

AI Plan puts workers at the centre

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Australian Unions welcome the Albanese Government's announcement of a National AI Plan containing clear recognition of the need to put working people's rights, wages, conditions, and jobs at the centre of the future roll-out of AI technology.

The National AI Plan clearly outlines the need for a strong worker voice through meaningful consultation and its commitment to ensuring that workers' rights are fit for purpose to deal with the widespread misuse of AI currently underway in many sectors.

Despite the many promises by large multinational tech companies, so far AI has done little to improve the quality of working conditions for most Australians.

Instead, too many big businesses have seized on AI technology to try and replace workers and to intrusively monitor their employees by placing them under Orwellian levels of surveillance.

AI technology has also been deployed to impose dehumanising engineered standards to workflows adding to the intensity of job demands, including in warehousing, finance, transport and elsewhere.

The use of generative AI has also been trained on the theft of creative works without the consent or proper remuneration for creative workers, including journalists, artists, musicians, and others. This type of AI misuse threatens the Australian ethos of a 'fair go' for working people in times of transition.

The National AI Plan will play an important role in ensuring that workers' rights are not sacrificed in the pursuit of profits by multinational tech companies and big business.

Unions welcome the National AI Plan's strong commitments to protecting workplace rights and ensuring that any productivity benefits are fairly shared with workers.

Unions also support the National AI Plan's emphasis on ensuring workers get training and skills support to take advantage of this new technology, including through the new AI Safety Institute that will help ensure AI and other technologies are fully compliant with Australian law and do not undermine fairness and our quality of life.

Comments attributable to ACTU Assistant Secretary, Joseph Mitchell:

"The Albanese Government's National AI Plan has workers' rights at its heart – and this is vital.

"Unions welcome the Government's commitments to ensuring our workplace laws are fit for purpose in the AI age, that meaningful consultation with workers takes place over the introduction of AI, and employers back their workers in by providing training and skills development.

"Workers aren't afraid of AI but are rightly sceptical about letting it go unchecked, especially when the technology has already been used by big business to undermine wages, conditions, and to wipe out jobs.

"Creative and media workers have had their work stolen by large multinational tech companies with no payment. This isn't fair and fails the pub test big time.

"Workers are tired of being told by large tech companies that AI will bring improvements in the far distant future, when our rights and our jobs are under threat right now.

“The AI Safety Institute will play an important part in holding tech companies accountable for the products they are developing and ensuring they comply with all Australian laws before being placed on the market.”

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