

File/Our Ref: 37.40 & 37.91  
Your Ref:  
Please quote in reply



26 November 2020

Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy

By email: [Environment.Reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:Environment.Reps@aph.gov.au)

**Re: Climate Change (National Framework for Adaptation and Mitigation) Bill 2020 and Climate Change (National Framework for Adaptation and Mitigation) (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2020 (“Climate Bills”)**

The Australian Services Union (ASU) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the Climate Change (National Framework for Adaptation and Mitigation) Bill 2020 and Climate Change (National Framework for Adaptation and Mitigation) (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2020.

The ASU is one of Australia’s largest Unions, representing approximately 135,000 employees. The ASU is Australia's largest union in the energy/electricity industry with ASU members working in a variety of classifications across electricity generation, distribution, retail and transmission.

Like all workers, ASU members have an interest in climate change, and how it will affect our working place, our quality of life and our communities.

The ASU supports the goal of net zero emissions by 2050 and understand the proposed Climate Bills set out a framework for national climate change mitigation and adaptation plans to be developed, implemented and updated regularly by the Australian Government. We also support the creation of a Climate Change Commission to set shorter term targets and report on Australia’s emissions and preparedness for climate change.

The Climate Bills must play a critical role in ensuring Australia adheres to all of the commitments in the Paris Agreement, however we urge the Committee to ensure that fair employment and just transition principles deliver better outcomes for workers and their communities.

We think that fighting for a just transition for our workers and our planet is core business. We also know that we cannot allow the climate action debate to be one where workers and climate action are pegged against each other. We deserve both a clean energy future and good secure well valued jobs in all regions.

To that end, in 2016 the ASU’s peak decision making body, the ASU National Conference, passed a motion setting out our policy on just transition strategies.

### **ASU Policy**

The ASU understands that the climate change crisis is an issue of environmental and social justice.

The ASU accepts the overwhelming science that carbon pollution is causing climate change.

Those who have done the least to cause climate change will experience the consequences first and worst. Climate change will have the greatest impact on our growth, our future generations and importantly, those who have the smallest voices and those who will find it hardest to adapt.

The environment is a social good to be conserved. The ASU fights for fairness and equality when it comes to the influence over and the distribution of environmental goods.

We are committed to ambitious action to reduce carbon emissions and avoid the worst impacts of climate change. We recognise the opportunities for Australia being a world leader in the transition to a low carbon economy.

We note that the ASU covers significant numbers of workers in the energy industry, including in Coal fired power stations. Accordingly we want to see a transition to a cleaner, fairer, job rich Australia that can provide these workers, their families and communities with a just transition.

Workers and families in regional areas who are affected by the closure of carbon intensive industries are some of the first to feel the impact of the transition to a low-carbon economy. We have already seen the closure of Port Augusta and Hazelwood.

The Australian Services Union stands with these workers and families and supports plans which assist local workers and local populations to obtain jobs through skill acquisition, skill transferability and skill enhancement in the new low carbon industries particularly in the renewable energy sectors. Also, that we embrace innovative schemes such as allowing older workers in other power stations to retire through redundancy so to allow younger workers, from affected power stations and mines, to access these jobs.

The Australian Services Union supports Climate Change Strategies which:

- build on Australia's past climate change action towards more ambitious targets;
- support the development of renewable energy generation;
- maximise opportunities for green and decent jobs;
- prepare workers for jobs in the low-carbon economy;
- encourage investment in and targets industry assistance to low-carbon industries;
- give highest priority to transitioning workers and communities affected by closures and reduced job opportunities in carbon-intensive industries;
- give workers and unions a voice;
- align climate change responses with regional development strategies;
- respect labour and human rights;
- ensure social protection for individuals and communities; and
- reduce Australia's carbon emissions in line with the Paris Agreement in 2015 of limiting global warming to less than 2 degrees above pre-industrial levels.

The Australian Services Union calls on the Committee to make it their key concern to look after workers and their communities who are affected by the closure of power stations and mines. It is important that Governments have Climate Change policy, however this must be accompanied by and include Just Transition strategies that are developed collectively by workers and their Union, industry, and government. Governments and employers need to ensure that workers are either retained, re-employed, re-trained, or, in the last instance, retrenched with fairness and dignity.

## **Just Transition – An ASU perspective**

Without a Just Transition there will be no appropriate work opportunities; technical expertise and experience will be left unused; and surrounding small businesses will be gutted.

Indeed, even for the lucky former employees from high-carbon workplaces who do find work, without a Just Transition all likelihood is that they will have wound up in jobs unmatched to their skill sets and capacity, with insecure conditions, and much lower wages. The impact on the worker and their family is obvious. When extrapolated, the flow on effect to the local and national economy is significant.

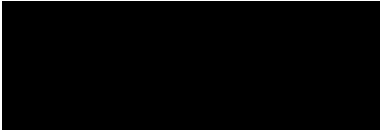
In June 2015, the owners of South Australia's only coal-fired power station announced their shock decision to close. By May 2016, all workers had walked out of the gates for the last time. As the major union at the operation, we saw firsthand the impact of an absence of a Just Transition plan for workers and the community from the owners of power stations and governments.

Workers were forced to retire early, or move intra or inter-state to seek out work. Many found employment just doing odd jobs. Some were completely unemployed. Few moved directly onto full, like employment. With only a small proportion of those in full employment being in the same region.

The ASU continues to work with governments, employers, energy workers and environmental activists to ensure we achieve real action on climate change and a Just Transition for all Australians working in high-polluting industries.

Finally, the ASU is aware that several other Unions and affiliates are making submissions in response to the proposed Bills. The ASU supports those submissions and the recommendations contained within.

Yours faithfully



Robert Potter  
**NATIONAL SECRETARY**