

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Unions: Delivering for all Working Australians

Speech delivered by ACTU President Sharan Burrow

to ACTU Congress 2009,

Brisbane Convention Centre, Tuesday, June 2, 2009

Introduction

Welcome to the 2009 ACTU Congress here in Brisbane.

Let me acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, the Yuggera peoples, and thank the elders past and present for their custodianship. We are honoured to have the representation of elders amongst us here this morning and privileged to have been welcomed to your country in such a magnificent way. The union legacy of a better Australia has and will continue to be won by tenacious dedicated people committed to a set of values and our resolve can only strengthened by the lessons you can teach us about historic struggle for justice. Your dignity, your wisdom, your willingness to forgive and live peacefully with the peoples of all other nations who make up Australia has our deep respect and our solidarity in return.

Let me thank up front the workers in this centre who will support our work over the next 3 days. We acknowledge your work, your union membership and contribution to a decent Australia.

So welcome Congress delegates and while I thank you all as the representatives who organize our workplaces, lead our unions or work to steer the ACTU through its Executive and Committees, it is the first time delegates I welcome in particular - for you will be our movement's future leaders. Stand up all those for whom this is their first ACTU Congress so we can acknowledge you.

Delegates, the world outlook is, in many ways, as bleak as at any time in our history and it demands our attention. Unions both nationally and internationally are committed to peace, peaceful coexistence and democracy, to social and environmental justice, to the eradication of poverty, to equality, and to economic security based on decent work.

We know we can make a difference in each of these essential priorities for the world.

The Global Financial Crisis is devastating the security and the aspirations of many workers throughout both developed and developing countries. The ravages of climate change is all too prevalent in the destruction of homes, infrastructure and livelihoods in the communities of our nations and those of our neighbours. For too many the reality or threat of conflict, ethnic cleansing, denial of democracy, religious intolerance and oppression, particularly for women, is still a daily reality.

The challenge is as always, to take on these threats and to see them off. We can and we will.

The success of the Your Rights at Work campaign

When we met three years ago, working Australians were experiencing the threat of WorkChoices. They were having their take home pay ripped off, losing overtime and penalty rates, being forced to sign individual contracts to secure a job and chaffing at the injustice of employers refusing to bargain collectively. Job security was smashed with the overwhelming majority of Australians losing their right to unfair dismissal.

Our building and construction workers were subject to this and much more. The impost of coercive powers that afford our brothers and sisters in the construction unions fewer rights than alleged criminals was a John Howard special. Compulsory interrogation, no representation, fines or jail for refusing to give names and details of safety or union meetings, powers that should not exist in any democracy, these are still with us. Shameful!

Workers' rights were under unprecedented attack from the Howard Government, and we were in the midst of a titanic struggle.

But the 'Your Rights at Work' Campaign was emerging as the challenger.

'Your Rights at Work' was the most successful union and community campaign in Australian history.

The real triumph came from the unity generated by the near universal Australian belief in a fair go for all – a basic belief in the Australian community for a collective approach and for standing up for and with each other.

It was these values that allowed us to unify workers and engage the broader community.

That engagement came in many forms. There was Tracy and all the other stories represented to the Australian community through the advertising and media campaign, massive mobilisation in community protests linked together by Sky broadcasts, the union leaders' tours to regional

centres and the infamous YRAW bus. The sheer visibility sustained with hundreds of street stalls, community forums, faith forums, presence at sporting events, door knocking, tens of thousands of one-on-one conversations and the magnificent effort on election day all worked to shift the vote.

And John Howard and his government were defeated; thrown out of office on the back of his obsession with Workchoices and his attempts to de-unionise Australia. The sweetest victory of all was like Stanley Bruce, same issue, same position, John Howard lost his seat. There is no question that in decades to come, historians will refer to the 2007 election as the 'Rights at Work' election.

We are very proud of all those who joined our army of orange shirts -- they became ubiquitous and unavoidable.

We are very grateful for the churches and numerous other community groups who stood up with us, supported YRAW, supported workers' rights.

WorkChoices wasn't about a more productive economy. It was about a vicious attack on the democratic rights of working people and their unions.

Enormous courage was shown by those who made a stand, often at the cost of their job.

They weren't just fighting for their own rights. Remember Andrew Cruikshank who was sacked for operational reasons from his job at Priceline, only to find his position re-advertised within weeks for \$25,000 less. He said:

"I became involved for my children's future, knowing that if I didn't take a stand my children might not have the kind of rights that they needed to move forward . . . You have got to take it on yourself and fight for others when you have got the opportunity."

We salute the courage and fortitude of people like Andrew Cruikshank, Annette Harris, Bernie Banton and many many many more and we thank them. Let me though thank Greg Combet,

Jeff Lawrence, all the TLC leaders, the community conveners and the union, TLC and ACTU campaign teams along with each of you for the inspirational work you did to take back a decent Australia.

There is no question that we still have work to do to overturn the Howard legacy and the deficit of rights for workers but there is also no question Australia is a vastly different country with the election of the Rudd Government.

The dignity for the nation of the long overdue apology to the stolen generations; finally the ratification of Kyoto and the chance for leadership as the world debates urgent action on climate

change in Copenhagen in December; an end to the punitive and soul-destroying treatment of asylum seekers; the ratification of the CEDAW [Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women] protocol and dignity for the rights of women; an advance in dignity for our pensioners; restored regard for our national institutions and for global forums and the beginnings of long overdue investment in nation-building economic and social infrastructure to pick out just a few advancements in just 18 months.

For working Australians we see the journey has begun to bring back respect for all of us in the Australian community and for our brothers and sisters internationally.

On July 1, the Fair Work Act will begin operation, re-establishing a decent safety net for all working Australians, restoring unfair dismissal rights, placing collective bargaining at the centre of industrial relations and restoring the powers of the independent umpire with Fair Work Australia. Is it the perfect law? No, but then we didn't write it!

Will we continue to argue and campaign for improvements where it falls short – of course.

Nevertheless, July 1, 2009, marks an historic day and the start of real rights for working Australians to freedom of association, representation and collective bargaining for which they will be better off. That is a direct result of union action.

We have more work to do on the rights front with the imperative to achieve the strongest possible OHS laws, genuine rights for 'independent contractors and an end to sham contracting arrangements, and without question the abolition of the obscenity of the ABCC. On both these matters Jeff Lawrence will say more and we will of course debate a course of action this week.

The challenge of the global financial crisis

Working Australians are also in the grip of another fight.

The global recession is well and truly on Australia's doorstep – part of a double crunch with climate change.

The Global Financial Crisis caused by extraordinary corporate greed is now a bitter crisis of unemployment.

The Global Financial Crisis is a tragedy, indeed a travesty.

It should never have been allowed to happen.

And it must never be allowed to happen again.

With unemployment predicted to rise to between 6 and 10% in Australia, jobs must be at the centre of our agenda this week along with workers rights and income security.

As we plan here for the defense of Australian workers and their families, we acknowledge the devastation for the 50 million workers or more workers who will lose their jobs and join those who are already unable to get work across the globe. Likewise we are angry that 200 million more people who will be forced in to extreme poverty, joining the 1.4 billion of our sisters and brothers who are already desperately trying to live on less than US\$2 dollars a day.

Indeed the anger of people around the world is growing.

This anger is understandable as more and more of the world's people realise that their jobs, their houses, the value of their pension funds have been stripped away by a crisis caused by greed and incompetence in the financial sector.

The message is loud and clear for our government, for the leaders of the G20, for all governments - there can be no *business as usual*.

There must be an end to unrestrained financial markets, the fraud of self-regulation and the greed and stupidity of our bankers and businesses leveraging massive profit from unconstrained debt.

The rampant free market must be buried - replaced with a more caring, more equitable society where people come first.

There must be strong role for government, for reform of regulation, for bank conditionality and responsible lending practices, for public services, for investment in infrastructure and jobs, for job security and for workers' rights.

Trade unions can say 'I told you so'. We have been warning for many years about the explosion in inequality, the growing gap between wages and profits, the increase in precarious employment, the rising debt levels for working families and the casino capitalism of a financial sector - including the instability generated by the dark side of private equity - a financial sector increasingly divorced from the real economy.

The shameful reality is that not only have there been no apologies and no jail sentences but outrageous multi-million bonuses are still being pocketed by the engineers who created a financial house of cards that toppled over and is now destroying the livelihoods and the homes of millions.

And there can be no doubt that the corporate world has lost its moral compass when CEOs are still taking home salaries many times the average wage, while at the same time closing factories and sacking workers or sending their jobs to even lower paying countries.

Indeed, some of the corporate cowboys who created this crisis are saying 'just bail us out' and leave it to the market! They are shamelessly still acting as if they still have a right to run the show.

To pick out just two of the shameful response in Australia – how can the CEO of the ANZ sleep at night knowing that he has survived because of taxpayer guarantees, continues to make serious profits but has sacked 500 workers and sent many of their jobs off shore; how can the CEO of Pacific Brands take home her salary while she sends 1850 workers and their families to the poverty of unemployment. Shame!

Well here's a news flash from working people across the globe, we do not intend to be silent about these atrocities because for the corporate cowboys and free-marketeers *the party is over!*

The double crunch with climate change

The Global Financial Crisis has demonstrated once and for all that unfettered markets don't work. They don't work for the economy, and they do nothing for workers and their families.

And the same unsustainable economic development has also rushed headlong down a path of environmental catastrophe, with climate change threatening the livelihoods of hundreds of millions of the world's people and whole communities in vulnerable continents like our own and many of our neighbours.

Global warming is the policy challenge of our time and the effects of climate change are being demonstrated right here in our neighbourhoods. With prolonged droughts, the tragedy of the unbelievably severe bushfires, the catastrophic floods and the intensity of cyclone activity we are witness to the devastation.

It is increasingly evident for Australians that climate change has profound economic and social consequences. Eleven of the last twelve years rank among the twelve warmest years on record since 1850. Continued greenhouse gas emissions at or above the current rates will cause further warming. Australia's ecosystems; cropping, forestry and livestock; water resources; public health; settlements; infrastructure; and weather will suffer consequences, increasing in severity, as the temperatures rise.

Australian unions reject the arguments put by the Liberal and National Parties that action on climate change will cost jobs – in fact the opposite is true. Climate change will create jobs. We

can and must take action to secure jobs in traditional industries with technology and processes that make them the best in their sector and therefore globally competitive as the cleanest producers in export markets. We can and must grow the new jobs associated with clean energy that will enable us to see up to a million new jobs within two decades. If we don't do this, we miss capturing our share of what could be a \$5 trillion global industry by 2030.

Our society, our environment and the economy are integrated and inseparable in any program of sustainable recovery from both the economic and the climate crisis.

Unions have a clear vision for a better Australia emerging from this crisis.

Jobs will not only be the number one priority. Good jobs, decent work with training and income security for working Australians will be priorities one, two, three, and four.

You will debate the priority measures this week and determine a plan for the future: jobs, jobs, jobs - with income security, workers' rights, a strong economy and a fair society.

The union response

The ACTU has been at the forefront of the push to protect jobs since the earliest signs that Australia would not be immune from the global financial crisis. We have argued for stimulus measures including a green new deal, proposed innovative ways of preserving jobs while retraining and re-skilling the workforce, and called for a set of national interest expenditure guidelines to give Australian industry a fair go in bidding for the billions of dollars of taxpayer funds to be spent on stimulus projects.

For many of us, memories of the recession of the early-1990s are still raw. Hundreds of thousands of young people saw their ambitions for the future delayed or abandoned, and many hundreds of thousands of older workers were prematurely left on the scrap heap.

Early and decisive action by the Rudd Government to stimulate the economy will moderate the impact of the GFC on Australia but there is still more unemployment to face as the devastation of the global impact buffets us. Last month's Federal Budget was unashamedly a jobs Budget. Together with the \$52 billion in two stimulus packages earlier this year the Government has moved to protect as many jobs as possible and with \$22 billion for infrastructure projects to also set Australia up for the recovery.

However the economic downturn has made it clear that major reforms are needed to improve the security of work in Australia.

Now is the time to look to major economic and social reform. At the top of this list is the need to reform social protection and social insurance.

In times of economic crisis, our national approach must be more sophisticated than simply laying people off. And we need to be ensuring that our workforce remains cohesive and skilled for competitive advantage in recovery.

We need an urgent solution to guarantee workers 100% of entitlements when a company goes broke but beyond this we need two areas of significant and structural reform.

1. The first is where production has been downsized due to a collapse in demand. The most productive measure is to keep workers in place with an eight or nine day fortnight and use the 'down days' for re-tooling and re-skilling. This sets the company up for a competitive advantage when the recovery comes and growth kicks back in and provides the workers with income security and up-skilling opportunities in the meantime.
2. The second is a reinvention of the social insurance base to guarantee a skilled labour force available for work in the recovery and to maintain workers income such that they don't lose the assets – their house and savings -- they have built up over decades of work.

Consider that if you are a worker who loses your job in Australia and have depleted your entitlements or been denied them then you fall to the unemployment safety net and risk losing your house or other assets because you can't continue to pay your bills. If you were in Germany, the government works with the company and provides compensation for income loss of 60-67 per cent of the last month's net wage for between six months and two years; Denmark provides compensation for income loss of 90% of pre-unemployment wage for up to four years; and South Korea provides a minimum of 90% of the base wage for between three and eight months.

Income security associated with training opportunities and employment support means everyone wins – new levels of security for workers, a continuous availability of skilled workers for employers and greater automatic stabilizers to offset the effect of downturns for the economy.

This level of security in these and other countries such as Sweden and the Netherlands stands in stark contrast to the fear of losing everything faced by Australian workers.

A new system of income protection and employment security that would transform Australian workplaces sits right up there with other major achievements like Medicare and superannuation. Can we afford such a reform? Yes - and we must. There are a number of models for payment and we will examine them all. It may even be that we can associate this social insurance guarantee with our ambition to raise superannuation levels.

But let's also be clear. In the interim as we seek to secure 100% of entitlements we will not simply accept GEERS as a get-out-of-jail free card for unethical employers who fail to make adequate provision – as they are required by law – for the entitlements of their loyal workforce. This is a crime, and employers cannot be allowed to get away with it.

And corporate law must be reformed to rank employee entitlements above secured creditors – that is, the big banks – in cases of insolvencies.

On the subject of income security for workers can I put firmly on the record that unions will oppose any moves to extend the age at which workers can gain access to their own superannuation contributions. We are pleased to have seen this ruled out by the Prime Minister.

When it comes to major reform for a better Australia, unions have never shirked the responsibility and we won't now.

We congratulate the Government for raising the Age Pension but remain concerned about the announcement to raise the age for accessing the pension from 65 to 67 years of age, particularly for those workers that cannot work the distance because of physical or mental incapacity. We equally recognize that many older workers will want to work longer and in more flexible patterns of work and call for consultation on the whole area of the transitions for employees to retirement.

Tackling climate change

Equally, central to our plan for the Australian economy is action on the climate change emergency. This is simply the biggest threat to our lives and our economy. To do nothing is not an option. To delay is not an option. Remember, as the ETU straightforwardly says, there are no jobs on a dead planet. Consider what we could achieve by 2030 if we act today.

Australia 2030 : A smart nation viewed by others as a model of sustainable enterprise, Australia can proudly tell the tale of transition to a low carbon future,

Facing the double crunch of the global financial crisis and the emergency of climate change in 2009, our nation forged a 'green new deal' to invest in recovery. It began a revolution in economic and social futures. Small steps became big ideas as 'insulate Australia' made our homes more comfortable and in the process began a national energy efficiency programme across both residential and commercial buildings that has stripped 30% of carbon emissions from our cities.

Dramatic action to bring Australian broadband speeds into the 21st century through the 'Ruddnet' met the 'smart grid' necessary for integration of renewable energy head-on and telecommunication companies and utilities providers gave birth to synergies that weren't even thought of. From left stage, a company called Better Place rolled out electric cars, saved the car

companies from their old technology platforms and ended the threat of blackouts from peak demand with the electricity stored in the millions of large car batteries integrated into the grid.

Public transport has been vastly expanded, is efficient and three parts cleaner with little residual reliance on fossil fuels.

Coal mining is still with us, but CCS – carbon capture and storage - is cleaning up its impact and all generators are vastly diversified with solar parks, renewable energy farms, new hydro and geothermal, all dancing together on the grid and managed by users relying on 'smart metering' to reduce both usage and cost.

Traditional EITEs – energy intensive, trade-exposed industries – are now world-competitive as co-generation from renewable energy sources powers steel, aluminum and cement production along with the communities that adjoin their sites. Funded by PPPs, these industries and the power companies in partnership have turned from crying profit risk and objection to promoting greener production. Decent secure work has been achieved.

Carbon trading is part of our economy but most Australian companies continue to add the profits from efficiencies to their annual reports.

Australia's inland communities are renewed ecosystems where soil sequestration has been so successful that legacy carbon has been stripped out of the atmosphere, brown coal and forestry waste through bio-char accepted as part of the solution with soils regenerated to guarantee more arable land. Our rural industries are an even larger part of the food bowl of the region. Forestry, too, is a renewed industry and the forestry wars are over with environment groups and forestry workers jointly leading policy debate concerning sustainability.

Best of all, the predictions of the ACF and the ACTU in 2008, that the green gold rush possible if we got the settings right would generate 800,000 new green jobs, has been outstripped and we are already at more than 1.2 million, allowing easy integration of displaced migrants into our workforce.

Likewise the water wars are also over as we lead the world in water saving and recycling technology born of the desperation of learning to share meagre resources.

Connected to the world, our scientists, designers, architects, green trades people, amongst other occupations, all work together to implement Australian know-how in other parts of the globe. We export products and services that are born of smart ideas and new manufacturing has produced three world-beating companies in bio-material production as we head towards a \$500 billion share of a \$5 trillion global green product market.

All Australians, proud of our achievements to date, are now holding their breath to see, despite having saved the Murray-Darling Basin and watched the miracle of the survival of Kakadu, if the mighty Barrier Reef can regenerate to its former glory – for, thanks to world co-operation beginning in Copenhagen in 2009 and to human ingenuity, the temperature increase has not risen above 2 degrees.

Is this vision of a better future possible?

It certainly is - but only if all politicians accept leadership from the Australian people who overwhelmingly know we must face this challenge and then translate it into the necessary investment -- in industry policy, research and development, skills and sectoral agreements, with the foundations of bold leadership toward a global deal in Copenhagen in December this year.

77% of Australians want politicians to pass the Government's Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) and get on with it. We must then see the Mandatory Renewable Energy Target MRET legislation passed and unions will work to get the industry policy in place that will drive new jobs in both renewable energy and the industries and services in the supply chain – steel, aluminium, manufacturing and much more.

But the Coalition says delay!

The need to invest in job security and recovery vs debt

But then where are the Liberals and Nationals on anything?

There are striking parallels between the warped thinking that led to WorkChoices and that which created the Global Financial Crisis.

Both were guided by an economic model of letting the markets rip.

This has seen mass privatisations, irresponsible tax cuts, deregulation of financial markets, and – most relevant to us – the unwinding of our industrial relations system.

Indeed, Work Choices was their final pinnacle. Business had the freedom to sack people at will, to slash wages and conditions through individual contracts, to prevent workers from having any kind of collective bargaining or union representation.

Well, they got what they wanted. And as we stand here today, scanning the mess left behind, who is better off?

And yet big business continued to ask for more: more deregulation, less government intervention, lower taxes. And the Howard government was happy to acquiesce.

Between 1990 and 2005, the average CEO in an Australian top 50 company saw their pay rise by 564% - or 13.5% a year - to \$3.4 million, while average full-time earnings rose by 4.2%. Today, CEOs earn 63 times the average worker. And these figures do not include the outrageous bonuses and golden handshakes pocketed by CEOs. Is anyone really worth \$30 million?

We've seen company profits skyrocket to record levels in the boom years, but workers did not share in the good times. This is a trend that accelerated under the Howard Government.

And those at the bottom of the wages tree – minimum wage-dependent workers – have watched their real incomes decline in proportion to the rest of the workforce. In 1981, the minimum wage was 81% of average earnings; today it is about 56%.

Malcolm Turnbull and his team are bordering on the hysterical about debt with no alternatives. The choice is simply debt or jobs? They would, it seems, simply throw working Australians and their families to the wolves.

This is the Coalition's response? It refuses to see the structural deficits in its own policies and now simply opposes both investment in jobs and action on climate change.

Government debt in Australia is very low relative to other countries where the average for the developed economies is around 80%. Now while we wouldn't want that, let's take a calm look at this question amidst all the noise. Debt has averaged around 7.2% for the last 30 years and in the recession of the 1980's peaked at 18.5%. In the recession of the 1990's it peaked at 10.5% but we saw little action on jobs for several years and reaped the unfortunate consequences. This is the worst global crisis since the Depression and we will see debt peak at 13.5% around 2014.

What **we** know is that if a family could secure a future by investing around 14% of their income for less than 15 years and service that debt at a fraction of their disposable income then they would think that was an extraordinarily good deal. So too is it for our country.

Then there is the hypocrisy of the Liberal-National Coalition in denying their deficit. Let's have a look at the Liberal deficit. In a word neglect – neglect of our schools, the shameful skills deficit and thus neglect of our VET and university sectors hospitals, aged care, childcare, public transport, port, road and rail infrastructure and more - the massive deficit of investment in social and economic infrastructure left behind by more than a decade of Coalition Government that squandered the boom years.

In fact the Coalition preoccupation with zero debt oversaw a collapse in skills and productivity. What a terrible record to leave multi-factor productivity down from 1.4% pa in the 80's and early nineties to only 0.9% and less since the introduction of Workchoices. The stuff of job creation and

wealth slashed on their watch while skills languished and debt was simply transferred to working Australians who are now drowning in it.

The impoverished hemorrhaging of jobs or a manageable debt through investment to secure a future – we'll take the investment path Mr Turnbull.

Conclusion

Before closing let me congratulate all the women; women through two generations and the men who supported us to achieve the historic victory for Paid Maternity Leave.

For three decades we have campaigned for paid parental leave as a standard entitlement, and while it is a great credit to the unions that over the years have successfully bargained for the inclusion of paid parental leave in many collective agreements, it is your determination to stand up for all women that marks this as a legacy piece for all daughters and granddaughters and their partners.

The smart employers have realised that paid maternity leave as a means of attracting and retaining good staff is a no-brainer.

But that has left many hundreds of thousands of women each year – usually those in low-paying or less secure jobs – without any entitlement to paid leave during the important early weeks with their baby.

Finally we have a commitment to an 18-week, universal paid maternity leave scheme from January 1, 2011 and a review to which we can campaign for improvements. This entitlement sits right up there for Australian union achievements with the 8 hour day, annual leave, sick leave and other entitlements that ensure dignity of work

As always, our work does not end there. We have to hold the Government to this commitment to ensure that it is implemented.

And we will be bargaining to build on the taxpayer-funded scheme.

Our priorities will be to have employers top up the government scheme to full income replacement, to extend it to 26 weeks, to require employers to continue contributing 9% to superannuation while women are on paid leave, and the introduction of two weeks paid leave for the secondary carer.

This momentous achievement for paid maternity leave is a tribute to all the thousands of women and union activists who have worked incredibly hard to get here.

And we will also be vigilant to make sure that those employers who already provide paid parental leave do not scrap their own schemes, but instead add the government scheme onto theirs.

This is unions at their best. This is what we do: stay the distance to deliver for all working Australians.

Unions remain the most broad based democratic movement in our society— almost 2 million workers and their families – and our breadth of interest reflects our membership.

Consider the range of policies to be debated over the next few days: the global financial crisis, climate change, income security and social insurance reforms, justice for indigenous Australians, tax and social security, democracy and participation, social inclusion, health, education, retirement incomes and much more.

Unions have a legitimate and fundamental role at the centre of every public debate in this country. Your Rights at Work demonstrated the enormous latent groundswell of support for our values. Our task is to build on this support to ensure that the voices of working Australians are heard. We will do politics differently as a result.

Barack Obama understands the role unions play and in one of his first public statements after his inauguration in January he said.

Our task is to put the rights and interests of working Americans at the centre of our economy and our society and in the process create a more equal, more democratic, more just and more tolerant society.

“I do not view the labour movement as part of the problem,” he said.

“To me, and to my administration, labour unions are a big part of the solution. We need to level the playing field for workers and the unions that represent their interests. We know that strong, vibrant, and growing unions can exist side by side with strong, vibrant and growing businesses. This is not an either-or proposition between the interests of workers and the interests of shareholders.”

The GFC has brought home the lesson that you sideline the views of working people at your peril. For the past decade, here in Australia and around the world, big business, corporate greed and Wall Street funny money dominated all the seats at the table to the exclusion of working people.

Because there was no alternative voice, free markets reigned. And the result is the worst economic crisis in a generation.

The lesson is stark.

With your commitment unions will continue to play their part in delivering a prosperous and more egalitarian Australia for all.

Unions are the voice of working Australians. We are legitimate. We are essential. We are optimistic. We are here to stay.

We will build on the achievements and the lessons over the past three years. Let's look back with pride but look forward with determination.

Solidarity and thank you.