

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Deal on CHAFTA labour provisions does not go far enough**

The Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) described the deal struck between Labor and the Government as a step in the right direction to protect foreign workers from exploitation and ensure local workers are not shut out of local projects. However, the deal does not go far enough and Labor and the Government must do more.

AMWU National Secretary Paul Bastian is concerned that the deal had put politics ahead of good policy.

“Unions have been campaigning hard to get a fair outcome for Australian and foreign workers in this deal. We are pleased that our campaigning has forced our political leaders to the negotiating table,” said Mr Bastian.

“But the Government and Labor should not think that this political settlement is enough. Our campaign will continue until Australian workers can be confident that CHAFTA and trade agreements generally deliver for their interests,” he said.

Under the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in the proposed China-Australia Free Trade Agreement, the Federal Government has proposed that Chinese investors be allowed to import foreign workers on low wages without any requirement to source local labour first.

Unions have been calling for changes to the *Migration Act* to require labour market testing on construction and other projects and for any imported workers to receive fair Australian pay and conditions. The agreement struck between Labor and the government achieves this, but only through loosely worded regulations rather than changes in legislation.

“We’ve seen rorting of the system before and the best way to stop this is to enshrine clear requirements in law and back them up by resourcing government agencies to make sure the law is being followed in every case. This agreement falls well short.”

Unions and Labor had also sought to increase the Temporary Skilled Migration Income Threshold (TSMIT) yearly salary for a 457-visa worker from the current \$53,900 to \$57,000 and indexed thereafter. While the agreement struck sets out a review of the TSMIT and includes new regulations that seek to ensure no 457 visa workers are payed less than Australians working on the same job, these regulations need to be enforced to be effective.

“We are very worried that the Immigration Department lacks the resources to effectively implement any new regulations and guidelines that are passed as part of this process,”

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“A lack of enforcement and resourcing has led to wide scale rorting of 457 visas in the past and nothing in this agreement provides us with any confidence this rorting won’t continue.”

The fact the deal agreed to between Labor and the Government would make no legislative changes to the *Migration Act* or resourcing changes to the Immigration department just sends the signal to those doing the wrong thing that it’s business as usual.

“The failure to agree to a sensible increase to the 457-Visa minimum salary is a big failure in this deal. We don’t think Labor should be willing to accept any deal that doesn’t incorporate a decent increase to 457-Visa minimum salary,” he said.

The AMWU will continue to campaign to tighten up on the 457 visa regime to ensure guest workers are not exploited ,and Australian workers are given every opportunity for work.

“This is effectively an admission by the Government that their original proposal risked local jobs and exposed foreign workers to exploitation. They are effectively admitting they have been misleading the public about the safeguards for Australian workers around CHAFTA for months. They now ought to be willing to put these amendments into the Migration Act,” said Mr Bastian.

“We are also seeking a public commitment from Labor that they will make the changes they have been campaigning for should they form Government in future, including changes to legislation and the text of the CHAFTA if necessary to ensure a truly fair deal for every single Australian worker. If they were willing to back this issue in Opposition, there should be no problem implementing it when in Government,” he said.

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