



24 MAY, 2022

Business Council calls for return to enterprise bargaining

The Australian, Australia

Page 1 of 1

Business Council calls for return to enterprise bargaining

EWIN HANNAN
WORKPLACE EDITOR

Employers have warned the union movement's pursuit of "unsustainable" pay rises is the No.1 challenge facing the economy, and are urging Anthony Albanese to restore the Keating government's enterprise bargaining system to lift productivity.

Business groups acknowledged the Albanese government had a mandate to kill off the Coalition's controversial building watchdog but want a specialist division set up within the Fair Work Ombudsman to prevent

"industrial turmoil" across the construction industry.

Australian Industry Group chief executive Innes Willox said he expected unions would be applying pressure for "across-the-board wage increases of what would be an unsustainable level for many businesses".

Mr Willox said Mr Albanese had said he wanted to lift wages and profits but the "secret sauce" was increasing productivity.

Unions expect the new government to back a 5.1 per cent minimum wage increase for the nation's low-paid workers when it makes a submission to the Fair Work Commission's annual wage

review by June 7. Key unions also intend to press for significant pay rises to take account of higher inflation and interest rates, with the Electrical Trades Union pursuing annual pay rises of at least 5 per cent.

Business Council of Australia chief executive Jennifer Westcott welcomed Mr Albanese's commitment to work alongside businesses to "deliver a private sector-led recovery that creates new jobs, better opportunities and

higher wages".

"This is also a chance to seize the opportunity and end the deadlock on workplace relations, restore the Hawke-Keating

enterprise bargaining system to lift productivity, and let Australians earn more," she said.

The Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union opposed the calls for a new agency to replace the ABCC, accusing the Australian Resources and Energy Employer Association and Master Builders Australia of behaving as "Liberal Party fronts". AREEA chief executive Steve Knott said the association would seek to work with the ALP on the practical implementation of its IR mandate, as well as further changes to the workplace relations system.

"AREEA notes and accepts the

ALP's mandate to abolish the ABCC, a body we have been a strong supporter of given the ongoing recidivist lawbreaking of the CFMEU," Mr Knott said.

"AREEA will therefore encourage the ALP to set up a specialist division within the Fair Work Ombudsman to investigate and prosecute any employer or union organisation that breaches Australia's workplace laws, with a high level of attention still required on the building and construction sector."

Master Builders Australia chief executive Denita Wawn has called on the new government to keep a specialist construction

watchdog in place. And Dave Noonan, the CFMEU's construction division national secretary, said he welcomed the fact that even Mr Knott conceded "the ABCC's days are gone".

"Our view remains that con-

struction workers ought to be treated equally with every other work before the law, and this talk of special divisions and stuff is really trying to keep the ABCC by different means," he said.

"They say they acknowledge the mandate but want to get around it a different way. Our view is there ought to be the same laws for construction workers as for every other worker."