

9 May 2024

Select Committee on Adopting Artificial Intelligence (AI)  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600



By email: [aicommitee.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:aicommitee.sen@aph.gov.au)

**Re: Select Committee on Adopting Artificial Intelligence (AI)**

The Australian Services Union (ASU) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the opportunities and impacts for Australia arising out of the uptake of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies in Australia.

The ASU is one of Australia's largest unions, representing approximately 135,000 members. ASU members work in a wide variety of industries and occupations in both the private, public and community sectors.

We acknowledge the rapid growth of AI technologies both domestically and internationally and we encourage investment in research and development that keeps Australia at the forefront of AI innovation. We are supportive of international efforts to create ethical AI standards.

AI presents both opportunities and challenges for workers and it is crucial that Government prioritise the protection of workers' rights and interests.

Workers must have a voice about the introduction and use of AI. Workers are the experts in the industries and occupations in which they work and must be given comprehensive information to make informed decisions and provide valuable insights on how AI will impact their workplace. Strengthening legal obligations to consult workers before introducing technological change will ensure that Australia gets the full benefit of AI innovation.

Whilst AI has the potential to increase productivity and efficiency, it also poses a risk to job security, overall job satisfaction and control. There are also additional challenges and risks associated with occupational health and safety (including workplace surveillance and changes to work allocation).

There should be a generous safety net for workers whose jobs are lost due to technological changes, including the adoption of AI. It is likely that AI will create many new jobs, but workers will need support to transition to new employment.

Government must ensure current and future workers receive relevant training so they can best participate in this ever-changing landscape. Workers whose roles may involve the use of AI in the future or whose future employment prospects might be diminished by the adoption of AI should be given every opportunity to receive comprehensive training or retraining.

Government must consider other flexibilities and initiatives for workers whose roles will be impacted by AI, such as a 4-day work week. The 4-day working week model should be based on the Select Committee on Work and Care recommendation of 100:80:100, whereby employees retain 100 per

cent of their salary while reducing their hours to 80 per cent while maintaining 100 per cent productivity.<sup>1</sup>

Government must also ensure generous redundancy provisions are in place where job losses are unavoidable due to the introduction of AI and significantly improve the current level of social protections that exist for workers and the unemployed.

It is essential Government consult with stakeholders, including unions, to explore options for the creation and funding of transitional arrangements and ensure no worker is left behind as industries transition to increased automation and digitisation.

AI in the workplace may also perpetuate discrimination against workers (for example, based on gender, race, sexuality or other attributes). Ultimately, AI technologies are made by human beings, whose biases will be reflected in their technology. Biases can creep in through the data used to train AI systems and can lead to algorithms that unfairly filter out qualified candidates. Whilst employers need to be vigilant about creating an unbiased AI system, it is critical that laws and legislation are in place to ensure workers are capable of redress.

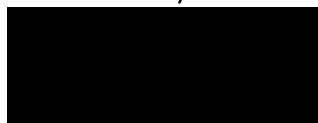
Furthermore, workers should not be compelled to accept AI-enabled surveillance or tracking in the workplace as it undermines their fundamental human right to privacy. Such surveillance will create a culture of mistrust and anxiety. There is also the potential for data collected through surveillance systems to be accessed by unauthorised parties which poses a significant security risk for both workers and organisations alike.

To mitigate AI risks, Government should collaborate with global partners to share best practices and ensure our regulatory frameworks are sufficient.

The Government's Interim Plan "Safe and responsible AI in Australia" outlines the development of voluntary AI safety standards; voluntary labelling and watermarking of AI-generated materials as well as establishing an expert advisory body.<sup>2</sup> The voluntary aspects of the Plan are concerning and undermines a recent survey which found most Australians want the Government to create a new government body to support a more safety-focused, regulation-first approach.<sup>3</sup> Government should consider legislating a new government body dedicated to AI regulation and governance.

The ASU emphasises transparency, accountability, and public engagement in AI decision-making. We recommend ongoing consultations on AI with key stakeholders, including unions, workers, and the public to ensure its safe development and use.

Yours faithfully



Robert Potter  
**NATIONAL SECRETARY**

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<sup>1</sup> Select Committee on Work and Care, Final Report

[https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Work\\_and\\_Care/workandcare/Report](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Work_and_Care/workandcare/Report)

<sup>2</sup> Australian Government, Department of Industry, Science and Resources, Safe and Responsible AI in Australia consultation [Online] [https://storage.googleapis.com/converlens-au-industry/industry/p/prj2452c8e24d7a400c72429/public\\_assets/safe-and-responsible-ai-in-australia-governments-interim-response.pdf](https://storage.googleapis.com/converlens-au-industry/industry/p/prj2452c8e24d7a400c72429/public_assets/safe-and-responsible-ai-in-australia-governments-interim-response.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> The Conversation, 80% of Australians think AI risk is a global priority. The government needs to step up [Online]

<https://theconversation.com/80-of-australians-think-ai-risk-is-a-global-priority-the-government-needs-to-step-up-225175>