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IR deal closer after unions, bosses hold secret talks

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A new test to prevent specialist contractors being caught up in the Albanese government's same job, same pay laws looks increasingly likely, after the proposal was put to key meetings of unions and employers in Sydney on Friday.

Several sources said the so-called multi-factor test was among proposals circulated by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations during a confidential all-day briefing about the government's second wave of

industrial relations changes. Employers and union participants were required to sign non-disclosure agreements that prevent them from commenting publicly to the media about the policy detail disclosed at the meeting.

The Australian revealed this week that Workplace Relations Minister Tony Burke is considering introducing the new test after meeting a delegation of contractors led by the Australian Resources and Energy Employer Association.

Some employer sources said the policy detail on Friday provided a welcomed narrowing of scope but denied the government had made concessions.

The government did not invite Master Builders Australia, whose

chief executive Denita Wawn has previously accused Labor of "sham consulting". Mr Burke said she was "incapable of working within the consultation processes of the previous government, let alone ours".

As well as the labour hire changes, the next wave includes measures to tackle wage theft, the creation of a fair test to determine when a worker can be classified as a casual; and a proposed extension of the Fair Work Commission's powers

to include employee-like forms of work, notably gig economy work.

Meanwhile, the commission will hear a landmark claim in August that could result in significant taxpayer-funded pay rises for thousands of early childhood education workers.

As Mr Burke met the ACTU and employers to brief them on the IR reforms, the commission laid out the timetable for considering the first application under the Albanese government's new multi-employer bargaining laws.

Commission president Adam Hatcher directed childcare employers and unions to file

submissions, and any agreed statement, by July 28. The government, the ACTU and peak employer groups can file by August 4 ahead of two days of hearings scheduled for August 17-18.

United Workers Union dele-

gates have backed a 25 per cent pay rise but the eventual size or timing of any pay rises remains unclear.

Childcare providers representing almost 500 centres have joined the multi-employer bargaining application, despite industry groups claiming the new laws are causing anxiety across the sector.