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Commission to operate in a government fishbowl

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Workplace Relations Minister **Kevin Andrews** will have unprecedented scope to scrutinise and intervene in virtually all **industrial** issues that come before the Australian **Industrial** Relations Commission under the federal government's new **workplace** relations system.

New regulations issued by Mr Andrews under the **Workplace** Relations Act will impose extensive reporting requirements on the AIRC.

These will allow the minister and his department to monitor developments in **industrial** disputes and **workplace** bargaining on a daily basis.

The reporting requirements - which allow Mr Andrews to order the AIRC to provide him with copies of any sensitive decisions and rulings within 24 hours of his request - will enable the Department of **Workplace** Relations to closely track developments in the new **industrial** relations system.

Under the act, Mr Andrews has powers to take part in cases before the AIRC by sending legal representatives to intervene on behalf of the federal government and, in some cases, can intervene directly by using new ministerial powers to terminate enterprise-bargaining disputes.

The new reporting regime set out in the **workplace** relations regulations suggests the government plans a "hands on" role by tracking cases and assessing whether to use Mr Andrews's intervention powers in cases where broad policy issues are at stake, or where there are politically sensitive developments.

The new regulations require the AIRC to send daily, weekly and quarterly reports to Mr Andrews giving details of any applications by unions or employers to initiate or suspend bargaining periods or to conduct secret ballots to authorise strike action.

The AIRC will also have to send reports on any cases where employers or unions seek orders or injunctions in **industrial** disputes, where parties to a

dispute ask the tribunal to help them try to resolve their differences, or where **union** officials seek right-of-entry permits to gain access to a **workplace**.

The AIRC will also be required to dispatch quarterly reports to Mr Andrews giving details of unfair dismissal applications coming before the tribunal.

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