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Minister concedes abuse of IR laws

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FEDERAL Workplace Relations Minister Kevin Andrews has conceded that some employers have used the Government's new industrial relations legislation as an excuse to sack people.

Responding to union claims that employers had immediately begun abusing new unfair dismissal laws, Mr Andrews admitted some had "jumped the gun" and may have acted unlawfully.

"This is again a case where I think all should take a deep breath, particularly the employers themselves," Mr Andrews said yesterday.

"I suspect some people believe the union rhetoric that this is a totally deregulated workplace is correct and that's not right.

"Employers have rights, but they also have obligations.

"It may well be that the employers have jumped the gun and are acting in a way which doesn't take account of their full range of obligations."

ACTU president **Sharan Burrow** said it was not bosses misinterpreting the laws, but proof of "the bastardry that these laws allowed".

Prime Minister John Howard said he was sure "good stories" about the IR laws were on the way.

"I think you need a few months for the laws to settle down and they will settle down."

New SA Employment and Training Minister Paul Caica has vowed to hasten an investigation into the sacking of two electrical apprentices last week, as revealed in The Advertiser on Saturday.

Unions SA believes Moonta apprentice electricians Rob Elkson and Greg Garrard were sacked unlawfully last Monday - the day the Federal Government's new workplace laws took effect.

Mr Caica said hearings for the test case would begin today in the Grievance and Dispute Mediation Committee, and would be completed in weeks.

``I will be seeking, as the minister, for it to be settled as a matter of urgency," he said.

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