

Step by step for workplace legislation



Workplace Relations Minister Peter Reith said that the Government would deal with the workplace relations legislation on an issue by issue basis.

The Federal Government has introduced four new pieces of workplace relations legislation into the House of Representatives in the wake of opposition from the ALP and the Australian Democrats to the earlier Workplace Relations Legislation Amendment (More Jobs, Better Pay) Bill 1999.

Commenting on the change of tack, Minister for Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business, Peter Reith, noted that the Democrats have publicly indicated that they prefer to deal with the content of the earlier bill on an issue by issue basis, not as an omnibus piece of legislation.

"The Government has sought to accommodate the preferences of the Australian Democrats by proceeding, other than on technical issues, with an issue by issue consideration of policy matters arising from the More Jobs, Better Pay Bill 1999," Mr Reith said.

The four separate pieces of legislation introduced into the House in the final week of the Winter sittings were:

- the Workplace Relations Amendment (Termination of Employment) Bill 2000, which proposes a number of amendments to the termination of employment provisions of the *Workplace Relations Act 1996*;
- the Workplace Relations Amendment (Australian Workplace Agreements Procedures) Bill 2000, involving procedural and technical amendments to the approval process for Australian Workplace Agreements;
- the Workplace Relations Amendment (Secret Ballots for Protected Action) Bill 2000, which proposes that secret ballots, overseen by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission, be held prior to the taking of protected industrial action; and

- the Workplace Relations Amendment (Tallies and Picnic Days) Bill 2000, which provides for further simplification of federal awards in the areas of union picnic days and tallies.



Shadow Minister for Industrial Relations, Arch Bevis (pictured right), was critical of this approach, commenting: "This is just the latest slice of last year's rejected second wave legislation that [the Minister] is serving up. The Minister can't seem to get over the massive public rejection of his failed second wave and seems set to return to the scene of the crime again and again."

The bills are expected to be debated during the Spring sittings of Parliament.

For details

The progress of bills can be checked from the Daily Bills List on the Internet at: www.apf.gov.au/parlinfo/billsnet/blist.pdf

The text of bills and the explanatory notes are available on the Internet at: www.apf.gov.au/parlinfo/billsnet/bills.htm

The debates on the legislation can be found on the Internet at: www.apf.gov.au/hansard

Migration changes debated

Proposed changes to migration laws affecting the migration of parents were criticised by the Opposition during recent debate in the House of Representatives.

The Migration Legislation Amendment (Parents and Other Measures) Bill 2000 and the Migration (Visa Application) Charge Amendment Bill 2000 implement changes to entry arrangements for parents and also affect the entitlement of certain non-citizens to Medicare. Under the new legislation, existing entry options for parents will be replaced with new visa classes and subclasses. The assurance of support bond will increase and applicants for the new classes will be required to arrange suitable and approved private health insurance cover for 10 years or pay a once off \$25,000 health services charge per person.

Shadow Minister for Immigration, Con Sciacca, condemned the legislation as "unfair and un-Australian". He argued that the Government was essentially legislating in favour of queue jumping.

According to Mr Sciacca, the Opposition is not against the principle of mutual obligation and is not opposed to ensuring that newly arrived aged parents and aged dependant relatives provide substantial contributions to their own health care. "These contributions, however, must be fair and they must be achievable, especially by those people whose means are limited," Mr Sciacca said.

The Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Philip Ruddock, indicated that the bills were intended to maximise the number of parents who can migrate to Australia. A contingency reserve of 4,000 visa places for the new parent category has been allocated over the next two years of the immigration program.

The bills were passed by the House on 26 June 2000 and proceeded to the Senate for debate.