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June 2024

NEW WESTERN NSW MINERS ALLIANCE LAUNCHED!



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**Mining &
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'DOUBLE THE RESOURCES AND DOUBLE THE MANPOWER'

NSW hard rock miners like Daniel Cronin will have access to more resources and support with the launch of the NSW Mine Workers Alliance bringing together the MEU and AWU.

The new Alliance will represent workers in metalliferous mining in NSW and was launched at regional events in Cobar and Broken Hill earlier this month.

Daniel has worked in the mining industry for twelve years. For the last three years he has worked as a Bogger Operator at Peak Gold Mine.

Daniel lives in Cobar with his wife Chanae, and their four-year-old daughter Charlotte and two-year-old son Hudson.



"I think the Alliance is fantastic. I think bringing together two strong unions is only going to be to the further benefit of members. We've now got double the resources and double the manpower," Daniel said.

"At the end of the day unions are the last fight that we've actually got. For so long your Rio Tintos of the world have given workers the false sense that they don't need unions. They've said they've given us this or that, but over time they've taken all those things away.

"That's where the union movement in this country is something that we really need to protect and support.

"Precious metals like gold, silver and copper have always held great value. The future of metals is only growing, especially in uncertain global times, so it's

only upwards from here."

The Alliance will fight for investment, good jobs and community services that NSW mining towns need to benefit from mining industries of the future and support the people who work currently in the industry.

"I like working in hard rock mining because I get to interact with lots of people, whether it's truck drivers, charge up or service crew.

"I get to see lots of people throughout my day, and there's lots of good people in this industry."

Members of both unions attended the launch events and had an opportunity to hear more about the Alliance from their local organisers and MEU and AWU officials who travelled up to western NSW to talk to members.

MEU South Western District Secretary Andy Davey said it was fantastic to hear the interest and enthusiasm from members who are keen and ready to join the Alliance. He said the Alliance will fight to ensure western NSW mining hubs benefit from critical minerals and transition metals industries, with secure local jobs and thriving communities.

The MEU and AWU have members in mines from Broken Hill to Cobar and Orange to West Wyalong, producing gold, cobalt, copper, lead, zinc, nickel and silver. Existing members will have the opportunity to transfer membership to the NSWMWA while new members will directly join the Alliance.

The NSW Mine Workers Alliance is the second alliance between the MEU and the AWU with the Western Mine Workers Alliance launched in the Pilbara in 2013, covering BHP and Rio Tinto mine workers.

The Alliance will officially begin operating on 1 July 2024.





UNION SUES BHP IN 'SAME PAY' BATTLE

BHP IN OUR SIGHTS FOR SAME JOB SAME PAY!

Our Union is continuing to file more Same Job Same Pay applications including for three of BHP's Queensland coal mines.

Ten applications were made covering approximately 1700 labour hire workers at Saraji, Peak Downs and Goonyella Riverside, for workers employed by Chandler Macleod, Workpac and BHP's in-house provider Operations Services.

The orders would lift the pay of the affected labour hire workers by at least \$10,000 and up to \$40,000 a year depending on skills and rosters. Each application compares labour hire rates to the BMA Enterprise Agreement 2022 to set protected rates of pay for labour hire workers who perform work covered by the Agreement.

BHP, as the biggest player in Australia's coal industry and a pioneer of the labour hire rort, has vowed to fight the applications in the Fair Work Commission and have hired the employer-friendly barrister Richard Dalton fresh off his unsuccessful defence of Qantas' illegal outsourcing of ground handlers during the Covid-19 pandemic. The company has flagged its intention to argue that Operations Services workers were 'service contractors,' not labour hire, and thus exempt from Same Job Same Pay orders.

The MEU is confident that OS workers will be

eligible for Same Job Same Pay orders. BHP OS workers, as well as Chandler Macleod and Workpac, work alongside directly employed workers, performing the same jobs.

Queensland District President Mitch Hughes said: "we expect BHP to throw everything at trying to avoid their same job, same pay applications for workers, they would rather spend money on lawyers than fair wages.

"We will continue working through the process and we are confident that Operations Services employees meet the conditions for the regulated labour hire arrangement orders we have applied for.

"BHP must accept that using labour hire purely to cut pay is out of step with community standards and is now out of step with the law."

In addition to applications filed at Callide mine in Biloela and Mount Pleasant mine in NSW – which was withdrawn after the labour hire workers were employed directly – the MEU has filed further Same Job Same Pay applications for:

- One Key workers at Boggabri mine in NSW
- Workpac workers at Rix's Creek mine in NSW
- Workpac workers at Poitrel in Queensland.



UNION SAFETY CHAMPIONS SHARPEN THEIR SKILLS!

Mine worker safety was the order of the day at the annual Queensland District Site Safety and Health Representative conference held this month in Mackay.

SSHRs from across the state gathered for the week of discussions and lectures regarding the current state of safety in mine sites, hearing from a wide range of speakers including experts in spontaneous combustion, fatigue, psychosocial hazards and whole body vibration.

SSHRs also had the opportunity to share their experiences responding to accidents and high potential incidents on site, comparing standards and learning from each other. Keeping thorough

notes was the most common piece of advice, as well as forming trusted relationships with your workmates so that they feel comfortable approaching you to raise issues.

One of the highlights of the event was Josh Jones, who was disabled in a tyre explosion at Dawson South in 2015 that took the life of his workmate. Josh spoke about the accident, the effect it had on his mental state, and the importance of maintaining good mental health at work from a safety perspective.

Thank you to all our guest speakers, as well as our SSHRs who give up time with their families in order to keep our worksites safe.





DAMNING CALLIDE REPORT EXPOSES RISK MANAGEMENT FAILURE

Workers at Queensland's Callide power station finally have an explanation of what went wrong when an explosion knocked out the C4 unit in May 2021, with a draft expert report finally published.

A draft report into the May 2021 explosion that tore through Callide power station's C4 Unit exposes a culture of poor risk management by operator CS Energy.

MEU Queensland President Mitch Hughes said Callide workers deserved an explanation of what had gone wrong as they worked towards returning the damaged unit to service next month, but the report's publication was long-overdue.

"Publication of this report at last provides some transparency and insight into what has occurred, and we look forward to reviewing it in detail," said Mr Hughes.

"It illustrates how extreme the explosion was, with a 300kg piece of equipment ejected 20 metres into the air and a 2-tonne piece of shaft flying across the floor.

"It is a miracle no-one was killed. Workers need transparency and reassurance that it won't happen again."

The report finds that a series of technical failures around a battery charger change-out triggered the explosion. It identifies that there was a lack of risk management process and understanding by CS Energy of risks associated with the operation.

The report further identifies a number of contextual factors including energy transition meaning the attention and resources of the power station operator were directed towards transition projects, distracting from the core business of the safe operation of power stations.

"At its heart, this report shows that CS Energy has dropped the ball on risk management in a major way," said Mr Hughes.

"We will be working with our members to ensure that their concerns are fully addressed and they are able to have open discussions with their employer about risk management going forward.

"The Government must also guarantee that all of Queensland's coal-fired power stations have the resources and support they need to operate safely through to closure.

"As long as coal-fired power stations are operating, there can be no scrimping and saving and running them into the ground."

CONSPIRACY THEORIES WON'T LIFT PAY, STRONG LAWS WILL

Queensland One Nation Senator Malcolm Roberts would win gold in the hypocrite Olympics. How many times can one man talk about coal mine worker underpayments while voting against every legislative reform to fix them?

Senator Roberts' latest trick is calling for a Government Inquiry. This comes just as the Same Job Same Pay laws he voted against are starting to deliver pay rises for labour hire workers in the coal industry.

Any inquiry into coal industry underpayments would find what has been obvious for many years. That is, that mine operators have used labour hire arrangements to cut wages by getting around site enterprise agreements.

We have always agreed with Malcolm Roberts that this is a big problem. Or he has agreed with us, as we've been campaigning against this rort for much longer.

Senator Roberts would prefer to attack the union and blame strange conspiracy theories than use his position in Parliament to deliver what has been really needed: fairer work laws.

You don't need tin-foil-hat conspiracy theories to see that mining companies have used legal loopholes to outsource large parts of their workforce to lower-paid labour hire arrangements to save money. They have been able to get away with this for so long because while it's unfair, it has not been illegal.

No conspiracy theories are needed to explain labour hire companies seeking their own Enterprise Agreements, to assist them to win contracts. Once a valid EA is in place, workers can't take any lawful industrial action to improve their conditions for the term of the agreement, usually four years.

The only requirements for an Enterprise Agreement are that at least two employees are covered by it and it passes a Better Off Overall Test (BOOT) and some procedural steps.

There are many labour hire Enterprise Agreements in the mining industry which don't breach any laws but still lead to very unfair outcomes.

The BOOT only requires EAs to ensure workers are better off than the Award, not industry standard pay and conditions which are much higher due to successful union collective bargaining.

The FWC regularly approves EAs that allow for casual work, even though casual work is not allowed for under the Black Coal Award. While EAs must be better off 'overall' than the Award, under the Fair Work Act they don't need to contain every Award provision and may contain alternative provisions such as casual work. This is a point Senator Roberts stubbornly misunderstands.

If EAs are voted up by a majority of workers and meet the legal requirements set out by the Fair Work Commission, then generally the Agreement is made and it is valid. The union can't veto it, even if we believe it is unfair.

Sometimes the union is named in labour hire EAs so we have the right to represent union members covered by it. We may negotiate on behalf of members, or recommend a vote for or against. However, EAs only become valid by being voted up by a majority of employees and approved by the Fair Work Commission – the union plays no role in their approval.

While accusing the union of somehow playing a role in mine worker underpayments, Senator Roberts and One Nation have used their position in Parliament to consistently vote against laws to support permanent jobs and pay rises; like Same Job Same Pay laws for labour hire workers and stronger rights for casuals. Most shamefully – or shamelessly – in 2021 he voted with the Morrison Government to remove court-recognised rights for casual coal miners in long-term, full-time roles to receive leave entitlements. This put a stop to class actions set to deliver millions in unpaid entitlements to labour hire coal miners.

So Senator Roberts can bang on about investigations and conspiracies all he likes. We know there's a wages scandal in coal mining and we are getting on with the job of fixing it by fighting for permanent jobs and using the Albanese Government's Same Job Same Pay laws to win wage justice for labour hire workers.

SIX-MONTH LIFELINE FOR MYUNA AND MANDALONG A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION



Origin Energy and Centennial Coal have struck a deal for a six-month extension for Myuna and Mandalong coal mines to supply coal to Eraring Power Station, providing short-term relief from the prospect of imminent job losses.

Workers at Myuna and Mandalong underground coal mines at NSW's Lake Macquarie are hopeful their jobs will continue for the life of the power station with a longer contract.

Northern Mining and NSW Energy District President Robin Williams congratulated workers and said that this progress would not have happened without the effort and support of the community, and that the announcement is a step in the right direction.

"While the future remains uncertain, workers are

hopeful that a longer-term arrangement can be reached particularly when you consider that Origin Energy have the security to operate for the next three years," he said.

In May the NSW Government and Origin Energy struck a deal to extend the operating life of Eraring Power Station until 2027 which was initially slated by Origin to close next year.

The intervention by the NSW Government is not an upfront payment, but rather a commitment to cover up to 80% of any losses incurred for the next two years and if the plant operates at a profit the state will share in a portion.

"There are around 1,000 workers at Myuna and Mandalong coal mine who have welcomed the additional six months of certainty which will allow more time to plan what comes next and see where the jobs of the future could be.

"Now that that Origin has government backing for Eraring to continue operating, we believe they have the opportunity to do more.

"Origin should support the community that has hosted Eraring Power Station for over four decades by committing to purchase coal from the local mines that exist to supply the power station for as long as the station operates."

COAL MINERS GENERATE \$2.3 MILLION A YEAR!

MEU members working in coal mining delivered more than \$2.3 million each in additional value for the Australian economy in the 2022-23 financial year, according to a new statistical release from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

This extraordinary figure reflects a recent period of record high coal prices, which reached peaks above US\$450 per tonne for thermal coal in the latter half of 2022. While this delivered windfall profits for employers (with the industry-wide profit margin at 48%!), it is worth keeping in mind that the true wealth-creators of the coal industry are the workers operating and maintaining mines over long shifts and in challenging environments.

The data also serves as a timely reminder of the role of the coal industry in Australia's economy, with the industry adding almost \$100 billion value to the

Australian economy over the period.

Meanwhile, a slight retreat in profitability compared to the previous year barely dented the outsized role of iron ore exports in the economy. The iron ore industry added \$103 billion in value, for a contribution per worker of \$2 million.

The mining industry is the first to congratulate itself on its tax and royalty contributions to state and federal government coffers, while simultaneously arguing against the royalty rates and industrial relations policies that would see more of this wealth shared with workers and their communities.

But we know that the real source of mining wealth in this country comes off the back of ordinary MEU members and chronically under-resourced mining communities, not the boardrooms of ASX companies.

DUTTON'S NUCLEAR PLAN WON'T HELP COAL-FIRED POWER STATION WORKERS

DAN REPACHOLI MP



Nuclear power stations will not provide a pathway into new employment for workers in the coal-fired power industry and Peter Dutton's half backed nuclear fantasy is a distraction from securing new jobs in regions like the Hunter.

Two months ago, I stood with Prime Minister Anthony Albanese at AGL's Liddell site in Muswellbrook, one of two proposed nuclear sites in NSW.

Together we announced a billion-dollar Solar SunShot program that will generate thousands of good, safe and reliable solar panel manufacturing jobs in the Hunter. AGL has already begun work converting the old site into an industrial hub which will be backed by the Federal Government.

We understand that securing job pathways for coal power workers is urgent, but Peter Dutton would rather fantasise about expensive nuclear reactors which are decades away and won't deliver viable new industries for workers and communities in our regions.

Even if nuclear energy was a popular option, according to the CSIRO, the earliest a large-scale nuclear plant could commence operations is no sooner than 2040, despite Peter Dutton claiming that the first two would be delivered by 2037. Even if we took Peter Dutton's claim at face value, a 2037 target seems unlikely given the raft of obstacles noted by experts and commentators. These include lack of support by site owners, state and federal nuclear bans and international experience on the length of time it takes to build nuclear power stations.

It's also only two. A majority of states would still be without nuclear capability into the 2040s and beyond.

Meanwhile, Liddell Power Station in my electorate closed last year. In NSW even with the two-year extension recently secured, the Eraring power station at Lake Macquarie is due to close in 2027. Bayswater Power Station in the Hunter Valley and Vales Point Power Station in Lake Macquarie are also set to close in 2033. These workers can't wait.

I was fortunate to tour the Latrobe Valley with MEU members last year and I know that Victorian coal power workers can't wait until the 2040s for new job pathways. Their communities haven't recovered from the closure of Hazelwood in 2017 and Yallourn Power Station is set to close in 2028 and Loy Yang A Power Station is set to close in 2035.

WHERE'S PETER?





The sod turning ceremony for the Solar Sun Shot Program

It's a similar story facing power station workers and communities nation-wide. On top of all of this – nuclear is just bloody expensive.

It is the most expensive form of power generation. As Matt Kean, the former Liberal NSW Energy Minister who now heads the Federal Climate Change Authority said this week, he considered nuclear in NSW but “I didn't want to bankrupt the state and I didn't want to put those huge costs on to families.”

What really gets my goat though is that Peter Dutton was part of a government that oversaw the closure of a succession of coal-fired power stations without lifting a finger to help those workers or support their communities. They buried their heads in the sand on the energy transition and now they're pretending they can simply move into nuclear jobs, when

nothing about their plans stack up.

The Albanese Government is currently very close to passing the Net Zero Economy Authority through Federal Parliament which will help workers and communities affected by the energy transition. This will deliver a federal body tasked specifically with supporting power station workers into new jobs and driving investment and economic diversification in energy communities. We can't wait until the 2040s, this work must start now.

We have a choice. Action and planning around the energy transition that will create viable new industries for workers in affected regions before the next two decades, or Dutton's half-baked nuclear plan with no costings, no information on how much energy they will produce and no details on how they will build the bloody things.

