media release

Tuesday, 10 November 2026

Unions strongly welcome PM's AI safety regulator and regulation

Australian Unions strongly welcome the Prime Minister's announcement today that the Albanese Government's world-leading AI Standards legislation will include mandatory AI protections and a dedicated AI regulator to enforce them.

This further consolidates the Albanese Government's global leadership on digital safety regulation.

Since 2024, Australian Unions have been calling for appropriate regulatory protections to keep working Aussies safe from the risks and harms of AI. Unions have been clear that such protections need to be legislated and backed by an empowered regulator.

AI needs to be developed, deployed and trained in the interests of working people and on our terms. The union movement has strongly argued that such regulatory protections must be a precondition of AI frontier training in Australia.

This must be backed by a strong regulator that can enforce significant penalties on these companies for non-compliance. The recent Medicare breach is ample evidence we can't trust these companies to regulate themselves.

This action is vital. Made even more so given that today, Qantas has announced 850 jobs will be cut and outsourced as the company accelerates its use of AI. This comes off the back of sackings at NAB, ANZ and Canva.

It is vital that workers' rights are fit for purpose from not just the development of this technology, but also the harmful deployment of AI by some big companies who are using it to cut jobs, intensify work, and degrade job quality.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Assistant secretary, Joseph Mitchell:

"The Albanese Government is a world-leader in digital protections, and that has been further demonstrated by today's announcement of AI safety regulation and an AI safety regulator. Unions have campaigned for greater regulatory protections since 2024 to keep working Aussies safe. We congratulate the PM on his decisive action.

"The Medicare breach shows we can't trust these large AI companies to do the right thing. The tech bros want us to believe that we, as a country, are powerless. But we are not; we absolutely can take the action to protect our rights and the fair go, and we congratulate Prime Minister Albanese for his strong action in this direction.

"Australians don't trust AI because of the lack of clear benefit for working people. We have had big promises, but so far, no guarantee that any benefits will be shared with workers. All workers have experienced is risks to our security and to our rights at work.

"But the job is not yet done. While these regulations will keep us safe from the risks posed by the development of these large AI models, workers are still exposed to significant risk from the big companies that want to use this technology to undermine our jobs, just as Qantas announced they will do to 850 workers today.

“We need to make sure workers’ rights are fit for purpose, and workers have genuine protections against job displacement and against bosses using AI for intrusive monitoring and surveillance to undermine the quality of work to make a quick buck, and for decisions that shape our working lives.”

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