

Check on skilled migrants

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Immigration Minister Chris Evans has ordered his department to investigate the visa status of skilled migrants working on Woodside Petroleum's Angel gas project on the North-West Shelf of Western Australia after allegations of underpayment raised by the Australian Workers Union.

Senator Evans instructed his department to detail the employment conditions of workers whom the AWU alleges are being underpaid by multinational contracting company McDermott Industries.

The minister asked the Department of Immigration and Citizenship to provide him with a brief on the nature of the visas that the foreign workers are employed under and whether any concerns had been raised.

The Workplace Ombudsman's office confirmed yesterday it had

begun an investigation into allegations that McDermott Industries had underpaid one foreign worker on a temporary 457 skilled-migrant visa.

"We take these allegations extremely seriously and are investigating them as a matter of urgency," Commonwealth Workplace Ombudsman Nicholas Wilson said.

The investigation could be expanded to include other workers employed on the North-West Shelf if there was reason to believe there might be further breaches of workplace regulations, he added.

Inspectors from the Ombudsman's office have served McDermott Industries with a formal notice to produce documents that are relevant to the inquiry.

The 457 visa scheme has been dogged by allegations of rogue employers abusing workers brought in under the scheme.