

Environment and Climate Change

Developments since Congress 2009

In 2009, the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) Bill was drafted by the Labor Government to reduce Australia's carbon pollution emissions by up to 25 per cent of 2000 levels by 2020 in line with concerted international action. The Bill failed, after two attempts, to pass through the Parliament.

Following the 2010 election, negotiations proceeded on a carbon price package between the Government, key independent parliamentarians and representatives of the Green Party. In November 2011, the Clean Energy Future Package was legislated. It is an emissions trading scheme that introduces a carbon price in Australia from 1 July 2012. The Clean Energy Future package also:

- Provides \$9.2 billion in assistance to emissions intensive trade exposed industries while competing economies do not have a comparable carbon price;
- Provides assistance to 90 per cent of households, including assistance that exceeds the cost impact of the carbon price to 66 per cent of households via tax cuts and/or payment increases;
- Establishes a \$10 billion Clean Energy Finance Corporation to invest in the commercialisation and deployment of renewable energy, energy efficiency and low pollution technologies;
- Allocated \$1.2 billion to a Clean Technology Program designed to help improve energy efficiency in manufacturing and support research and development in low pollution technologies; and
- Increases Australia's emissions reduction target to an 80 per cent reduction in emissions (below 2000 levels) by 2050.

Other countries are also taking decisive action on climate change:

- The number of countries with renewable energy targets has doubled to 118;
- Carbon prices are already legislated in countries covering around 567 million people and a further 900 million people will be covered in 2015 when schemes commence in China and South Korea; and
- Globally, investment in clean energy technologies is over \$980 billion and now exceeds investment in traditional power generation.

Internationally, the negotiations on a global agreement have progressed. In 2010, governments recognised the need to take action that minimises the rise of the earth's temperature to 2°C, in order to reduce the impact of climate change. In 2011, governments made progress in negotiating an international agreement to reducing carbon emissions that for the first time will cover both developed and developing countries.

Key Issues

This policy demonstrates that Australian unions accept the global consensus that climate change is real and urgent action is needed to reduce carbon emissions. Without action, the rise in temperatures and change in weather patterns will have a significant impact with serious implications for all countries including Australia.

Furthermore, the cost of delaying action on climate change is far higher than the cost of taking action to reduce emissions now. That is why this policy reaffirms the commitment by Australian unions to support decisive action to reduce emissions, improve energy efficiency, expand renewable energy capacity, and rapidly develop low carbon technologies.

Acting on climate change is consistent with job creation. Research commissioned by the ACTU (in collaboration with the Australian Conservation Foundation) found at least 770,000 extra jobs can be created across the economy and country by 2030 if we take strong action now to reduce emissions. This included a price on carbon pollution and complementary measures including industry policies.

In 2011, Australian unions strongly supported the introduction of a carbon pollution price and complementary measures as an important first step in taking action to address climate change.

During the development of the package, unions focused on ensuring that the package was fair, equitable, and sustainable; and most importantly supports workers to attain safe, secure and rewarding employment in the move to a low carbon economy.

In our view, the Clean Energy Future package achieves these objectives. It provides for:

- Job protection, particularly in emissions-intensive trade exposed industries during the period of adjustment;
- Investment in clean energy technology and innovation and the creation of new jobs and industries; and
- Assistance to the majority of households in meeting costs associated with the introduction of the scheme.

Agenda 2012 – 2015

This policy focuses on maximising decent work opportunities while reducing Australia's emissions through the implementation of the Clean Energy Future package.

The Clean Energy Future package will drive significant investments in the clean energy economy. Much of the fabrication work and machinery and equipment production is or can be done in Australia, and by traditional manufacturing firms. This policy advocates a range of measures to drive local manufacturing and associated jobs in the clean energy economy.

The Clean Energy Future package includes a tender process to close 2000 megawatts of emissions-intensive coal-fired generation capacity by 2020. Unions are committed to supporting workers and communities in regions where closures will occur. This policy calls for well-designed region planning that includes economic diversification plans, training and support for workers to transition, and consultation with communities and trade unions throughout the restructure.

Unions recognise that a significant investment in training is needed to equip workers with the skills needed in a low carbon economy. This policy calls for a significant increase in skills and training investment including training to Indigenous workers who can engage in projects to improve energy efficiency and secure reliable power supplies in remote areas.

All workplaces have a role to play in reducing emissions. This policy views workers as important advocates for climate action in the workplace and aims to empower workers to participate in climate action.