



Union role expected in new IR laws

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A government push to introduce lifetime workplace agreements for greenfield projects will most likely involve unions and employers negotiating pay and conditions, making it difficult for Labor to oppose.

The government gave the green light to the industrial relations change that former Labor leader Bill Shorten also pledged to consider had he been elected.

Industrial Relations Minister Christian Porter cited Labor's pre-election support for the policy when he confirmed yesterday the government would pursue it as part of a new industrial relations agenda.

While Labor will wait for the details of the policy proposal before responding, unions are cool on the idea and Mr Shorten suspected the government would back non-union agreements.

But Mr Porter is expected to endorse lifetime agreements negotiated between unions and employers. These would prevent cases where agreements expire mid-project and workers then use protected industrial action to apply maximum pressure on employers to improve wages and conditions.

Mid-project expiry became a hot



Christian Porter is expected to back union-employer lifetime agreements. PHOTO: AAP

issue during the resources boom with the construction of billion-dollar LNG projects. When Chevron's agreement expired in 2015 before construction was finished on its Gorgon gas project, the oil and gas giant was forced to agree to roster changes to avoid threats of protected industrial action.

In 2009, Woodside was hit with two months of stoppages at its Pluto LNG project when a crane contractor's agreement expired mid-project and the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union stopped crucial work in a bid to win better conditions.

Woodside said the industrial action delayed the project, costing the company \$3.5 million a day and deferring millions of dollars in LNG sales.

The government's push for change comes as the Australian Mines and Metals Association said 57 major resources projects worth \$41 billion are in the pipeline or likely to proceed over the next five years, with another 153 awaiting a final investment decision.

Mr Porter's decision to approve the policy has buoyed Coalition backbenchers, who have been agitating for IR reform to boost productivity.

One Coalition MP described the greenfield proposal as "a good first step" and urged Mr Porter to develop more policies for which the Coalition could seek a mandate at the next election. These include reform of unfair dismissal laws and complicated modern awards.