media release

ACTU
australian council of trade unions

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Unions welcome new Parliament report calling for AI worker protections

Australian Unions welcome today's report by Parliament's Joint Select Committee on Artificial Intelligence and its recommendations that show the urgent need for action to protect workers' rights from harmful AI usage by employers.

The report recommends that the Federal Government encourage employers to consult workers early and genuinely about their AI adoption plans. This is particularly important given the spate of recent announcements by major corporations citing AI as a reason to cut jobs. Union members told the Committee that some employers fail to provide basic transparency and consultation before adopting AI systems that impact their workforce.

The Committee also recommends further examining whether existing laws adequately protect workers when employers use AI for workplace surveillance and automated decision-making. It also calls for action to ensure legal frameworks hold employers accountable for deploying AI agents and investing in skills and training support for workers.

Australian Unions also welcome the Committee's recommendation that the government implement a licensing framework for AI infrastructure standards. Unions have consistently argued that Data Centre developments must bring new renewables online, not drain energy grids, drive up working people's energy prices, monopolise land that should be used for housing, siphon off water supplies, or railroad local communities and their interests.

Unions and Australia's leading AI experts have been pressing for enhanced national investment in Sovereign AI capability to reduce reliance on US tech giants and to keep jobs and economic benefits flowing to Australians. The Committee recommendations are a positive step in this direction, but more is still to be done to ensure AI delivers genuine benefit to Australia and Australian workers, not just large US tech multinationals.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Secretary, Melissa Donnelly:

"Unions have been campaigning for years to ensure work rights are fit for purpose in the age of AI and we have regulatory protections to keep Australians safe. Working people need to know that their rights will be protected from the harmful use of AI by big employers, that they will have genuine skills and training support, and will genuinely share from any benefits.

"The stark reality right now is that workers have been exposed to all the risks of AI without gaining the benefits. Time and again, we have had big employers invoking AI while making jobs cuts, undermining conditions, intensifying work, and intrusively monitoring and surveilling workers.

"The recommendations of this Committee are a step in the right direction to ensure the rights of workers and the interests of the community are protected. Workers around Australia now want to see these recommendations taken up by government and regulators, and for employers to start doing the right thing.

"This is why it is so important that this Joint Select Committee has recommended further action to ensure workers' rights are fit for purpose and the fair go is being protected. The Committee is absolutely

right that we need to manage the risk of AI. This includes the risks posed by big employers in Australia who want to use AI to undermine hard-won working rights and conditions.

“Unions back our members in creative industries absolutely and 100%. We will never accept any changes that undermine their control over their work and right to fair payment for it. The theft by large AI companies of creative works is just that, theft, and it is about time they paid for it.”

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Media Contact: Cameron Warasta (0447) 159 467