

---

# Multi-employer wage fight test

**EXCLUSIVE**

**EWIN HANNAN**  
WORKPLACE EDITOR

A key union is demanding airconditioning manufacturers convert casuals to permanent employment, limit use of labour hire and engage more apprentices under a proposed new multi-employer agreement shaping as a test case for Labor's new bargaining laws.

The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union is pressing to reinstate every clause banned under the Howard government's building code.

In abolishing the Australian Building and Construction Commission, the Albanese government scrapped the Coalition's code, which prevented employers from agreeing to insert different clauses into agreements if they wanted to remain eligible for commonwealth building work.

The CFMEU has also flagged it will seek to have the clauses reinserted into construction sector agreements during upcoming bargaining, including clauses that require employers to convert casuals to permanency after a certain number of weeks.

Unions will push to insert "same job, same pay" clauses into new agreements to remove the financial incentive to engage

labour hire en masse at rates below those paid to direct employees. They will seek to reinstate clauses that see employers commit to engaging one apprentice per number of tradespeople.

"The AMWU will be seeking the reinstatement of every single condition ... stripped from our agreements by the Howard government's building industry code of conduct," union national secretary Steve Murphy told *The Australian*.

Mimmo Scavera, HVAC Manufacturing and Installation Association president, said he had seen the claim but employers did not yet have a position and he hoped there would be compromise on both sides.

Mr Scavera said heating, ventilation and airconditioning manufacturers wanted to use the multi-employer agreement to link higher annual pay rises to workers gaining new skills rather than increases being entirely automatic.

Stephen Smith, principal of Actus Workplace lawyers and former head of national workplace relations policy with the Australian Industry Group, said in recent years some airconditioning companies had entered into pattern agreements that included a 36-hour week, base pay rates of \$48 per hour, a \$19-a-week travel allowance, \$110 per employee per week into a redundancy fund, in-

come protection insurance through the unions' preferred provider, a \$3.60-an-hour site allowance, and numerous other employee benefits.

He said if the union applied to the Fair Work Commission to vary the agreement to include other employers, hundreds of companies would be potentially forced to adopt wages and conditions negotiated by a small group of contractors that had been pattern bargaining with the AMWU for many years.

Mr Murphy said the union and the association had decided the agreement's foundation "will focus on improving job security, improving safety standards, industry skills recognition and development, productivity and industry co-operation".

"The meetings have been positive and productive," he said. "When final agreement is reached and endorsed by AMWU members, we will review the outcomes ... and ... plan strategically where we might flow on the standards or leanings from these new laws."

Mr Scavera said the association did not intend to replicate the pattern agreement in NSW. "We're not interested. The employers are saying (to the union) 'no, that's not what this is about. If you just want to talk to us about another EBA but just put another title on it, we're not interested'."