



TRANSITION FROM CRISIS

Union Action Strategy

Victorian Trades Hall Council's Just Transition & Economic Recovery Strategy

Statement from the Secretary

When we started to prepare this strategy, Victoria was in the grip of a bushfire crisis of unprecedented scale. No sooner had the fires been extinguished than COVID-19 entered the margin of our consciousness, at first as an deadly virus causing problems in China. Since then, it has broken its geographic bonds and gripped the world in a pandemic and everything has changed. The measures implemented to deal with the crisis have been unprecedented but necessary, with a phenomenal reduction in economic activity to save lives.

On top of the bushfire and climate crisis came a public health threat that led to an economic downturn the likes of which we have never experienced. Even the Great Depression is of limited comparison, although many governments have learned at least one lesson since then (a lesson many didn't understand during the Global Financial Crisis): don't respond to such a crisis with austerity; spend quickly and spend big.

The most important lesson from the COVID-19 crisis is that it is only governments that have the scale, authority and financial capacity to respond to challenges of this size. The scale of the fiscal response to COVID-19 shows that, when a government takes a problem seriously and commits to dealing with it, the finances to get the problem fixed can be found and the spending is supported by the general population. The implications for action on climate change are obvious. The fact that governments have not acted at sufficient speed and scale to deal with the climate crisis is not a matter of lacking the resources – it is lacking political will.

The trauma, disruption and dislocation caused by COVID-19 are unprecedented outside of war time. The response, with its restrictions of civil liberties and suppression of economic activity, has been necessary, proportionate to the threat, and largely accepted by the population. The deep irony is that acting proportionately to deal with climate change would require none of those infringements of liberties and would produce an economic transformation that would leave Victorians better off.

Hence this strategy is not simply for a just transition but for an economic recovery and the reconstruction of Victoria. In the period of recovery, after COVID-19 has been brought under control, we must learn the lessons from the virus response, continue to mobilise the resources we need, build on the incredible growth in community spirit and mutual aid, and get to work to deal with climate change with a determination that is based on hope and necessary action for a better world. COVID-19 has shown us what we can achieve if we want to change, as it has shown how much of our previous world was, beneath the superficial gloss, deeply broken. We can't return to the old normal after COVID-19; we owe that much to ourselves and each other.



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Luke Hilakari'.

Luke Hilakari
Secretary
Victorian Trades Hall Council

About Victorian Trades Hall Council (VTHC)

VTHC is the peak body representing workers and unions across Victoria. We represent over 430,000 workers and 40 affiliated unions, covering all sectors of the economy, both public and private.

Acknowledgement of Country

Victorian Trades Hall Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung of the mighty Kulin nation as the traditional owners of the land on which we live, meet and work. This land was stolen and never ceded, always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

Just transition efforts by unions nationally and globally



Large numbers of unions, union peak bodies, climate and climate justice organisations, NGOs, financial organisations, as well as governments and international bodies, particularly those under the UN umbrella, have released reports with a focus on the just transition.

Without analysing each of the individual documents listed here, it is possible to summarise key recurring themes:

- There should be a fair distribution of the costs of transition across the whole of society;
- Putting workers at the centre of the transition to a sustainable economy is essential to making the transition successful;
- There will be more jobs created in the transition to a sustainable economy than will be lost as fossil fuel industries close;
- New jobs in sustainable industries are not automatically better jobs than those in fossil fuel industries. Concerted government, business and union efforts need to be made to ensure that secure, well-paid jobs are not replaced with casual, low-paid and low-skill work;
- Government investment and planning are essential to ensure that transitions give priority to affected workers, and overcome the market failures that are inhibiting the transition and leaving communities worse off;



- Active government policies to support redeployment, create new jobs, provide income support and training to affected workers are vital;
- Support for economic diversification of carbon-intensive regions is important;
- Good communication with unions and workers is critical as unions are key to ensuring justice for workers in the transition, and labour rights are fundamental to any just transition strategy;
- Public ownership of renewable energy should be a component of the new energy mix;
- Improved social safety nets are needed to reduce poverty and risks across transitioning societies;
- Climate change represents a serious OHS risk to many workers;
- Climate change is an international problem requiring international solutions and solidarity;
- Coordinating bodies, such as just transition authorities, have been established in various parts of the world to coordinate public and private sector activities; and
- Policies need to take account of the gender dimension of climate change and just transition.

Our strategy

Our just transition and economic recovery strategy involves several different strands from workplace organising and delegate training to policy advocacy.

Electric
drive

INDUSTRY PLANNING & POLICY ADVOCACY

Industry planning should be tripartite, involving government, unions and employers. **The following industry plans are needed:**

- Low-carbon manufacturing industry plan, including a Victorian green metals industry plan;
- Green hydrogen, vital to the decarbonisation of metals manufacturing and will also be important to the decarbonisation of other industries, electricity generation and transport;
- Electric vehicle plan, including manufacturing, incentives for purchase, charging infrastructure, grid integration. It should be noted that many types of electric vehicles will be necessary, not just passenger cars, the domestic manufacture of which Australia has allowed to end. Commercial vehicles of various types could be manufactured in Victoria, as is proposed by SEA Electric in the Latrobe Valley;
- Cement production plan, vital to the decarbonisation of the construction industry;
- Ecosystem recovery and preservation plan, including reforestation and tree planting, ecosystem repair (especially after fires)
- Unlike the Victorian Forestry Plan, a genuinely tripartite plan for Victorian timber communities

based on the principles of just transition for workers impacted due to changing resource availability, including fair transition support compensation and worker retraining packages; and sustainable development for communities including ongoing sustainable native forest management, viable growth of the plantation estate and economic diversification.

- Public transport plan, vital to the decarbonisation of the transport sector. Planning should take into account regional as well as metropolitan public transport needs, as well as whole-of-supply chain needs, including for vehicle manufacture; and
- Growing the cooperative sector of the economy, with particular support for those union-based cooperatives already operating, including Earthworker Energy, Cooperative Power and Redgum Cleaning Cooperative.

Procurement policies are vital to improve industry development and employment opportunities in Victoria, while the state government can use its policy initiatives to guide industry development more broadly. State and federal governments should commit to direct investment and job creation in regions undergoing transformation.



TRAINING THE WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE

The Plumbing and Pipe Trades Employees Union (PPTU) understands challenges associated with climate change and was the leading force in the creation of the Plumbing Industry Climate Action Centre (PICAC). PICAC is a national non-profit network of training hubs delivering vocational skills to transform the built environment to adapt to climate change, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and create new jobs.

Since 2008, PICAC has trained and upskilled over 10,000 apprentices and working professionals in the plumbing, gas, fire protection, heating and ventilation industries. PICAC is a unique collaboration of all key industry participants where employer and employee representation combine, ensuring industry needs are met through cost-effective, industry-relevant, trade skill-specific high quality training.

The first training facility opened in Brunswick, with the primary purpose to provide courses in Green Plumbing, in order to address the skills shortage in sustainability within the industry at the time. Since then PICAC has evolved and now offers courses supporting the entire career life cycle of plumbing, ranging from pre-apprenticeship and Certificate III courses through to a range of Certificate IV and post trade courses.

Through this evolution and expansion, PICAC has become the premier Centre for Excellence in training for the plumbing and pipe trades. Our Narre Warren campus is the first net-zero education and research facility in Victoria. It will generate all energy required to support the operation of the building on site through the incorporation of several renewable energy technologies. The Narre Warren facility is shared by PICAC and the International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials (IAPMO). IAPMO are one of the world's leading plumbing product certification agencies, and the site houses IAPMO Oceania's new research centre and product testing laboratories.

PPTU members and the plumbing industry as a whole benefit from sharing the facility with IAPMO as innovation and evolving technologies can be identified quickly as they progress through the IAPMO certification process.

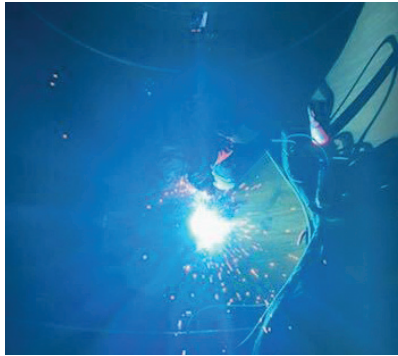
The PPTU is also active in the area of equipping the plumbing and pipetrades workforce to unlock the future of safe and renewable hydrogen. PPTU is leading the way in Queensland to assist industry to address the hydrogen trade skills shortage by creating a Hydrogen Centre of Excellence at our PICAC campus at Beenleigh, Queensland. The only one of its kind in Australia, the centre will train industry and give PPTU members the skills required to deliver the Queensland government's hydrogen and green future plan. The centre will consist of world-class training areas, with separate zones where vocational training is undertaken safely on regulated supplies of hydrogen.



GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

Just as the energy generation and use systems that we have inherited from the 19th and 20th centuries need overhaul to deal with the challenges of the 21st, we need to create new governance structures to guide the transformation of the economy to a zero-carbon future. Some possible ideas are listed below:

- First Nations people need to be consulted on planning for location of infrastructure and industries, and to be given priority in training, education and employment opportunities in new industries. Consideration must be given to First Nations people in communities undergoing transition from reliance on carbon-intensive industries. The autonomy and financial independence of First Nations people's organisations can be strengthened by partnerships between government and those organisations in decentralised renewable energy generation. First Nations people's land-use and care practices offer many important insights for the care of country;
- The Latrobe Valley Authority (LVA) has been important to managing the effects on the Latrobe Valley of the closure of electricity generation infrastructure and other industrial restructuring. The Authority should be retained while the restructuring of the Valley continues, to assist with the eventual full closure of all coal-fired power stations. Further, similar transition authorities should be established in all other regions of the State, coordinated by a state level Just Transition and Economic Recovery Authority. Expansion of the LVA to play the central coordinating role for the regional authorities could be considered. Whatever the eventual structure, the fundamental requirement is for coordination of the various government departments and agencies with an interest in the social and economic transformation necessary to achieve decarbonisation goals;
- Similar to CleanCo in Queensland, Victoria should have a government-owned renewable energy generator focused on boosting the amount of renewable energy available while ensuring that energy is affordable and jobs in the generation industry are secure and well paid;
- Worker representatives on company boards have been important to better transition processes in Germany, and to the overall functioning of workplaces. Improving worker and union representation in company management structures would allow greater workplace democracy, harness the ideas of workers, increase productivity and facilitate longer-term planning for just transitions; and
- Investigate opportunities in deliberative democracy, including local, regional and state-level citizen juries and other such processes to engage citizens in the work of society-wide transformation.



JAMIE WOMBELL RENEWABLE ENERGY WORKER

Jamie Wombwell has worked as a mechanic and welder for 25 years. For the last five years, he's worked in the renewable energy industry for Keppel Prince Engineering who are at the centre of wind turbine production.

Jamie is a union delegate for the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU), which he says has been crucial in ensuring workers at Keppel Prince have secure jobs.

When he was offered work in the renewable energy industry, he says he never looked back.

"I look at the way the world is going with pollution, climate change and everything else. We have to do better. I want to leave the world as clean and as safe for my children, my grandchildren, and my great-grandchildren as I possibly can."

Jamie says his union has been crucial in the work to ensure renewable energy targets are pursued and met and that working people are prioritised in doing this.

Jamie lives with his partner and five children in the rural Victorian town of Portland, a town with just over 10,000 people.

Keppel Prince is the second largest employer in Portland, close behind Alcoa.

Job creation is crucial for rural communities and Jamie says the Victorian Government has been leading the way in Australia with a target of ensuring that by 2030, 50 per cent of energy production in the state is via renewable sources.

In October 2019, the government passed new legislation to boost Victoria's Renewable Energy Target (VRET) to 50 per cent by 2030, building on an original target of 25 per cent by 2020, and 40 per cent by 2025.

Jamie says the first target resulted in up to 80 workers being hired by Keppel Prince but COVID-19 has put the brakes on the roll out of investment and bids across the state to ensure the government reaches its 2030 target.

Up until now, Keppel Prince have fabricated 80 of the 140 wind turbines on the Macarthur wind farm. They've also made and assembled wind tower components on-site.

Most of the materials, including 90 percent of the steel they use are manufactured in Australia.

"The first VRET put in place by the Victorian Government was fantastic, it has kept us busy for two-and-a-half years - we hired an extra 70 to 80 workers, just to keep up with the demand," says Jamie.

Workers like Jamie are calling for the government to bring new investment to renewable energy to meet the 2030 target so that Keppel Prince can continue to grow its output.

Employment is crucial to Portland and workers like him.

Achieving renewable energy targets will not only create jobs for regional Victorian workers, it will result in lower CO2 emissions and drive down energy prices.

Jamie says Keppel Prince is one of the top producers of wind turbines in the world and this would be a crucial strength when Victoria begins to recover from the global COVID-19 pandemic.

"Now is the time to boost manufacturing in Australia - if we can do this we can recover from COVID-19. Australia is known for the best quality manufacturing and top trades people."

Jamie says using local content requirements are crucial to support Australian manufacturing. He said in other states there were purpose built facilities available to be used for manufacturing windtowers, but they were only being used as storage because the relevant state governments did not have local content requirements and were instead importing turbines.

"Local content requirements create thousands of jobs.

"I am happy that my job has an impact on improving the environment and reversing climate change. I think everyone needs to be doing this."

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Workforce planning

Australia's workforce planning system needs substantial improvement. For instance, there is no comprehensive national data on the number of jobs in renewable energy, the types of jobs, their skill requirements, and their location. Without this data it is difficult to properly plan for training provision.

It is likely that similar data deficits exist in other industries. Thus, a key need is an audit of the data quality for workforce planning in key industries, including:

- Renewable energy and other elements of the

energy system, such as grid infrastructure;

- Energy efficiency;
- Ecosystem restoration, including tree planting;
- Green metals; and
- Green hydrogen.

The revitalisation of the industry skills councils is important to understanding the workforce planning needs of various industries.

Retraining for workers in industries undergoing restructuring

“Retraining—especially when used as a preventative measure rather than a reactive response to plant closure—is the most effective method for preventing unemployment and long-term unemployment. This training needs to occur well before retrenchment to be most effective in the transition to decent work. It should also be provided without cost to those workers”. (CFMEU)⁵⁸

The following elements are important to retraining packages to deal with climate change-related restructuring:

- Skills audits, recognition and retraining to commence early, well before closure of any plant or factory;
- Skills audits focussed on the recognition of prior learning and skills developed on the job with the aim of workers being able to demonstrate their competencies including through the attainment of qualifications, skills sets and or units of competency (with any additional training or assessment required if needed)
- Skills audits, recognition and retraining costs should be covered in full by employers or government, including transport, dependants care and relocation costs;
- Retraining packages should, where possible, be fully or partially part of existing approved qualifications, so that workers achieve proper recognised qualifications or can build on units later to achieve a qualification;
- Introduction of peer counselling services during

transition;

- Employment placement services;
- Priority should be given to using only public TAFEs and not-for-profit training providers, that have a close connection to workers in that industry; and
- A funded role in the brokerage of skills audits, retraining, employment placement services, career transition advice, financial support and job search assistance for coordinators who are directly recruited from the cohort of workers to be made redundant (with support from unions and tripartite industry bodies with requisite sector specific experience).

Importantly, retraining is useless if there are no jobs for retrained workers to go into. The most important element of a retraining package is the direct creation of jobs for redeployed workers to go into.

Retraining

One of the most recent examples of retraining that we are aware of in Victoria has been the Gippsland Trades and Labour Council's work with workers displaced by the closure of the Hazelwood power station in Morwell. Despite the short notice of the power station's closure, the GTLC, working with the Latrobe Valley Authority, helped hundreds of Hazelwood workers, and workers from the Carter Holt Harvey plant, to retrain, acquire new qualifications and get new jobs. The success of the scheme has much to do with the GTLC being a union organisation, its close connection with the local community, and its focus on achieving the best outcomes for workers rather than delivering profits or meeting compliance requirements. These characteristics should be the fundamental characteristics of retraining services.

ORGANISING

Climate change will have ramifications for most industries and there are few workplaces that will not be affected in some way by the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This means that climate change will be a workplace issue for most workers:

- Outdoor workers will be exposed to more days of extreme heat;
- More frequent extreme weather events will shut down workplaces or prevent workers from getting to work. This happened on a large-scale during the bushfire crisis;
- Job losses could occur in some industries as a result of climate-related damage. Tourism is particularly vulnerable, as tourism workers on the Great Barrier Reef and in bushfire-affected regions know;
- Drought puts pressure on rural industries, with job losses, reduction in work, or changes in production and shifts;
- Emergency service workers will be called on to deal with destruction caused by climate disasters or health problems caused by increased heat or extreme weather;

- Getting to and from work may get more difficult during times of intense heat, when public transport systems break down;
- Businesses may seek to reduce increasing costs of, for instance, insurance, adaptation to changing product markets, stranded assets or increased air-conditioning use by seeking to reduce wage costs; and
- On a positive note, workers might seek to reduce utility costs of their employers and channel savings into improved wages and benefits.

For all these reasons and more, unions will need to increase their workplace organising capacity around the issue of climate change and VTHC will work with affiliates to develop a kit for workplace organising around climate change.

Younger workers are particularly concerned about climate change and tackling the issue of climate change in the workplace is a good way to engage this cohort, for many of whom unions are not well understood.

A NETWORK OF JUST TRANSITION COMMITTEES

Although the ACTU, VTHC and a number of unions have dedicated just transition positions, there will be an increasing need for the movement to dedicate more resources to just transition and to create appropriate structures to ensure it properly informs our work.

VTHC will work with the ACTU and affiliated unions to participate in, or establish if needed, national and state level just transitions committees to formulate policies around just transition, provide support to individual unions, engage with state climate and environment organisations, and provide a conduit into national-level decision making.

VTHC will also work with unions that wish to establish their own Just Transition committees (howsoever called) to develop union policies and organising strategies, and to provide a conduit into state and national-level decision making.

BARGAINING FOR RIGHTS AND ENTITLEMENTS



Several unions have already engaged in bargaining around clauses related to climate change or the environment. There are many reasons why unions might want to bargain around climate issues, including to:

- Increase consultation or negotiation rights around workplace change;
- Improve redundancy, redeployment or retraining entitlements, especially in industries undergoing transition;
- Establish joint management-union workplace committees to improve a company's environmental performance or reduce its emissions;
- Introduce clauses that provide benefits to workers from, for instance, covering a warehouse roof with solar panels, or the so-called Earthworker clause, which allows workers to direct some of their pay through their employer's payroll to purchase solar hot water services;
- Improve safety provisions around excessive heat, or bushfire smoke;

- Improve leave provisions around forced absences from work due to sickness (an issue brought to the fore by COVID-19) or disasters;
- Provide protections around stand-downs during extreme weather events or even electricity system demand management episodes; and
- Provide for planning, notice periods, training commitments and job transfers in case of plant closures.

For further reference, 'Adapting Canadian Workplaces' provides an online database of collective agreement clauses from around the world.⁵⁹ VTHC will work with interested unions to provide assistance with the drafting and negotiation of such clauses.

Example: Union agreement clause

The CPSU and the Victorian Government are committed to working together to achieve the target of nett zero emissions from Victorian public sector operations by 2025 in a way that maximises public and workforce benefits while minimising negative effects on public sector workers.

The [Department or agency] and the union[s] agree to establish a Joint Sustainability Committee (JSC) with [specify union and management membership] to assist with the attainment of the goal of ensuring that the Victorian Public Sector is carbon neutral by 2025. The committee will have the following Terms of Reference:

To examine and provide recommendations for implementation to [Department/Agency heads] about the following matters:

- i) the procurement of renewable energy supply for government buildings;*
- ii) means of reducing energy consumption in government buildings and facilities;*
- iii) the procurement of equipment, resources, other materials, and services in such a way as to contribute to the goal of carbon neutrality;*
- iv) ways of performing work that reduce carbon emissions;*
- v) Any other activity that contributes to the achievement of the carbon neutrality goal.*

To ensure that a substantial proportion of the benefits, including financial benefits, of the reduction of the public sector's carbon footprint is distributed to public sector workers by a process of negotiation between the CPSU and [the relevant public sector bargaining unit].

To develop and recommend just transition principles and policies for adoption in cases where jobs are affected by the implementation of the carbon neutral goal. These principles and policies must provide no lesser rights or entitlements for staff than those provided in other parts of this agreement.

To develop guidelines that ensure that avoidance or diminution of the effort to achieve carbon neutrality do not result from contracting out or privatisation of public sector activities.

- To provide ways for staff to participate in the effort to achieve the carbon neutral goal.*
- To recommend ways in which staff can reduce their own carbon footprint, through, for instance, using payroll deductions or salary sacrificing arrangements to encourage the use of public transport or the installation of renewable energy systems in workers' homes.*

The Committee will be established within three months of this agreement coming into force, and will continue to perform its functions for the life of the agreement. The parties also agree that subsequent agreements should maintain the Committee's existence, subject to agreed modifications as deemed necessary by the parties.

Union delegate members of the Committee will be provided with adequate time release to perform their Committee duties to a professional standard and to allow the Committee to perform its work effectively.





DELEGATE AND ACTIVIST TRAINING

Making sure that the importance of climate change as a union issue is widely understood amongst delegates, activists and members is vital to the success of this strategy. Drawing on existing

programs, VTHC will work with interested unions to develop delegate and activist training packages to assist in organising around climate change.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Climate change has substantial ramifications for workplace health and safety, including:

- Increased risk from extreme heat;
- Smoke from bushfires, which in the fires of 2019-2020 affected indoor workplaces as well as outside; and
- Increased pressure on emergency service and health workers from more frequent and damaging natural disasters.

There is a risk that pressure on businesses from climate change and from the COVID-19 crisis will lead some businesses to take short-cuts on safety or pressure workers to take greater risks. Heightened

vigilance from unions and regulators will be necessary.

VTHC and a number of unions have already developed comprehensive policies on heat and smoke, but these need to be consolidated, circulated widely, and included in enterprise agreements.

Further lobbying work needs to be conducted with the Victorian Government to improve guidance and policies around worker exposure to heat and smoke. VTHC will work with unions to coordinate this lobbying and provide assistance to unions around appropriate enterprise agreement clauses and provide guidance to unions around the OHS issues related to climate change and COVID-19 recovery.

COMMUNITY AND POLITICAL CAMPAIGNING

We Are Union local groups have already shown interest in organising around climate change and can be involved in the community and political campaigns to effect change.

The Young Workers Centre is vital to the organisation of the Young Unionists Climate Action Network

(YUCAN), which provides opportunities for young workers to campaign on climate change, coordinates actions, and offers assistance to young unionists to raise the profile of climate action within official union structures.

SUPERANNUATION

With unions playing a leading role in the establishment and management of super funds, there is an opportunity and a responsibility for unions to ensure that funds use their investments to facilitate the shift to a sustainable economy, and that just transition is central to investment decisions.

Institutional investors like superannuation and pension funds are now devoting attention to the issue of just transition.

The Principles for Responsible Investment is the leading responsible investment organisation and has produced several reports on the importance of just transition to investment decisions⁶⁵ including a guide for investor action.⁶⁶ Importantly, like many organisations, it is advocating strongly for a COVID-19 response geared towards dealing with the climate emergency.⁶⁷

Australian super funds are increasingly reporting on their climate change risk, and taking action to reduce it, an example being VicSuper.⁶⁸

It is important for unions to push for the integration of climate change issues, as well as labour rights and just transition, into super fund Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) frameworks. Increasing member concern about climate change demands greater accountability from super funds on the carbon intensity of their investments, and on what members' money is being spent on. The economics of energy generation are working against the fossil fuel industry, and it is now accepted that climate risk is not merely to be relegated to a marginal concern of environmentally aware members, but is a core element of financial risk, including stranded asset risk.

ALLIANCES AND PARTNERS

VTHC has good connections with the environment movement, social justice organisations, local government, universities, and government agencies. Victorian unions believe that for the most part, the climate/environment movement and the union movement, while sometimes having disagreements, are fundamentally united by a shared interest in opposing those interests that would exploit both the natural world and workers. All too often, the big corporate interests and their political proxies that

are plunging us all headlong towards climate disaster are the same forces that are trying to destroy unions and reduce worker rights.

VTHC is keen to work with organisations that share our goals and our values: putting people and workers at the centre of the transition to a just and sustainable economy, and stopping the destruction of our natural world, and the human communities that depend on it.

GLOBAL SOLIDARITY

As one of the richest countries in the world, we have a responsibility to provide assistance and solidarity to countries with fewer resources, especially those in our immediate Asia-Pacific region.

We must work closely with unions in our region to ensure that workers' rights and interests are at the centre of climate change action everywhere and support the creation of an international movement of workers' solidarity across borders.

UPGRADING UNION FACILITIES ACROSS VICTORIA

There is also much that unions could do to improve our own environmental performance, which would create work and jobs for our members. Undertaken together, this would additionally create opportunities to increase our collective bargaining power to negotiate better returns. A number of unions have already built world-class net-zero facilities for their members, but more is possible. These opportunities include:

- Undertaking energy audits of our buildings, and then undertaking energy efficiency upgrades; coupled with educational and behavioural change processes in workplaces to reduce energy use and waste;
- Focusing on energy efficiency in renovations or new buildings, for example, the ANMF Elizabeth St building;
- Purchasing green power, or, better still, investing in renewable energy either through putting solar panels on our buildings (for example, as the AEU has done) or investing in generation capacity or entering power purchase agreements with community energy generators, such as Ramyuck

Aboriginal Cooperative in Gippsland, which is planning a solar farm and looking for offtake agreements. If unions pooled resources, we could do good deals on solar panels and power purchase agreements;

- Factoring in environmental impacts and labour standards in our purchasing decisions for merchandise, paper and other consumables;
- Purchasing fuel efficient, hybrid or electric vehicles;
- Providing bulk purchase opportunities for staff and members to acquire solar panels or solar hot water systems (Earthworker has already developed a model for this); and
- Supporting cooperatives and community organisations working towards a just transition and sustainable economy, including Cooperative Power (an electricity retailer owned by unions, including UWU, ASU, ANMF and community organisations) and Redgum, a 100% union cleaning cooperative (which the ASU uses).

UNION RIGHTS AND CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION

As this document argues, workers need to be at the centre of the decision making around the shift to a sustainable economy.

Insecure work means insecure income, no leave and few workplace protections. Insecurity also means that it is difficult to engage workers in just transition processes, since workers – rightly – feel that economic restructuring in Australia means high costs for workers, especially in terms of job losses, and that their voices are not going to be listened to in the shift to a low carbon economy. Even before COVID-19, the “flexible labour market” meant that the promised jobs in renewable energy were turning out to be largely short-term, low paid and sometimes performed by temporary overseas workers.

If workers, particularly in high emissions industries, are to be properly engaged in the shift to a low-carbon economy, they must be confident that their voices are listened to, that change will not mean reductions in the quality of their terms and conditions of work, or in the availability of jobs. There must be an acknowledgement from the political elite that the frequently celebrated modernisation of the Australian economy from the 1980s fostered the

world of precarious work through the abandonment of employees to ruthless market forces. There also needs to be a recognition of the victims as well as the successes of the “modernisation” of the economy since this time – the unskilled, the former industrial working class, regional cities. It is from these wellsprings that climate change denialism issues, from people who remember only too well what happened to them the last time a government decided the Australian economy needed to be restructured.

Though it may be surprising for some, one of the most important elements of the fight against climate change is our industrial relations framework.

Thus, the Australian union movement’s campaign to improve the industrial relations framework to allow unions to do their work, and to improve the terms and conditions of work for all Australian workers, must be seen as a vital component of any VTHC climate change and just transitions strategy. It must also be seen similarly by all organisations that are seriously committed to reducing the threat of climate change.

Gender implications

Australia's workforce remains subject to considerable gender segregation, disproportionately so compared to other OECD nations. Our national gender pay gap has remained relatively static around 15% to 19% for the past two decades.⁵⁷

Some important gender-related aspects of the transformation to a sustainable economy include:

- Many industries that are experiencing the impacts of climate change, such as food production and agriculture, have large numbers of women workers. Climate change is not just an issue for male-dominated industries;
- Employment and training policies in transitioning industries must take account of the specific needs of blue-collar, predominantly male, workers. In many regions these workers are experiencing the most substantial loss of employment opportunities, with flow-on economic, social and health problems;
- Employment and training policies for new and transitioning industries, including renewable energy generation, must actively seek to increase gender diversity, including specific pathways for women entering the sector as well as retaining women once they enter the industry;
- Old stereotypes about the gendered nature of work must be challenged. Women can work in construction, and men can work in nursing, for instance. While we must be careful to ensure that displaced male workers are not left behind, encouraging gender diversity in new industries is an inherently good thing;
- Caring professions, including disability and mental health workers, are female-dominated. During times of crisis, these professions (dubbed 'essential workers' during COVID-19) are expected to work harder under increasing demand, and often put themselves and their families at risk. Workers in these industries must have access to appropriate leave, adequate crisis allowances, and safety equipment to allow them to work in safety during crises.



REFERENCES

- 1 This section is excerpted from the ACTU's new climate change policy document. Our thanks to Mark Wakeham for making it available to us.
- 2 <https://climate.nasa.gov/evidence/>
- 3 <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>
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- 7 Australia's Intended Nationally Determined Contribution to a new Climate Change Agreement - August 2015.pdf
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