and operate large resources projects.

Our nation can do much better on productivity, it can do much better on competitiveness and it can do much better on keeping our resource industry strong well beyond temporary 'booms'. This is the challenge for both Mr Rudd and Mr Abbott.

The Migration Amendment (Offshore Resources Activity) Bill 2013

AMMA is bewildered at the lack of scrutiny and due process paid to the *Migration Amendment (Offshore Resources Activity) Bill 2013*, which passed the Senate yesterday and which will double the reach of Australia's laws, breaching our international legal obligations.

These changes will add more red tape, more costs and more union interference to Australia's offshore resource industry – an industry that is worth many billions of dollars and creates thousands of jobs.

The proposals in this bill are not 'tweaking' or 'closing a loophole' as the Immigration Minister and Maritime Union of Australia assert. They are radical changes that are out of line with how this industry operates anywhere else in the world.

Fair Work Amendment Bill 2013

The government has no mandate for the latest Fair Work changes that include uninvited union intrusions into employee lunchrooms and employers subsidising remote site visits for union officials. It represents more efforts to artificially impose unions between employers and employees, regardless of the views of workers or the community.

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This pandering to the government's trade union constituents moves the ALP further away from their 2007 promise to leave existing laws governing union access to Australian workplaces as they were.

It should be noted that the government's own Fair Work Review Panel did not recommend these extreme changes, which appear to be driven solely by trade union agendas. This overreach in the dying days of the 43rd parliament will go down as the ALP's IR legislative WorkChoices moment.

These latest privileges for unions need winding back and hopefully either the current or Australia's next government will restore balance and sensibility in this area by rescinding these laws.

Migration Amendment (Temporary Sponsored Visas) Bill 2013

The divisive and borderline-xenophobic debate current around temporary skilled migration is both embarrassing to our nation's international reputation and is playing out very negatively in the global investment marketplace.

The government has no evidence backing its laws to unnecessarily restrict employer access to the 457 Visa skilled migration program that has been proven to be both socially responsible and economically responsive. The 457 Visa scheme plays a very small, but very effective role in filling crucial areas of skills shortages on significant resources projects.

We also note these amendments are clearly contradictory to the position of former Immigration Minister and the new Treasurer of Australia the Honourable Chris Bowen MP, who as recently as late 2012 repeated his effusive support for the 457 Visa scheme.

Prime Minister Rudd should stop all of these laws and demonstrate his newfound interest in business consultation by engaging with industry representatives on how the government can promote competitiveness, investment and growth in our nation's valuable resource industry.

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