



# O'Dwyer signs up former FWC judge

**David Marin-Guzman**

Kelly O'Dwyer has hired former Fair Work Commission vice-president Graeme Watson to advise her on industrial relations, suggesting a renewed focus on workplace reform under the Morrison government.

*The Australian Financial Review* understands Mr Watson, originally a partner for law firm Freehills who acted for employers, will start as a senior adviser to Ms O'Dwyer in her cabinet portfolio of industrial relations.

Mr Watson sensationally quit the Fair Work Commission in disgust last year over what he described as a biased workplace relations system and a "partisan, dysfunctional and divided" commission. He has since called for the government to go beyond narrow, "piecemeal" industrial relations changes and address a "regulatory system that institutionalises conflict".

In particular, he has criticised the internationally high level of minimum wages and conditions as contributing to youth unemployment and called for a review of the entire safety net. He has also called for red tape in enterprise bargaining to be cut.

Australian Mines and Metals Association chief executive Steve Knott said Mr Watson, who previously worked with AMMA in the 1980s, was "an

experienced and highly credentialed employment lawyer. He possesses a wealth of knowledge and expertise; something that was sadly lacking when IR, with wanton recklessness, was relegated to a junior minister role in the Turnbull government."

He said Ms O'Dwyer should consider the "systemic problems" Mr Watson identified in his 14-page resignation letter.

"Many of the issues outlined in this correspondence would form a good starting point for review of Fair Work legislation and the Fair Work Commission, including taking steps to address why enterprise bargaining is failing Australian employers and employees," Mr Knott said.

Australian Council of Trade Unions president Michele O'Neil said Mr Watson's hiring was "disappointing" but not unexpected.

"It's not surprising that a man who has spent most of his life advocating on the side of reducing the rights of working people and giving more power to big business will be heading to work in the office of Kelly O'Dwyer."

Meanwhile, the government has listed its Ensuring Integrity bill, which disqualifies union officials who repeatedly breach the law and lowers the bar to deregister unions, for debate on Wednesday.