

17 April 2020

## Fast-tracked workplace changes a step in the right direction

TEMPORARILY allowing employers and employees to fast-track changes to their workplace arrangements is a step in the right direction for Australia's industrial relations approach during the COVID-19 pandemic, said Australian Resources and Energy Group AMMA.

Taking effect today, the Morrison Government has amended the Fair Work Regulations to reduce the minimum consultation required for variations to enterprise agreements from seven days to one day.

"Seven days is an extraordinarily long time during this unprecedented dual health and economic crisis," Steve Knott AM, AMMA Chief Executive, said.

"Over past weeks we have seen a huge level of employer-employee cooperation in implementing changes to workplace practices designed to protect the health and wellbeing of the workforce as well as keep operations and jobs viable.

"While it may come as a surprise to some, employers and employees don't necessarily require union or Fair Work Commission 'assistance' to respond to the rapidly changing COVID-19 work environment.

"In the overwhelming majority of cases, both employers and employees know what needs to be done and are quickly agreeing on the necessary measures. A seven day *minimum* period in which consultation must take place is simply too long.

"The ability to move quickly and effectively can mean the difference between jobs saved and jobs lost. Employees understand that modified roster cycles or working hours during this pandemic period is far more preferable to being stood down without pay or retrenched."

Measures commonly agreed upon in the resources and energy industry have included changes to rosters and 'swing' lengths to minimise movement of people to and from remote sites, temporary changes in working hours to maximise 'social distancing' measures, and matters relating to relocation, taking of leave and working remotely where possible.

While the changes to consultation timeframes is welcome, AMMA maintains that additional, more wide-ranging industrial relations changes may be required on a temporary basis should the impacts of the COVID-19 lockdown on the Australian economy worsen.

"Earlier this month AMMA [wrote](#) to the Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations suggesting a three-to-six month temporary suspension of modern awards and enterprise agreements should be considered," Mr Knott continues.

"This would allow businesses relatively unaffected to continue to operate under their existing industrial instruments, but provide immediate relief to any employer facing significant pressures as a result of COVID-19, not just those who can secure agreement with unions and their workforces on changes to enterprise agreements, or those operating under the awards the Fair Work Commission chose to vary.

"There needs to be more trust in business to do what's required and responsible to keep the doors open and save jobs during this crisis; and best position themselves to resume their ordinary pre-COVID operations once we are through this period to the extent possible.

"We encourage the government to consider further action as it monitors the effectiveness of its temporary measures to date, including the JobKeeper amendments and today's regulation change."

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