



AUSTRALIAN CHAMBER OF
COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY

MEDIA RELEASE

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BUILDING INDUSTRY REFORMS – KEEP THE GENIE IN THE BOTTLE

Statement by Mr Peter Anderson, Chief Executive

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI), Australia's largest and most representative business organisation, has used its appearance this morning before a Senate Committee inquiry into proposed Australian Government changes to industrial relations arrangements in the building and construction industry, to call for the retention of current Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC) powers.

Whilst the current workplace relations environment is not perfect, the work of the ABCC over the past 5 years has had a highly beneficial effect on the industry.

The genie is, in large part, "back in the bottle" and business is greatly concerned about legislative changes that may put that situation at risk and create the potential for a return to the bad old days.

In this context, anecdotal evidence indicates that some unions are already talking about being "back in town" when the Government's changes come into effect in February 2010.

Whilst the industry is still a tough and demanding one in which to operate, it is also one that is now characterised by a much greater sense of predictability and certainty than was the case prior to the establishment of the ABCC.

However, changes contained in the *Building and Construction Industry Improvement Amendment (Transition to Fair Work) Bill* - lower fines, the repeal of unlawful industrial action provisions, and restrictions on the powers to interview - all have the potential to undo what has been achieved to date.

Different measures can be justified in the building and construction industry because industrial and commercial arrangements and cultures in the industry are different. Royal Commissions and other enquiries dating back to 1982 have consistently exposed the intimidation and disregard for the law that existed in parts of the industry, and the failure of conventional industrial laws and systems to effectively respond.

This situation does not exist in any other industry sector.

It is critical at this time that the building and construction industry continues to be effectively controlled and regulated, given the stimulus spending being channelled into it by the Government as part of its stimulus package.

For further information:

David Gregory Director of Workplace Policy 03 9668 9950 / 0417 052 390
Brett Hogan Director of Communications 03 9668 9950 / 0407 273 884

ACCI represents over 350,000 businesses in every State and Territory and all industries. Our network employs around 4 million employees, ranging from the top 100 companies to tens of thousands of small and medium businesses.

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