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December 2024



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MEU team investigates ‘terrifying’ Grosvenor disaster



The Mining and Energy Union has launched an industry-first investigation into this year’s underground explosion at Grosvenor mine, bringing together union mine safety experts from around Australia and globally.

This is the first Union-led investigation that brings together experts from across jurisdictions in order to gain an understanding of the event’s origins, as well as the points of failure that led to it occurring.

The explosion took place on 29 June, forcing the mine to be evacuated and the entrances to be sealed. While no one was physically injured in this event, it followed the 2020 explosion in the same mine which left four workers in critical condition with third degree burns.

Led by Queensland District ISHR Jason Hill and General Vice President Steve Smyth, the investigation seeks to understand how the explosion was able to take place, including which systems and procedures failed to prevent it from occurring.

Assisting in the investigation were Grosvenor SSHR Julian Barnsdale, South Western District ISHR Stephen Barrett and QLD District Policy and Admin Officer Annika Geraghty. They were joined by United Mine Workers of America Administrator for Health and Safety Josh Roberts, who provided the proceedings with an international perspective.

Throughout the two-week investigation the MEU team analysed a mountain of documentary evidence and data, including gas monitoring data, ventilation readings, inspection reports, risk assessments, hazard management plans, SOPs and trigger action response plans.

The team also visited the surface of Grosvenor, inspecting surface infrastructure and gas drainage, and meeting with workers who were underground at the time of the event.

Additionally, the team examined a comparable longwall take-off and seals at the nearby Moranbah North mine.

Steve Smyth said it's important the Union gets to the bottom of what happened.

"The event itself was a coal mine explosion and had the potential for the catastrophic loss of life," he said.

"This investigation ensures that the MEU leaves no stone unturned in understanding why this explosion has occurred. We owe it to our members, their families and all underground miners."

Jason Hill said that while the MEU was experienced in investigating fatal and serious accidents, this was the most extensive investigation conducted by the MEU into a mine explosion.

He said the witnesses interviewed by the team gave great insight and detail into what must have been a terrifying event.

The seam mined by Grosvenor is the Goonyella Middle Seam, also mined by Moranbah North, Broadmeadow and North Goonyella mines which have also experienced explosions, fires and spontaneous combustion across these mines.

"We are very fortunate to have a very experienced and knowledgeable investigation team. It's our intention to create a final report into this investigation, it is so important to do this before the mine reopens."

Watch this space for updates.



Support for power station workers on the way

Co-ordinated national support for power station workers is on the way with the official commencement of the Net Zero Economy Authority this month.

MEU General President Tony Maher has been appointed to the board of the Authority, which is an independent, statutory authority tasked with supporting workers and communities affected by coal and gas-fired power station closures. Former President of the Fair Work Commission Iain Ross has been appointed as Chair.

The Authority currently has 120 staff and will work with unions, communities, state and local governments and industry to facilitate the development of new industries in traditional energy areas and co-ordinate redeployment for displaced power station workers.

Central to the Authority's work is the 'Energy Industry Jobs Plan' that places obligations on employers at closing power stations to support their workforce including retraining, engagement with potential future employers, and paid time off work for these activities. It also sets up pathways into new jobs through pooled redeployment schemes, with incentives for other local employers to hire displaced workers.

The MEU has campaigned for many years for co-ordinated support for the workers who are most imminently and profoundly affected by Australia's energy transition.

Tony Maher attended the NZEA's first board meeting last week. He said it was a positive meeting where there was a shared commitment to ensuring a bright future for energy regions and redeployment options for affected power station workers.

The next coal power station due to close is NSW's Eraring in 2027, where workers will have the support of the NZEA's Energy Industry Jobs Plan.

"We have been talking about the need for redeployment programs for power station workers for many years. This will now be a reality, with significant expertise and resources allocated to supporting power station workers into new employment.

"The establishment of the NZEA is an important milestone, facilitated by the commitment of the Albanese Government to ensure our energy transition leaves no-one behind. With multiple power station closures in the next five years, there's no time to waste in putting our plans in place."

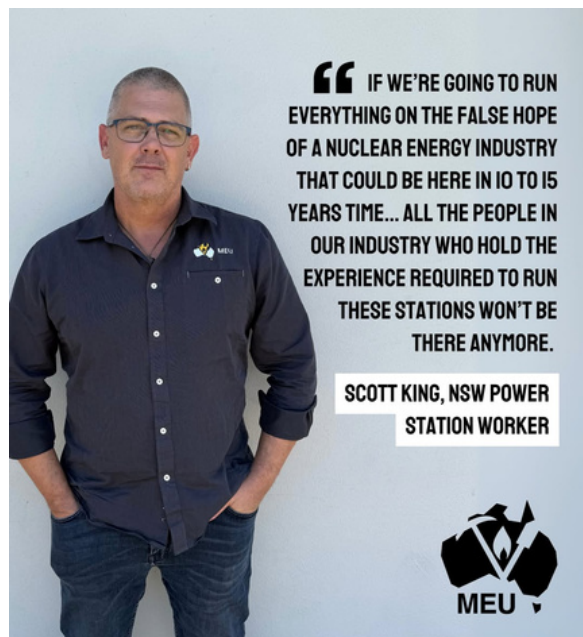
Nuclear timeline doesn't stack up

The MEU has told MPs at a parliamentary hearing in the Hunter Valley that the timeline does not stack up for coal-fired power station workers to transition to nuclear.

District President Robin Williams told a hearing of the Inquiry Into Nuclear Power Generation in Australia that workers in coal-fired power stations would need jobs much sooner than nuclear could provide.

"There is an urgent need for workforce support and investment in diversifying our regional economy. However, the expert advice is that the time has passed for Australia to create an economically viable nuclear industry in the timeframe that we need.

MEU Delegate and Power Station Operator Scott King told the Committee the development of nuclear would be far too late for workers like him, with power stations closing imminently. The Committee will report in 2025.





2024 a big year of giving

MEU Members have continued a long tradition of community giving in 2024.

Here are just a few of the great causes our members have supported in 2024:

'Angel in the Sky'

The Northern Mining and NSW Energy District continued their strong support for the Westpac Rescue Helicopter Service, with members contributing some \$1 million through payroll deductions to the 'Angel in the Sky'.

\$160,000 for QLD Helicopter Services

The Queensland District has continued their support of local helicopter services. \$17,000+ was donated to the Capricorn Helicopter Rescue Service which supports the Capricorn region and Central QLD community for rapid response search and rescue. An additional \$142,000+ donation was made to the CQ Rescue Hangar Helicopter which provides a lifelines to anyone, anywhere at any time across Central and North Queensland.

Ronald McDonald House Newcastle

The Bayswater Lodge (pictured) donated \$20,000 to Ronald McDonald House Newcastle. The House is a home-away-from-home for the families of sick kids undergoing treatment at John Hunter Children's Hospital. It provides over 600 families a year with a comfortable place to stay and peace of mind during difficult times when they need it the most.

Grosvenor Hospital Donation

This year the Grosvenor Lodge gathered for their fourth annual night of remembrance for the underground explosion that tore through their mine on 6 May 2020.

Moranbah nurse Bronwyn Dagan, who was on duty on the day of the explosion, spoke about its impact on nursing staff and implored workers to put their safety first. She accepted a donation of \$5,000 to Moranbah Hospital from the Lodge.

Mineworkers Trust scholarships

The Mineworkers Trust has provided 20 scholarships worth \$7,000 each for Members or families to help fund higher education. Broken Hill local, Violet Holland was one of twenty successful applicants for this year's Mining and Energy Union Mineworkers' Trust scholarship worth \$7,000. The scholarship will assist Violet to pursue her goal of becoming a paramedic as she completes her Bachelor of Paramedicine at Flinders University in Adelaide. The Trust has returned more than \$10 million dollars to Australian mining communities since its inception in the 1970s.

VCE Scholarships for Victorian schools

The Victorian District provides VCE Scholarships to schools within nearby catchment areas of up to \$600. Some of this year's recipients include Kurnai College, Warragul Regional College, Trafalgar High School, and Traralgon Secondary College.

Ongoing support for Members

In 2024 MEU Lodges have also donated to countless individual families in hardship, whether to help fund medical treatment or to assist with costs associated with bereavement.

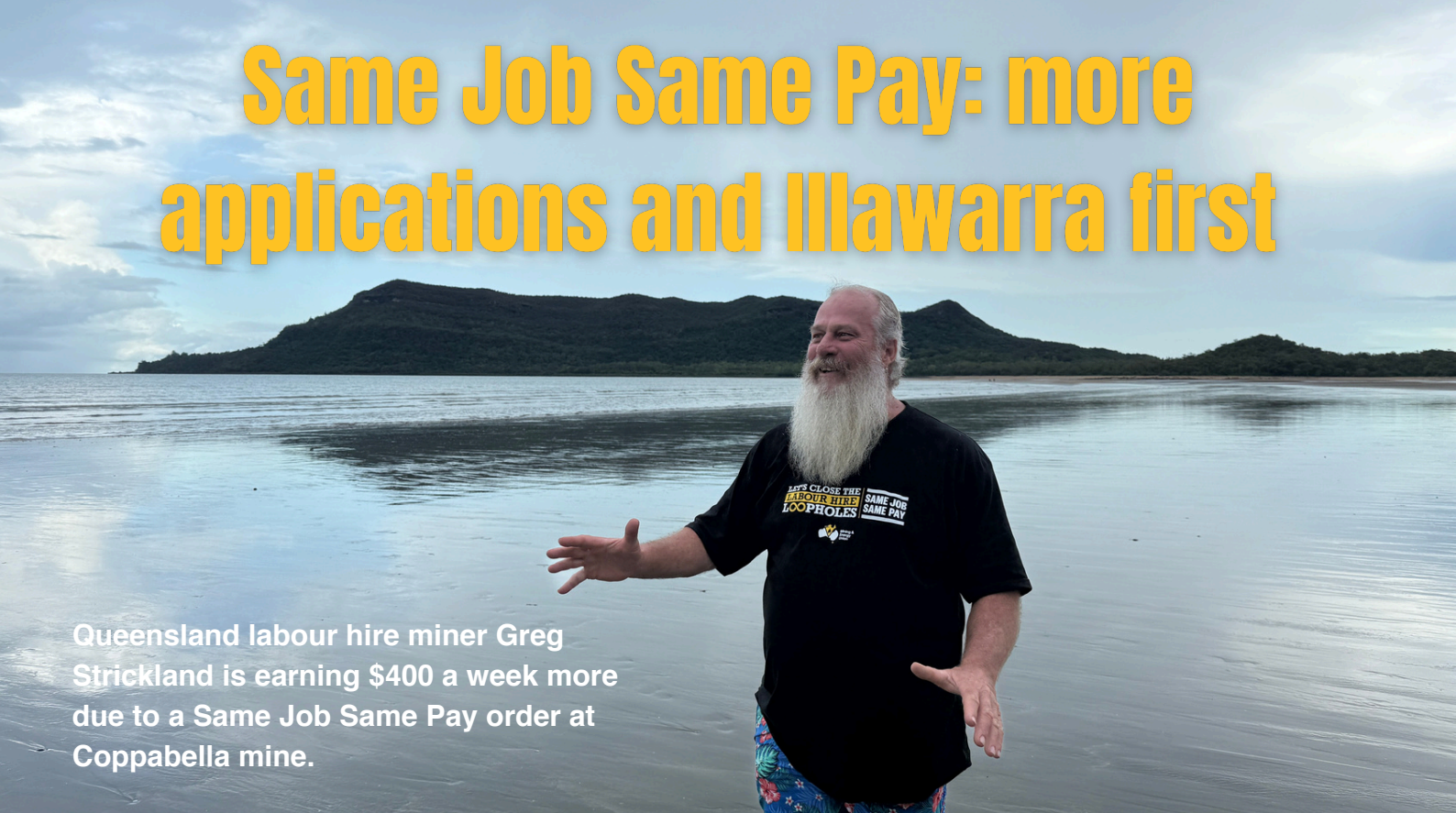
Well done to everyone for their generosity and community support in 2024!



New delegates rights: how will they work for you?

In our latest episode, MEU podcast host Tim Brunero is joined by National Legal Officer Jack Patrick, Caval Ridge Delegate Hannah Freriechs and Loy Yang A Emergence Services Delegate Hayden Stephens to discuss new delegates' rights and how to put them into action.

Same Job Same Pay: more applications and Illawarra first



Queensland labour hire miner Greg Strickland is earning \$400 a week more due to a Same Job Same Pay order at Coppabella mine.

We have closed out 2024 with more Same Job Same Pay applications rolling out, as well as a historic order bringing Same Job Same Pay to the Illawarra.

New applications this month include one covering around 100 Workpac labour hire workers at Anglo American's Dawson Mine at Moura in Queensland's Bowen Basin. If successful, this application will lift the pay of the covered Workpac workers in line with direct Anglo employees, as much as \$25,000 a week in some cases.

This was followed by an application covering labour hire workers at Glencore's Ravensworth mine in the Hunter Valley. This application, covering approximately 165 CoreStaff, Programmed and Workpac workers, will lift pay rates by up to \$40,000 a year if successful.

We have also lodged an application at BHP's Caval Ridge mine near Moranbah. This application covers as many as 300 Workpac and Chandler Mcleod labour hire workers, and will also raise their pay in line with direct BHP employees if successful.

Finally, we also have two applications in the pipeline covering Nexus workers at Dendrobium and Helensburgh mines in the Illawarra. We expect these applications to be lodged by Christmas.

Workers at Appin mine are celebrating an early Christmas present after the Fair Work Commission handed down the first Same Job Same Pay order in the Illawarra coal industry.

MEU member and Production Operator Brian Hinchy is one of the workers who has received a big increase in his pay packet.

Brian has been labour hire for over nine years, working for various contractors. He is currently employed by PIMS.

Brian said that the pay rise is very welcome particularly in a cost-of-living crisis.

"The pay rise will be a massive boost going into the Christmas period. I'm going to use the wage increase to help pay my bills."

The successful Same Job Same Pay or 'regulated labour hire arrangement' order covers around 250 labour hire workers PIMS, with pay rises estimated at over \$4 million annually.

In general, PIMS workers were paid around \$15,000 to \$20,000 less than employees at Appin mine performing the same work under the site Enterprise Agreement. The order sets a 'protected rate of pay' in line with EA rates. South Western District President Bob Timbs said the order at Appin mine was a great first step towards winding back the toxic labour hire model widespread in the NSW southern coalfields.

4 ways 'Secure Jobs Better Pay' is helping you

While Same Job Same Pay delivers pay rises for labour hire workers, there are more ways MEU members are benefiting from Albanese Government workplace reforms.

The 2022 Secure Jobs Better Pay Act introduced a wide range of measures including multi-employer bargaining and prohibiting pay secrecy. Here are four ways the Secure Jobs Better Pay Act is helping MEU members:

1. Ending the 'small cohort agreement' dirty trick

The Act has eradicated 'small cohort agreements', previously used by employers to avoid genuine bargaining. Hand-selecting a few employees to vote on an agreement intended to cover a much larger number was a classic dirty trick used by mining and energy employers to avoid genuine bargaining with the workforce.

Usually the hand-selected employees would be paid above-agreement rates, so they didn't mind voting up an agreement that locked in conditions minimally above the Award.

Small cohort agreements were a tactic to avoid bargaining with the hundreds or thousands of workers that would then become employed and work under these agreements – after approval by the Fair Work Commission.

The Secure Jobs Better Pay Act has brought this dirty trick to an end with new 'genuine agreement' requirements introduced.

2. Ending EA termination threats during bargaining

Another dirty trick used by employers to avoid genuine bargaining was seeking to unilaterally terminate an enterprise agreement. The effect of terminating the Agreement is to push workers' wages and conditions back to Award minimum.

The threat of terminating an agreement and cutting wages and conditions was routinely made by employers in the mining and energy industries to moderate employees' claims during bargaining. Changes introduced by the SJBPA Act mean employers can no longer terminate agreements during bargaining.

3. 5-year window: overcoming employer refusal to bargain

The Secure Jobs Better Pay Act makes it harder for an employer to refuse to bargain by amending the definition of notification time in the Fair Work Act. This means that within a five-year window of the expiry date of an Enterprise Agreement, bargaining can commence upon request by a bargaining representative. This is a sensible change in the face of refusal by some employers to engage in enterprise bargaining.

This amendment has been used by the Western Mine Workers Alliance (our joint venture with AWU in the Pilbara) to commence bargaining this year for a new agreement to replace the BHP Mining area C Operations Agreement 2015 which expired in 2019.

With an employer hostile to bargaining, this allows us to avoid the lengthy and complex process of a majority support determination, which would delay workers benefiting from improvements won through bargaining.

4. Greater rights to flexibility

Prior to the Secure Jobs Better Pay Act, there was little opportunity to challenge employer refusal of flexible work requests. The Fair Work Commission is now able to examine whether a refusal is based on reasonable business grounds.

Several MEU members have benefited from this change to access greater flexibility, including workers returning from parental leave, with caring responsibilities or those with a disability. We have been able to assist these members implement flexible work arrangements in industries and employers not known for supporting flexibility.

This would not have been possible without amendments made by the Secure Jobs Better Pay Act. Members were less likely to make flexibility requests, knowing that the employer could simply say no with little scrutiny.

Read our submission to the Secure Jobs Better Pay Review at meu.org.au/policy-research/

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So you want to be a union social media star?

A recent survey of MEU members revealed that 85% of members use social media weekly, with Facebook being the most popular platform. In recent years, we have seen more Lodges and groups of MEU members move to online platforms.

Whether you're managing a Lodge page, starting a private group or posting about work online, here are our five golden rules to using social media without it coming back to bite you. Remember, if you can read this, there is every chance Richard from HR can too!

1

Don't take or share photos or videos while at work because this is likely to breach company policy. Also, read your company policy!

Taking a selfie at that awesome holiday resort during summer? Great. Taking a selfie in a moving truck? Pump the breaks on that thought. We generally advise members to not take photos or videos while at work because it is likely to breach company policy.

Remember that closed groups aren't totally private.

Even though you may not have invited the boss to join the MEU Lodge page, always assume that your social media posts can find their way into the wrong hands. Believe us, they frequently do. We caution members who manage any union social media accounts to assume that everything you post can be found or screenshotted.

2

Be extra careful during industrial action

During industrial action, it's common for companies to hire private security to run surveillance on what's happening on the picket line. This has now extended to scanning workers' social media posts. When you're on strike, you can still be sacked for breaching company policy, such as using offensive language towards other employees or attacking the company. Commentary about industrial action – even if it's on social media – should be left to Lodge or District officials who can comment on behalf of the union.

'Vaguebooking' can get you in trouble too

"Can't believe he did that. I'm spewing" ... You know those annoying status updates that suggest something's up, but you don't know what it is? That's a vaguebook and it can get you into trouble too. Even if a post doesn't mention the workplace or mention any particular individuals, your employer can still make a case that you are referencing work and take disciplinary action. There have been multiple cases where an employer has claimed a vague post is about work and the Fair Work Commission has agreed.

4

5

When in doubt, get advice from the Union

Finally, if you are unsure about posting something online, or about what someone may have commented on your page, ask your relevant Union Official. They are here to help you and can access legal and communications advice as required.

A few more tips for good measure:

- Don't denigrate your workmates on social media, it can be seen as bullying.
- It's not just your own posts – comments on other people's posts can get you into trouble too.
- It's better not to list your employer on your social media accounts.

Social media blurs the lines between the public and personal like never before and as platforms evolve, so do the issues and risks that workers face.



Message from the General Secretary **2024: Growing and Winning**

Membership has grown by over 2000 in a successful first year for our standalone Mining and Energy Union.

Last December marked the end of a lengthy and complex process to withdraw from the amalgamated CFMEU and the start of our journey as the independent Mining and Energy Union.

In the past 12 months our Union has gone from strength to strength. Our long campaign to stamp out the labour hire rort has seen Same Job Same Pay laws introduced, pay rises start to flow and permanent jobs increase.

Our advocacy for co-ordinated national support for power station workers and communities has seen the establishment of a new independent Authority with powers to redeploy displaced workers.

We've established a sturdy foothold in the Pilbara, formed a new Alliance to cover hard rock miners in western NSW and beefed up our national organising and training capacity to grow our numbers and skill up our delegates to represent them.

Around the country, members are standing together to win improved conditions in their workplaces and enforce them.

Our first national Convention as an independent Union in late October was a great success, involving a record number of delegates and setting our direction for the next four years.

Workplace reforms introduced by the Albanese Government to get wages moving

have not only delivered Same Job Same Pay, but also a wide range of improvements to bargaining and job security as well as beefing up rights for union delegates. These reforms help us even the playing field dealing with mining and energy employers, who some of the most ruthless around.

In the past year we've seen our membership numbers grow by more than 2000 nationally which is a very encouraging sign that we are heading in the right direction. Of course, we want to keep growing until we have strong density in every mining and energy workplace that we can cover.

I'm excited for 2025, to build on our growth and success of 2024. An important focus in the first half of the year will be re-electing the Albanese Government and ensuring our important wins like Same Job Same Pay, delegates' rights and support for energy workers aren't wound back by a Dutton Government.

There was unanimous agreement at our National Convention that we can't risk that.

On behalf of our national leadership team I'd like to thank MEU Officials, Staff, Delegates and Members for their hard work and support in 2024. Our thanks also go to the partner organisations who support our members so well.

We wish you all a safe and happy Christmas and New Year and look forward to working with you to meet the challenges and seize the opportunities 2025 brings.

Grahame Kelly
General Secretary