

Construction body top priority for Cash

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Industrial relations looms as the first major battle when parliament resumes next Tuesday, with the government vowing to reintroduce legislation to bring back the Australian Building and Construction Commission.

Employment Minister Michaelia Cash said the re-establishment of the ABCC would be the first order of business for the government in the wake of the findings of the Royal Commission into Trade Union Governance and Corruption.

Senator Cash also confirmed that the government would criminalise "corrupting benefits" paid by employers to unions, as part of the government's response to the royal commission.

"I find it absolutely astounding in Australia that we have had a situation whereby the laws have allowed this to occur," she said.

Senator Cash said that she had been speaking with crossbenchers in a bid to win their support for the ABCC bill — which has been rejected by the Senate twice — and would allow them to read the confidential volume of the union royal commission next week when parliament resumed.

The government will also begin stakeholder meetings next month on the Productivity Commission's review of the industrial relations regime.

But the government will not be making a submission to the Fair Work Commission on penalty rates and is yet to make a decision on whether to embrace its recommendation to allow enterprise contracts for small and medium business.

Liberal Democrat senator David Leyonhjelm, who supports the government's industrial relations agenda, slammed crossbenchers Jacqui Lambie and Glenn Lazarus for demanding access to the confidential chap-

ters, saying it was "prurient curiosity" that would not change their opposition to the reform.

"You can't blame the government for trying to find a way to satisfy these demands but I think Lambie and Lazarus are inherently sympathetic to Labor and the unions and so they're looking for excuses to not support the legislation," Senator Leyonhjelm told *The Australian*.

"The reason (the volumes are) confidential is so that people can be prosecuted — you don't need to know the details of a prosecution in order to know that a law needs changing."

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MICHAELIA CASH
EMPLOYMENT MINISTER

Senators Lambie and Lazarus say that a viewing of the full report will help them determine their position on the two bills.

Greens workplace relations spokesman Adam Bandt yesterday warned the government off embracing a proposal by the Productivity Commission to create a new industrial agreement for small and medium-sized business dubbed the "enterprise contract", which would allow employers to vary key award conditions.

"With about half of the Australian workforce employed in small and medium businesses, the Liberal government's idea to allow some companies to contract out of legal minimum standards would dramatically undermine people's rights at work," he said.

"The Fair Work Commission won't be required to approve these contracts, so this is a recipe for widespread exploitation."