

MEDIA RELEASE

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Strike action vote: Crossbench urged to stop Greens doing ALP and union bidding

AMMA (Australian Mines and Metals Association) – The resource industry employer group
Statement by Steve Knott, Chief Executive

AMMA is urging Senate crossbenchers to stop the Greens from doing the ALP and unions' industrial relations bidding by making Australian employers and communities helpless to damaging strikes.

The Greens are today raising a motion to throw out important changes to strike action rules made by the Australian Government in June. The Coalition's changes meant that any third party that would be significantly impacted by strikes could have its case heard in the Fair Work Commission (FWC) for that strike action to be suspended or terminated before the damage was done.

For employers such as large resource companies, which rely heavily on operational continuity and stability, this would help discourage militant unions from holding millions of dollars in revenues to ransom by targeting small employers along the commodity supply chain.

Given project operators are often most impacted by such strike action, it is a no brainer that organisations, which employ thousands of people and are responsible for billions of investment dollars in our country, should be able to state their case before Australia's workplace tribunal.

As the only state that has not referred its private sector IR powers to the Commonwealth, the change also meant the Western Australian workplace relations minister could apply to the FWC to suspend or terminate a strike that would significantly impact its economy or local communities. That Western Australia now has this scope is unremarkable, given all other states have had this right since 2009.

An example of how this change has created a much-needed pressure valve is the still unresolved Teekay Shipping matter. Earlier this year, this dispute saw a small group of around 55 well-paid tug boat employees threaten to halt the \$100 million per day iron ore export operations of Port Hedland.

As noted by Fortescue CEO Nev Power at AMMA's 2014 National Conference, the potential stoppage would have cost WA taxpayers around \$7 million per day in royalty revenue foregone. In three days, that would be the entire state budget for the homeless or the cost of a new school.

Had the strike gone ahead, the change implemented by the Coalition would have provided scope for the state government, Fortescue or any other impacted third party to apply to stop that action.

This new regulation represents balanced, sound policy making that recognises the wide impact strikes can have on local communities and third parties throughout the supply chain. It is disappointing, but unsurprising that the Greens are doing the bidding of the ALP and unions by attempting to disallow this reasonable and important power for third parties.

While we note the Greens' IR spokesperson Adam Bandt reportedly received a \$300,000 donation from the Victorian Branch of the Electrical Trades Union (ETU)¹, we ask the party to put the national interest and that of WA taxpayers ahead of the interests of militant union groups.

The crossbench Senators must today vote against the Greens' move to destabilise our industrial relations system and make third parties helpless against militant unionism and damaging strikes.

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¹ <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/union-chips-in-to-back-greens-mp-20130623-2oqrz.html>