



‘Reform to offset slump’ in mine jobs

EXCLUSIVE

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The nation’s largest companies and resources exporters are telling Scott Morrison he could create “tens of thousands” of new jobs by pushing through workplace reforms to help offset an expected 10-20 per cent slump in mining, oil and gas jobs.

Steve Knott, the chief executive of the Australian Mines and Metals Association, provided new figures to The Australian reflecting industry forecasts for a huge drop of up to 48,000 jobs in the resources and energy sector, in the absence of new projects, as a result of the pandemic.

He said it was critical the government’s industrial relations working group on greenfields agreements — which met for the first time on Friday — was able to secure new workplace deals that could last for the entire construction phase of new projects without having to be renegotiated.

At stake is about \$250bn worth of new projects sitting in the investment pipeline with the potential to create more than 100,000 new jobs by 2026, with Mr Knott saying it could help offset forecast job losses of between 24,000 to 48,000 arising from the pandemic.

Business Council of Australia

chief executive Jennifer Westacott also told The Australian that “tens of thousands of jobs” could be created if the government extended changes to the Fair Work Act, making it easier for employers who qualified for JobKeeper to alter an employee’s hours or duties.

On Friday, the Prime Minister gave the strongest sign yet that he would continue with temporary changes to the Fair Work Act allowing employees receiving the \$1500 fortnightly JobKeeper payments to be directed to work less, take leave and change their duties, location of work and days of work.

“That flexibility going forward will create tens of thousands of new jobs and keep as many people working as possible,” Ms Westacott said.

“The decision to give business and workers the space they needed to adapt quickly to this crisis has been crucial to saving jobs, and that challenge isn’t going away.

“The Prime Minister is right — flexibility will be crucial to saving jobs and creating new ones as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic.

“The reality is we’ll need to live with this virus and manage outbreaks for some time (and) businesses will need room to move to keep people working as

they adapt to rapidly changing circumstances.”

Mr Morrison is contemplating the future of the JobKeeper program after he received the first draft of the review into the \$70bn scheme on Friday — one day after Qantas announced it would cut 6000 jobs and leave 15,000 people stood down.

Industrial relations working groups have been set up into casuals and fixed-term employees; award simplification; enterprise agreement making; compliance and enforcement; and greenfields agreements for new enterprises.

Mr Knott attended the virtual meeting on Friday for the greenfields agreements session along with ACTU secretary Sally McManus, the CFMEU’s national construction secretary Dave Noonan and representatives from the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the MCA and Master Builders Association.

“In regular dialogue with CEOs at blue-chip mining, oil and gas companies, the prevailing view is that on the other side of COVID-19, in the absence of new projects, there will be job losses in the vicinity of 10 to 20 per cent,” Mr Knott said.

“There are 240,000 directly employed in the resources and energy sector and 1.1 million in direct and indirect employment. So the numbers are not insignificant.”