



19 AUG, 2021

## Business slams PM for lack of leadership

The Australian, Australia

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Employers have accused the Morrison government for failing to show “any leadership at all” over workplace vaccinations, criticising the Coalition for rebuffing their bid for new laws that would clarify their ability to enforce compulsory Covid jobs and stand down vaccine refusers.

Employer groups said a meeting with unions convened by Industrial Relations Minister Michaelia Cash on Wednesday had done nothing to address their concerns about the potential legal consequences for business from the vaccine rollout.

“We got absolutely nothing from the federal government today,” Australian Mines and Metals Association chief executive Steve Knott said.

“All we’re getting at the moment is ‘run around the park, look over there, have a go yourself, maybe you might be able to get a state health order’. When you operate across multiple states that’s not very helpful. So we’re not getting any leadership at all from the federal government on this issue which is really disappointing.”

Mr Knott said employers, once they have consulted with workers, should have the right to not employ workers in customer-facing roles if they chose not to be vaccinated. “The issue of what you do with the vaccine hesitant, those who refuse to get vaccinated and the implications that has for business, that issue just gets sidestepped,” he said.

Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry chief executive Andrew McKellar said the Morrison government needed to

implement new legislation clarifying the ability of employers to implement mandatory vaccinations without being exposed to the risk of legal action.

He said employers needed clarity and “there needs to be national leadership” but the federal government had not given any assurances.

Australian Industry Group chief executive Innes Willox said the meeting was told that businesses seeking to mandate vaccinations should obtain legal advice to ensure any such decision was lawful and reasonable.

“It cemented the view for us that it would be employers who would need to decide if they were on secure legal ground to mandate in the absence of rare vaccination health orders,” he said.

“Mandating of vaccinations will not be appropriate in all workplaces, but it will be for some. It will not be surprising if more businesses that are public-facing or have workers in close proximity announce decisions to mandate vaccinations over the months ahead.

During the meeting, Senator Cash rejected the ACTU call for paid vaccination leave to be inserted into the National Employment Standards. She also reiterated the government’s position that vaccination was voluntary unless a state or territory public health order was in place.

ACTU secretary Sally McManus said unions expressed in-principle support for business calls for the government to indemnify employers who encourage, not mandate, Covid jobs and face legal action from staff who have a bad reaction to vaccines.

Mr McKellar said union officials at the meeting called for the

issue of mandatory vaccinations to be “parked” but employers wanted the government to legislate so they could have confidence about their legal position.