

ACTU Congress briefing: A safe climate with good union jobs

Why it matters:

The world is facing a climate crisis. Australian workers know that we can be part of the solution, building new low carbon industries and creating good union jobs. But unlike many other countries Australia has no coherent climate or energy policy and no plan to support workers and communities as we reduce emissions across the economy. Under Federal Coalition Governments, Australia has been falling behind our allies and trading partners in responding to climate change, which presents a growing risk to Australian workers and industries as global markets demand low emissions goods and services.

Australian unions are stepping up to face the climate crisis, reducing emissions, creating new clean energy jobs, and on the frontlines fighting extreme weather like bushfires and floods. However for too long workers have been left out of Australia's climate policy debate. Voices representing workers in industries affected by climate change and climate policy responses need to be heard. The ACTU and Australian unions are committed to ensuring Australia leads on climate change and that the action we take is good for workers. We can create good, unionised jobs, reduce emissions and ensure workers and communities are strengthened by responses to climate change. That's why unions are leading and making the case for a safe climate with good union jobs.

Key facts:

- The world has already experienced 1.2°C of warming since the pre-industrial era, and warming is increasing by 0.2°C per decade¹. This level of warming is already unsafe and leading to significant increases in the frequency and intensity of climate-related disasters such as drought, flooding, bushfires and the loss of coral reefs globally.
- In 2016 the globally agreed Paris Agreement came into force. The Paris Agreement's central aim is to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change by keeping global temperature rise this century well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5°C.
- Under the Paris Agreement nations are expected to develop short and long term targets consistent with the Agreement's temperature targets. Globally there is increasing momentum for net zero emissions by 2050 targets. In addition, many of our allies and competitors have adopted targets to cut emissions by around 50% by 2030.
- Australia has not committed to net zero emissions by 2050 and the Coalition Federal Government's target to reduce emissions by 26-28% by 2030 is not consistent with Paris Agreement temperature targets.
- The Paris Agreement recognises the need for a just transition for workers and communities. 46 nations have committed to developing a national plan for a just transition. Australia has made no such commitment and has no plan to support workers and communities through the transition to net zero emissions.
- Australia is in the midst of a rapid energy transition that lacks national planning or oversight and is failing to deliver maximum benefits for workers and communities. The Federal Coalition Government's failure to develop and implement coherent energy policy has made Australia's energy transition more painful and less successful than it should be for workers and communities.

¹ <https://climate.nasa.gov/evidence/>

Australian Unions believe:

- It is in the best interests of Australian workers that Australia and the rest of the world act with urgency to reduce emissions and ensure a just transition in accordance with the Paris Agreement. Doing so will both reduce the damaging impacts of global warming and ensure that Australia is not left behind our trade partners and competitors as the world shifts to low emissions goods and services.
- Workers and their representatives' perspectives need to be heard by governments when they are developing climate and energy policy.
- Australia has lacked national leadership and policy on climate and energy since the Federal Coalition was elected in 2013. We need much stronger national leadership and policy from the Federal Government on this issue. Through public ownership, procurement policy, properly resourcing government departments and developing comprehensive industry policy, government has the levers it needs to decarbonize Australia's economy.
- As Australia develops low carbon industries, we need to ensure workers have the skills these industries need, and in some cases build on workers existing skills. This will require industry and workforce planning and training and ensuring we foresee, and act to address, any future skills shortages.
- Climate change will impact every sector of the Australian economy, and therefore we need sectoral plans developed by workers, government and business to plan and maximise the benefits of the shift to net zero emissions.

Action Plan 2021-25

Australian Unions will work together on the following priorities:

- Work with the international union movement to ensure that Australia joins the global community in adopting national emissions targets that are ambitious and based on science, and national policy and programs to achieve these targets in a manner which maximises the benefits, and minimizes any hardship created by the shift to net zero emissions.
- Establishing a national Energy Transition Authority to plan and coordinate retirement of Australia's coal-fired power plants; ensure workers at these facilities are trained and redeployed in secure, decent jobs and that there are no forced redundancies; and ensure that new jobs and industries are created in regions disproportionately impacted by the shift to net zero emissions.
- Ensuring that new low carbon industries such as renewable energy, recycling and environmental restoration are built on sustainable foundations by providing secure and safe unionised jobs with fair wages and conditions.
- Ensuring that Australia is at the forefront of industries that are emerging to solve the climate crisis such as hydrogen, green steel and renewable energy powered manufacturing and minerals processing, and that these industries are developed in a manner that creates secure, high quality jobs for Australian workers.
- Ensuring that workers voices and union perspectives are incorporated in climate and energy policy as it is developed by governments and business.
- Support workers to take collective action in their workplaces to minimize the workplace impacts of global warming, and to drive emissions reductions and environmental improvements in their workplace.