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Employers must invest in training to address resources skills shortages: unions

A plan to ease labour shortages in Australia's resource sector must be accompanied by a commitment from employers to invest in training and skills development, say unions.

ACTU President Ged Kearney today welcomed the Government's commitment to a national resources sector workforce strategy, which she said would take the 'high road' of investing in Australian skills rather than the 'low road' of reliance on short-term migration.

"We are pleased the Government has agreed to implement all 31 of the National Resources Sector Employment Taskforce report's recommendations, which will help ensure skills needs of the growing industry are met," Ms Kearney said.

"But any plan to ease labour shortages must be matched by investment in skills training by employers because an over-reliance on skilled migration has in part led to a labour shortage in the resources sector. Right now, the resources sector takes a short-term, short-sighted approach, overusing the 457 visa and offering high wages to poach from other sectors - effectively robbing Peter to pay Paul."

Ms Kearney said companies had resolved their labour needs by outbidding each other instead of working collaboratively through strategic workforce planning to address the issue.

She said the ACTU called on the Government to ensure its planned National Resources Sector Workforce Strategy maximised local procurement and economic development, which would in turn offer opportunities for skills development.

"Employers will need strategies to attract and retain labour. Higher wages have attracted many to the sector, but employees are also interested in conditions such as access to training, career progression and a family-friendly work environment," Ms Kearney said.

She said unions also welcomed the Government's plan to invest \$200 million to employ 1000 new apprentices within the region, also announced today as part of the Government's response to the taskforce report.

"However, a 10 per cent apprenticeship target should be adopted, as a minimum if Australia is to turn the skills shortage around and meet future growth needs," she said.

"Employers need to take responsibility for this target and unions will push for an employer levy to achieve it. The resources sector has not done nearly enough to train its own workforce and would have to double its number of apprentices to be on par with other industries."

Unions will also resist any push by employers to lower the 457 visa wages threshold for the resources sector.

"This would be a regressive move which would undermine Australian wages and conditions, and reopen the door to exploitation of migrant workers."

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