

Unions vow to continue to stand up for the rights of construction workers

Unions vowed today to continue to stand up for construction workers' rights and for an end to the use of coercive powers in the industry.

Commenting on the announcement by the Federal Government that it would introduce new industrial relations legislation for the construction industry into Parliament tomorrow, ACTU Secretary Jeff Lawrence said:

"Unions are determined to improve workers' rights and to ensure workers in the construction industry have the same rights as all other Australian workers.

"It will be good to see the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC) abolished, as the Government has said it will do.

"The removal of unfair, higher penalties for construction workers is also a step forward.

"However it is unacceptable for the Labor Government to retain discriminatory laws including the use of over-the-top coercive powers against one group of workers.

"Unions are fundamentally opposed to the continued use of coercive powers against workers - even for a five year period and with the new safeguards that are proposed.

"The only people that will win from the retention of unfair laws in this industry will be the big building developers and construction companies.

"Our short term fear is that workers will continue to be subject to laws that are just unfair and unreasonable.

"Our long term fear is that these laws will stop workers on building sites from speaking out when a situation is unsafe or unfair.

"According to official figures from the Australian Safety and Compensation Council, prior to the introduction of the Howard Government's discriminatory laws for the construction industry in 2004, there were 19 deaths on building sites but in 2007 this had risen to 33 deaths.

"Special laws have failed to deal with the terrible record of health and safety in this often dangerous industry and have failed to improve productivity.

"The recent report by Justice Wilcox into the industry found the discriminatory laws had no positive impact on productivity and debunked the ABCC's claims that they had.

"The Australian people voted at the last election to restore workers' rights and to get rid of the Howard Government's unfair IR laws.

"Unions will continue campaigning to ensure this happens," said Mr Lawrence.

Media contact: Mark Phillips ph (03) 8676 7266/0422 009 011; email: mphillips@actu.asn.au