



INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

Employer groups push for workplace law changes

Dana McCauley

Employers have outlined a list of demands for the Morrison government's new industrial relations minister, calling for a bold new approach to crack down on unions and give business the flexibility they argue is needed to boost the economy.

Australian Industry Group chief executive Innes Willox said he had already entered into discussions with the major parties "about the need to revitalise the enterprise bargaining system and to crack down on rosters".

"The current uncertainty about casual employment needs to be addressed," he said. "The Fair Work Act needs to be amended to ensure that an employee engaged as a casual and paid as a casual, is not entitled to be paid annual leave or other entitlements that casual loadings are paid in lieu of."

Mr Willox said he would also be "pushing hard" for an overhaul of the Better Off Overall Test, which requires every employee to be better off before changes to pay and conditions can be approved in new enterprise agreements.

"And we need clearer and tighter rules around union right of entry in critical sectors such as construction," he said.

With Labor's promised overhaul of workplace laws - including restoring penalty rates and abolishing the construction watchdog - consigned to the policy scrap heap, business leaders are jubilant about the Coalition's chances of enacting its own reforms, which had been blocked by a hostile Senate.

Public servants are understood to be working around the clock to prepare a "blue book" for the new industrial relations minister, having poured substantial resources into preparing written advice to an expected Shorten Labor government

with an ambitious reform agenda.

Mr Morrison is expected to announce his new cabinet this week, including a new jobs and industrial relations minister after Kelly O'Dwyer retired from politics.

Minister for Cities, Urban Infrastructure and Population Alan Tudge is seen by employers as a "safe pair of hands" to take over the portfolio, as is Immigration Minister David Coleman.

Michael Sukkar, a former lawyer who served as assistant treasurer in the Turnbull government, is one other name being discussed.

Australian Mines and Metals Association chief executive Steve Knott said the new Morrison government had been given a mandate to reject the union movement's "divisive class warfare rhetoric and false characterisation of our workplaces being in need of radical change".

But newly-elected NSW Labor senator Tony Sheldon, the former secretary of the Transport Workers Union, said voters had not backed Coalition changes to workplace laws as Mr Morrison had not made industrial relations a feature of his election campaign.

Employers want the government to pass key legislation that is ready to be voted on, including the Ensuring Integrity Bill, which would lower the threshold for courts to deregister law-breaking unions.