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Resources employers are unhappy the Morrison government is offering "next to nothing" on industrial relations reforms at the upcoming election, as they call for industry awards to be scrapped, high-earners to be exempt and compensation in workplace lawsuits to be capped.

In a speech to be delivered to the Brisbane Club today, Australian Mines and Metals Association chief executive Steve Knott will urge Prime Minister Scott Morrison to "get back in the business of IR" after arguing that the COVID-19 recovery and volatile global marketplace meant the "time for reform is now".

The Coalition has not promised any major industrial relations changes this election and is focused on attacking Labor policy, such as a pledge to scrap the building industry watchdog.

Mr Knott will argue that preserving the watchdog, although vital, has little relevance for most workplaces and will say that the Morrison government has entered the federal election "with no substantive agenda for IR reform".

"As has been its trend since the Howard government was removed from office in 2007, the Coalition sees IR as a losing area and is offering nothing substantial on IR, likely fearing it would only add fuel to union and ALP scare campaigns," he will say.

Labor's proposals, including giving labour hire employees the same pay as direct employees on work sites, are "a brick wall in front of free market competition principles", he will add.

Mr Knott will also raise "serious concerns" that the union movement will try to force "bargaining fees" on employers to pay for non-union members covered by union agreements and argue that Labor has not ruled this out.

"The ACTU has been attempting to justify this atrocious policy since the early 2000s, and I know from personal

conversations there remains great support for this concept among influential union leaders," he will say.

"So in summary we are in an eerily familiar position – a Coalition government offering next to nothing on industrial relations, and the Opposition

putting forward terrible ideas formulated around myths, gross exaggerations and scare campaigns."

Mr Knott will also highlight the recent spate of underpayments by well-resourced employers including Woolworths, McDonald's, Clayton Utz and Macquarie Bank as evidence that the industry award system is too complicated and should be abolished.

He will say the solution is to expand the Fair Work Act's National Employment Standards – which ensures minimum conditions such as paid leave and redundancy pay – so they include varied conditions for 18 industries.

"This proposal would not only see 123 minimum wages reduced to a number one-sixth its size, but also provide a single baseline of minimum working conditions for all other non-wage related employment matters, such as leave, allowances, entitlements, working hours, consultation and more," he will say.

Mr Knott will also target the adverse action jurisdiction – which allows workers to sue employers for taking action against them for exercising a workplace right – as "unnecessary and damaging" and forcing many employers to make significant settlements because of concerns about reputational damage and legal costs.

He says the reverse onus of proof for such claims should be abolished and compensation, currently uncapped, should be limited to six months' pay.

He will also reassert AMMA's proposal to allow employees to "voluntarily remove themselves" from most of the IR system through individual agreements if they earn more than the high-income threshold of \$158,500 a year.

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The Coalition sees IR as a losing area and is offering nothing substantial.

Steve Knott, Australian Mines and Metals Association chief executive