

Friday 28 April 2023

Liddell closure underlines need for National Energy Transition Authority

As the Liddell Power Station in Muswellbrook, NSW, closes its doors today after 50 years in service, the ACTU acknowledges the impacted workers, their families and communities, and again calls for a National Energy Transition Authority to ensure no one is left behind in the nation's transition to net zero emissions.

For 50 years, the workers at Liddell have powered NSW, and the power station provided hundreds of long-term, skilled jobs and supported local communities. Some 300 jobs are affected by the closure, with about half the workers transferring to the nearby Bayswater power station. Others will retire, some are taking voluntary redundancy, and a few are staying on for decommissioning processes.

The Liddell closure has seen the Mining and Energy Union negotiate with owners AGL to ensure no worker faced a forced redundancy, but other closures throughout Australia have not been well planned or managed. Between 2013 and 2020, 11 coal-fired power plants closed with an average notice time of just four months. At least seven more are due for closure between now and 2030. So far there is little or no transition planning for affected workers and their communities.

An independent, statutory National Energy Transition Authority would coordinate across government departments and industry, and consult with workers to develop comprehensive support packages that include pooled redundancy and employment schemes, education and training, income replacement and retirement plans.

Such an authority would also help establish and fund place-based economic diversification plans to bring new industries into energy-generating regions, along with the resources that will enable regional communities not only to participate in but lead the new renewable energy economy.

A National Energy Transition Authority is vital to support those who keep Australia's lights on, and to help them build a sturdy bridge to a thriving future.

Quotes attributable to ACTU President Michele O'Neil:

"The ACTU commends the generations of workers at Liddell for their important contribution in powering our country. A National Energy Transition Authority is so important in the upcoming federal budget so future closures are fair and equitable. A just transition plan is urgent and critical.

"An independent, statutory National Energy Transition Authority will ensure the shift to renewable energy happens with workers, not to them, and delivers good jobs and economic opportunity.

"Done properly, the transition to net zero, along with investment in renewable energy, can create hundreds of thousands of good jobs, support healthier and more equitable communities, and generate a renewed national prosperity. We cannot leave this to the market. A just transition plan is crucial for workers and their communities, such as those around the Liddell power station, who are living through the impact of change."

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