

Tuesday, July 28, 2026

ACTU announces leadership transition

The ACTU, the peak body for Australian Unions, has announced it will transition to a new leadership team.

ACTU Secretary, Sally McManus and President, Michele O'Neil have announced they will make way for a new generation of union leaders to bring renewal to the peak union body.

With extensive new rights won and the Australian union movement growing, Sally McManus and Michele O'Neil determined it is the right time for a new leadership team at the ACTU.

McManus and O'Neil were elected to the ACTU leadership in 2017 and 2018 respectively and are the longest serving ACTU leadership team since 1969.

Under their leadership, all attempts to reduce workers' rights from the previous Coalition Government were defeated and 47 new rights for working Australians have become law under the Albanese Government. These improvements have increased wages, reduced the gender pay gap, revived collective bargaining, increased secure jobs and increased workers' share of the nation's wealth.

Union membership has also grown for the first time in decades.

They are proud of the movement's work during the pandemic, including securing JobKeeper payments so that financial support reached Australian households and small businesses.

They will stagger their departure from the ACTU with Sally McManus stepping down as ACTU Secretary at the end of August, while Michele O'Neil will stay on as ACTU President until later this year, to assist with the leadership transition.

The ACTU's union affiliates will decide on the next leadership team, initially with the ACTU Executive filling the casual vacancies and then through an election at next year's Congress, which will coincide with the ACTU's 100th Anniversary.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Secretary, Sally McManus:

"I am proud of our movement's achievements, and it has been an honour to serve the union movement and working people as the Secretary of the ACTU for nearly a decade. This is the right time to make way for new leadership to take our movement forward and to face new challenges.

"When I took on this role, workers' rights were under attack and workplace laws desperately needed fixing. I wanted to be part of turning that around. Unions are now growing and workers have extensive new rights that they can use to begin winning the pay rises and fairness at work they deserve.

"It is an absolute privilege representing working people and I've given it my all. Now I look forward to supporting new leaders stepping up. One of my favourite things has been meeting workplace union delegates in cities and towns across the country. They are the best people. Always looking out for others and bravely standing up for what's right. They live our values of solidarity and fairness for all."

Quotes attributable to ACTU President, Michele O'Neil:

"As the ACTU President, I've been proud to be part of a team leading a movement determined to win new rights for working people that make a real difference in the lives of workers and their families.

Every win we have achieved together has not been because of individuals but come as a result of workers standing together.

“When I was elected President, the challenge was clear, workers' rights were under attack, jobs and industries were being lost, insecure work was on the rise. Having the opportunity with our movement to campaign for and win change has been the honour of my life. Workers today are safer, have better rights, and more secure jobs. Unions are growing. I want to thank union members from all over our country for what you have taught me and your support, solidarity and courage.

“Sally and I have decided to announce our decision together and to stagger our leaving times, I will stay for a period between now and the end of the year to support the transition to the new leadership team. We are lucky, our movement is full of passionate, skilled, committed people and now is the right time for renewal and for the movement to choose their next Secretary and President.”

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