

## Union membership 'in crisis'

THE ACTU has admitted union membership in the private sector is in crisis.

In an email widely circulated within the ACTU, assistant secretary Chris Walton urges his colleagues to concentrate on increasing union membership.

"Private sector membership is at crisis levels of 15.2 per cent," Mr Walton wrote.

"The ACTU must continue to drive the necessary changes and provide the necessary support to unions to achieve growth. There can be no greater priority."

Mr Walton admitted membership levels were only slightly stronger when the public service was counted. "Since 2000, membership has declined steadily. Our affiliation is currently 1.95 million. This represents 22.2 per cent of the workforce."

Mr Walton also warned his colleagues not to expect a "golden age" if Labor wins the next federal election.

"The greatest risk inherent in an ALP win is that unions put their feet on the table and slow down."

South Coast Labour Council secretary Arthur Rorris said low union membership reflected the impact of the Federal Government's workplace reforms.

"You've got to ask what that number actually demonstrates - it's a question of cause and effect," Mr Rorris said.

"There's no doubt that the ability of the union movement to help working families has been affected by WorkChoices legislation, and a symptom of that is lower membership.

"But the crisis is not that level of membership - the crisis is what's facing working families."