

Tuesday 28 August 2007

## **FORWARD WITH FAIRNESS 'MARK TWO' REPRESENTS PROGRESS BUT IMPORTANT CONCERNS REMAIN UNANSWERED**

Statement by Heather Ridout  
Chief Executive Australian Industry Group

"By pledging to retain key elements of the current workplace relations framework, the Federal Opposition has addressed some major risks and uncertainties inherent in their original *Forward with Fairness* policy. This will go some way to allaying business concerns," Australian Industry Group Chief Executive Heather Ridout said today.

"As well, while business remains disappointed with the decision to abolish AWAs, the transitional arrangements appear workable and will provide more certainty for affected employers and employees than earlier proposals.

"The arrangements that Labor pledged to retain in their policy announcement today go to the integrity and rigour of the workplace relations system. In particular these include:

- existing right of entry arrangements;
- mandatory secret ballots before industrial action can be taken;
- retaining the current arrangements to obtain orders to stop or prevent unlawful industrial action;
- laws prohibiting industrial action in pursuit of pattern bargaining; and
- retaining secondary boycotts in the trade practices legislation.

"Also, the clarity given to the ongoing role and resourcing of the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC) - which we had sought - will be welcomed by the construction industry," Mrs Ridout said.

"These are all sensible and positive decisions.

"However, important questions raised by Ai Group in relation to Labor's 'compulsory' collective bargaining model have not been answered in this policy document – these include:

- how compulsory collective bargaining is triggered;
- what good faith bargaining will look like;
- what can be bargained for; and
- whether there will be compulsory arbitration.

"Further clarification on these matters is required.

"We have long held that Labor's proposed collective bargaining system would overturn the successful existing bargaining regime which has been in place since the inception of the system.

"Finally, there will be strong opposition from business to the slashing of the threshold for unfair dismissal claims. Companies will be very nervous that it will be a return to the bad old days despite assurances to the contrary.