

MEDIA RELEASE

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Historic low in union membership demonstrates need for reform

AMMA – Australian Mines and Metals Association
The national resource industry employer group

THE continued decline in the number of Australians who choose to be trade union members must prompt further efforts from our national policy makers to reform our outdated employment laws to better reflect the choices employees are making in their workplaces.

The ABS' *Characteristics of Employment* report, published today, shows that as of August 2014 trade union membership had declined significantly over the preceding 12 months – continuing a downward trend since the mid-1980s.

Mining industry trade union membership declined from around 16% twelve months earlier to 12% in the most recent figures. Coal mining union membership, which was previously at around 40%, has since declined to around 28%.

“Not only is union membership in the mining industry at an all-time low, but across the board in both the private and public sectors we are seeing a continued decline in people choosing to be members of a union,” says AMMA chief executive Steve Knott.

“This is despite the fact that since 2009, Australia has had a workplace relations system that provides unions with a primacy in workplace bargaining that is more suited to a 1980s industrial environment.

“Australians are no longer working in an economy where one-in-two people belong to a trade union. The longer our workplace relations system ignores this fact, the longer it remains a barrier to employment and economic growth in this country.

“In the iron ore mining sector, for instance, only one in every 15 employees is a member of a trade union. Yet the architects of the Fair Work Act were so obsessed with propping up the influence of unions that the laws basically pushed the unions' conditions on all iron ore employees.”

AMMA continues to advocate for a more flexible workplace relations system that contains a range of agreement-making options including individual and collective agreement making options both with and without trade unions involvement.

“Greater options for agreement making would better reflect the diversity of Australian workplaces,” Mr Knott says.

“This should include statutory individual agreement making, subject to a no-disadvantage test, similar to those that provided value for both employees and employers during the Howard-era.

“Our new PM is all about innovation and change. Australia needs to change from a workplace system suited to the horse and buggy era to one that represents today's workplace environment.”

[Click here](#) to read AMMA's recent reply to the Productivity Commission's Review of Australia's Workplace Relations Framework, and learn more about the organisation's proposed reforms.

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