



31 MAR, 2023

Labor swaps in unionists for bosses on FWC

The Australian, Australia

Page 1 of 1

Labor swaps in unionists for bosses on FWC

EWIN HANNAN
WORKPLACE EDITOR

The Albanese government has appointed five people with union backgrounds to the Fair Work Commission, declaring Labor wanted to fix the Coalition's "shameless stack" of the tribunal with appointees from an employer background.

Employment and Workplace Relations Minister Tony Burke announced the appointment of four deputy presidents, including ACTU senior legal officer Thomas Roberts, the shop assistants union's West Australian secretary Peter O'Keefe, and Australian Services Union NSW and ACT deputy secretary Judith Wright.

Maurice Blackburn principal lawyer Alexandra Grayson, a former national industrial officer with the Finance Sector Union, has been appointed deputy president, while Sharon Durham, a former Queensland union official and chief of staff to Industrial Relations Minister Grace Grace has been made a commissioner.

Ingrid Asbury, a deputy president since 2013, has been promoted to FWC vice-president. She comes from an employer background and has been on the tribunal since 2001.

Mr Burke said the government was delivering on its promise to restore balance to the commission to "give workers an equal voice in decisions that affect them".

Of 27 permanent appointments made to the commission by

the Coalition, 26 came from an employer background.

Mr Burke said there were now 29 commission members with an employer background and nine members – now 14 – with a worker background.

Labor in opposition repeatedly promised to rebalance the commission to ensure workers had "as much of a voice as employers".

"For the commission to work as intended, it needs to be properly balanced. It should work in the interests of workers and businesses alike," Mr Burke said.

'We are still a long way from balance. There is more work to do to correct the Coalition's shameless stack'

TONY BURKE
WORKPLACE RELATIONS
MINISTER

"Even with these appointments, we are still a long way from balance. There is more work to do to correct the Coalition's shameless stack. I look forward to the day when I can return to appointing people from employee and employer backgrounds in equal numbers, but there is an imperative to restore the balance."

The ACTU said the Coalition stacked the commission during nine years in power and the Morrison government did not appoint

a single worker representative.

"The union movement welcomes the Albanese government acting on its election promise to restore balance on the FWC, but there is much more to be done to even get close," ACTU secretary Sally McManus said.

"It is critical that important bodies such as the commission, which has a big impact on the lives of working people, are just and balanced. It is disgraceful that the Coalition government stacked it with employer ideologues.

"Working people in Australia need their confidence restored in the institution that oversees workers' rights. Our industrial tribunals must draw from a balance of those from employer and employee backgrounds and the legal profession."

Australian Resources and Energy Employer Association chief Steve Knott said it was "disappointing but not surprising the government has decided to continue the long practice of partisan political appointments to the commission. Since forming government, the ALP has been very clear they intend to stack the FWC with ALP-friendly appointments. Minister Burke made it very clear many more partisan appointments will come," he said.

"The Coalition appointed mostly their own under Howard, the Rudd-Gillard years did the same, as did the last three terms of Coalition government. What is more important is the ALP has maintained its influence over the leadership of the tribunal for well over a decade."