



Australia's Federal Election: What In-house Counsel Need to Know

Employment and Labor

Environmental

Government



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Australia's federal election has delivered a sweeping victory for Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's Labor Party, with Albanese being the first Australian prime minister in 20 years to win re-election.

For in-house counsel serving businesses that operate in or have ties to Australia, the implications of this result merit careful attention.

A political landscape rebalanced

Albanese's victory over Peter Dutton's center-right Liberal Party was notable not only for its scale — Labor is expected to hold at least 85 of the 150 seats in the House of Representatives — but for the collapse of the conservative Liberal-National Coalition leadership. Dutton lost his own long-held Queensland seat to Labor challenger Ali France.

The election outcome mirrors recent shifts in other countries, including Canada, where progressive parties have gained momentum.

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What it means for in-house counsel

1. Regulatory continuity and stability

Albanese's re-election and commanding majority position him to drive legislative and regulatory reforms with minimal obstruction. For in-house counsel and legal teams, the risk of abrupt shifts in regulatory direction that often accompany leadership changes may be reduced. The risk of abrupt shifts in regulatory direction, which often accompany leadership changes, seems significantly reduced.

Action point: In-house counsel should anticipate the continuation — and potential acceleration — of Labor's policies on climate disclosures, ESG compliance, and corporate transparency. Existing frameworks should be reviewed to ensure alignment with anticipated developments, particularly in sectors such as energy, technology, and finance.

2. Trade and foreign investment outlook

Albanese's government has shown a commitment to pragmatic international engagement, particularly with key trade partners in the Asia-Pacific region. The election win gives the Prime Minister leverage to negotiate from a position of strength - even as global trade tensions persist, including in connection with paused — but not forgotten — US tariffs on Australian goods.

Action point: Legal teams managing foreign investment or cross-border trade should closely monitor the trade and regulatory implications of any bilateral developments, particularly with the US and China. Australia's Foreign Investment Review Board (FIRB) may take on greater assertiveness in reviewing deals that touch on national security or strategic industries.

3. Workplace relations and employment law

Labor has pledged reforms to strengthen workers' rights, improve wage growth, and address insecure employment. These issues are likely to receive priority attention in Albanese's second term.

Action point: Corporate legal departments should proactively review employment contracts, gig economy engagements, and enterprise agreements in anticipation of reform-driven changes. Cross-functional coordination with HR teams and external counsel will be critical.

4. Reputation management and ESG scrutiny

Regulatory bodies may take a harder line on greenwashing and other misleading practices.

Action point: In-house counsel should work closely with public affairs and sustainability teams to assess reputational risks and consider the potential need to strengthen ESG disclosures.

5. Government relations and lobbying

With a consolidated government, access to key decision-makers may become more centralized, and lobbying efforts may face tighter scrutiny, particularly around transparency and political donations.

Action point: Ensure that all government engagement activities are compliant with lobbying and

transparency laws. Consider potential needs to reassess advocacy and engagement strategies in light of the new administration's priorities and personnel.

Looking ahead

Albanese's re-election signals an end — at least temporarily — to the country's revolving-door leadership model. For legal departments, this presents a window of opportunity to invest in longer-term compliance strategies, build stronger relationships with regulatory agencies, and align corporate governance with the evolving legal and regulatory landscape.

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