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Australia deserves a future-focused workplace system – time to ditch industrial awards

Statement by AMMA Chief Executive, Steve Knott

AUSTRALIAN Resources and Energy Group AMMA notes the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) is ramping up its campaign to heavily re-regulate our nation's workplace relations system.

The campaign is laden with emotive terms, factually incorrect data, media hooks and 'triple whammies', all designed to get media attention for a union movement on life support. While each week advancing more extreme anti-business rhetoric, this is nothing that we haven't heard before.

It is not new or remarkable that the ACTU is seeking mass re-regulation of Australia's workplace relations system to put unions front and centre of all employment relationships. Nor is it new or remarkable that the ACTU wants more power for the Fair Work Commission, a body established by the former Labor government and stacked with ex-ALP operatives and union bosses.

Sadly, a future Shorten-led ALP government may well adopt many of these proposals, including further stacking the Fair Work Commission with politically-aligned operatives who have never run a business.

The majority of Australia has moved on from the ACTU's nostalgic vision. Nine in 10 private sector employees are choosing not to join unions. Australian enterprises and workplaces are continually modernising and the ACTU has been left well behind.

Unfortunately when business publicly opposes such regressive proposals it can play into the ACTU's agenda. We need to change the conversation and begin talking about the future of work, not a 1970s-style union utopia.

AMMA will be encouraging other peak employer groups to move to more future-focused discussions on workplace relations reform. One that sets Australia up to be more competitive in the global marketplace, and to attract new investment and create more jobs.

The following proposals for a future-focused debate on making Australia's workplace system more competitive and more prosperous include:

1. **Reduce red tape and interference:** Making our system more efficient, less costly and more productive will make it easier to employ people and create jobs. Australia's complex system and interventionist approach to workplace relations is unique in the modern global economy. There are more unwanted guests in Australian workplaces than anywhere else in the world.
2. **Simplify the minimum employment standards: Australia's industrial award system should be abolished.** Australia should have one simple national foundation for minimum employment standards and employee protections. There is no justification for Australia being the only country in the world with an award system, let alone 122 awards.
3. **Open up options for individual agreement making:** Australians work in more varied, flexible and innovative ways. Less than one-in-10 private sector employees see value in the outdated union model. The modern Australia should have more options for individuals, above statutory minimum standards, to bargain with their employers and agree directly on their employment conditions.

Future-focused principles such as these will be the subject of AMMA's advocacy leading up to and beyond the 2019 Federal Election. Only through thinking outside the box can Australia truly seek to reinvent our national competitiveness and create meaningful, highly-paid jobs of the future.

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