

WORKPLACE AGREEMENTS, LEGISLATION

351. Mrs EDWARDES to the Minister for Consumer and Employment Protection:

I refer the minister to the Labor Government's policy of abolishing workplace agreements and to the minister's statement in *The West Australian* of 21 March 2001 that he would introduce the necessary legislation to the Parliament in May 2001, and that he wanted the new system to begin in July 2001. Given the environment of uncertainty that has been created for businesses in Western Australia, will the minister now give a firm commitment about when he will introduce this legislation to Parliament?

Mr KOBELKE replied:

It is great to have people in the Opposition who are keen for the Government to bring forward its reform package to improve matters that the previous Government left in this area. It is an important question, because I was keen to have those reforms in place by mid-year. I have clearly not been able to meet that objective. I have discussed the matter with a range of industry people and in many instances what they said reflected the member's statement; that is, that business would like some certainty on this matter and as quickly as possible. The Government will try to move to introduce the legislation to the Parliament without too much delay. I spoke to one key industry group last night and I was surprised because it thought the time had worked to the benefit of its members; they had been given more time to consider the policy and what was in store for them. Perhaps they are not as frightened now as they had been when certain stories were put around. The point the member made is a good one - business needs certainty. The Government hopes to provide that. The difficulty has been in the drafting and in the transitional arrangements of this legislation. I wanted to keep them as simple as possible, but it is a complex set of drafting. It is lengthier than I had hoped. That will be tied down as quickly as possible. As promised, I hope to consult key industry groups before taking this legislation to Cabinet. That is still a few weeks away. Once that has been done, I will introduce the legislation into Parliament. That will clearly be before the end of the year.

Mrs Edwardes: Will that occur in October?

Mr KOBELKE: It will be before the end of the year.

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2. Mrs EDWARDES to the Minister for Consumer and Employment Protection:

I ask a supplementary question. Is it the minister's intention not to introduce this controversial legislation until after the federal election?

Mr KOBELKE replied:

If I knew when the federal election would be held, I might be able to answer that question. It is not the Government's intention to delay the legislation, but we want to get it right. For that reason, we are going through the drafting process and making sure that is correct, and, as a second check, we will consult with key industry groups.

Some people think there will be wide community consultation. That would take too long and I have said that we cannot do that. The legislation will be a clear fulfilment of the election promise. The election policy was extremely detailed and, therefore, it will be a technical revision with key interest groups to determine whether that legislation adequately and fully reflects the election promise. Sometimes election promises need a great deal of finetuning and that may shift the balance. Of course, the balance between the respective rights of the people in industrial relations is incredibly important, and we shall seek from those key industry groups and union groups their views on that balance. I do not expect any of them to agree with it. However, I suspect we will have that balance if the conflicting views come from both sides, and that will be a very important part of that quick consultation process before the legislation is introduced into the Parliament. The legislation will be in Parliament before the end of the year.