

Tuesday, 20 October 2026

Unions appoint new ACTU President-elect

The ACTU Executive has appointed Emma Kingdon, as the new President-elect of the ACTU, replacing Michele O'Neil who stands down in December after eight and a half years leading the movement with former ACTU Secretary, Sally McManus who stood down in August.

The ACTU Executive met on Tuesday to elect Emma Kingdon as the ACTU's next President-elect to take office from 1 December 2026, as part of the transition to the next generation of leaders.

Emma Kingdon, 38, is a former union organiser and campaign director, who grew up in a working-class family in Perth's outer-suburban Rockingham; where her father was a truck driver, a meter reader and a union delegate in the Pilbara, while her mother looked after children in local day care centres, followed by a career in TAFE.

Emma's first job was working in Rockingham's fast-food KFC outlet, where she was a proud member of the retail workers' union, the SDA, before becoming a union organiser with the United Workers Union and the Finance Sector Union.

At the United Workers Union in WA and NSW, Emma organised lower-paid, mainly women workers in sectors such as Early Childhood Education and Care and Aged Care. She supported them to achieve better recognition and higher pay, while defending their rights to take action, including locked out workers on picket lines in the aged care sector.

At the Finance Sector Union, she worked with Finance workers to build collective strength and hope to take on some of Australia's largest corporations. She pressed for fairer treatment of workers being made redundant at NAB, which saved jobs and livelihoods and led a successful campaign against the Westpac Banking Corporation planning to offshore local jobs from a regional call centre.

Emma worked at the ACTU for 10 years including as the ACTU's National Campaigns Director as part of the ACTU leadership team, driving union membership growth not seen in more than two decades. More workers, led by younger workers, are joining unions, as the means to securing better pay and stronger workplace rights.

For the last nine months Emma has been the Executive Officer of the CFMEU Administration, which is tasked with rebuilding the union as a clean, stable, effective union that looks after members' interests, including safety in an industry with the highest level of workplace fatalities.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Secretary, Melissa Donnelly:

"Emma Kingdon has been a grassroots union organiser representing workers in early childhood education and aged care to win higher wages in these low-paid sectors.

"Emma also dealt with some of the toughest corporate bosses in the major banks and has never left a negotiating table or a picket line without getting the best possible outcomes for her members.

"Emma is a highly experienced campaigner who led union campaigns that have protected and advanced workers' rights, helped to overturn bad workplace laws and has helped to boost union membership.

“She has also taken on hard challenges, including her work in the CFMEU Administration which is tasked with rebuilding the union free of the corruption and criminality that has taken hold in the construction industry.”

Quotes attributable to ACTU President, Michele O’Neil:

“Emma Kingdon is a highly effective and formidable union campaigner. She has represented workers across the private sector in industries as diverse as aged care and banking. Her deep understanding of the issues facing workers today, commitment to fairness and strategic mindset will be an asset for workers and their unions that have backed her to become the next President of the ACTU.

“I am confident that I am leaving the role of President in very good hands. The leadership team of Emma Kingdon and Melissa Donnelly represent a new generation of strong, smart, effective representatives of working people.

“Emma expects workers to be able to turn up to work and be treated with dignity and respect, get paid fairly and have safe and good working conditions. Working Australians should know they have a strong and determined advocate to fight in their corner.”

Quotes attributable to ACTU President-elect, Emma Kingdon:

“I come from a working-class family in Rockingham in WA and I get how hard it is to make ends meet and that is what drives me every day to see workers get ahead.

“What I’ve learnt is the power to change things, comes from us – working people sticking together. It is what has made our country great, when we put aside our differences and support each other, we win great things like Medicare, wage rises and our rights at work.

“Too many workers are having to look at their budgets and wondering what else they can cut because the system feels rigged when your pay can’t keep up with the cost of living. Across the country unions are building strength and winning on the things that matter. That’s why union members earn on average \$250 per week more.”

ENDS

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