



## BUSINESS BACKLASH

# Shorten's shake-up for casual workers

**Dana McCauley  
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Labor leader Bill Shorten has bowed to union demands and will promise 2.6 million casual workers an easier pathway to permanent employment as part of a widening overhaul of the industrial relations system that has drawn warnings from nervous business leaders.

Mr Shorten will announce today that he will legislate to give casual workers an easier path to permanency if Labor is elected, while his plan to make it more expensive to hire skilled foreign workers has angered employers.

"Too often, long-term casual work is used as a mechanism to pay

workers less, deprive them of leave, and make them easier to sack," he said.

Employers are wary of any approach that would create red tape or interfere with their ability to employ casuals in industries with fluctuating demand, such as retail and hospitality.

Business leaders have also slammed Labor's plans to increase the minimum wage for temporary skilled visa holders by 21 per cent to \$65,000 a year in a bid to prevent local workers being undercut by low-income migrants.

The chief executive of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and  
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# Labor's plan on casual work sparks business warnings

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Industry, James Pearson, said the changes would be a particular problem for firms in regional areas. "I think this is a potential body blow for employers who are looking to bring in temporary skilled migrants," he said.

Bar owner Tally Konstas said the minimum migrant wage increase "takes choice away from the employer and the employee".

"If you increase that minimum payment it will preclude the four migrant workers I have employed. At the point I employed them they commanded that minimum but have developed to a point where they deserve the increases they've received," he said.

"Increasing the threshold will preclude a lot of good people from being employed."

But ACTU president Michele O'Neil said employers should not be able to use the visa system to cut

wages, avoid training locals and exploit workers on visas.

"If a local can do the job, or can be trained to do the job, then that job should go to a local," she said.

Australian Mines & Metals Association chief executive Steve Knott said businesses did not use skilled foreign workers to cut costs as migrants added to business overheads.

"We are sick of both sides of government, when under pressure, turning to skilled temporary migration looking for a bounce in the polls or to buy votes," he said.

Mr Shorten, campaigning in the Queensland marginal electorate of Flynn, said there were 1.6 million people in Australia with visas that gave them work rights.

"Surely some of those jobs could go to Australians," he said.

Under Labor's casual conversion plan, all workers will be able to ask to be made permanent after 12 months if they work a regular pat-

tern of hours, and if an employer says "no" they will have access to an appeals process through the Fair Work Commission.

Mr Shorten's promised legislation would extend to all casual workers the decision by the Fair Work Commission to grant award-dependent casuals the right to request conversion after 12 months.

Employers can refuse casual conversion requests by award-dependent employees on "reasonable business grounds". Labor would consult stakeholders on whether to remove this defence.

It comes after Mr Shorten vehemently opposed the Morrison government's casual conversion bill, which Labor argued would change the legal definition of a casual worker.

Mr Shorten said his casual conversion bill would improve job security for the one in four Australian workers who are employed as casuals.



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**Bill Shorten speaking to workers at Gladstone Ports yesterday. Photo: AAP**