



Net Zero Economy Authority

## Torrens Island Energy Industry Jobs Plan Consultation

MEU Submission, February 2025

The Mining and Energy Union (MEU) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Net Zero Economy Authority's (NZEA) Energy Industry Jobs Plan consultation for Torrens Island Power Station.

The MEU represents more than 24,000 members working across Australia's mining and energy industries, including in underground and open cut coal and metals mining, coal-fired power generation, coal ports, and iron ore mining and transportation.

Our Union was a longstanding and leading advocate for a national authority that would govern the energy transition in the interests of workers and their communities. The establishment of the NZEA in law was a huge milestone – now attention must turn to the challenging, practical work of ensuring the Authority delivers on its objectives.

Our members live and work in the energy regions that the NZEA has been established to support. Over the coming years, members in coal-fired power stations, and the mines that supply them, will rely on the NZEA and Energy Industry Jobs Plans to support them through the closure of their worksites and into new opportunities created in their communities. Energy workers nationwide are counting on a comprehensive and successful Energy Industry Jobs Plan for Torrens Island.

The closure of Torrens Island Power Station near Port Adelaide is the first test of the NZEA, and must provide a strong precedent for the design and implementation of future Energy Industry Jobs Plans. The eventual Torrens Island Plan can then be treated as a blueprint to be customised to suit the needs of coal power workers and their regional communities.

We support the joint submission by the 'Single Bargaining Unit' (SBU) group of unions at Torrens Island, and trust that the Authority will rely on their first-hand expertise of what is needed for workers at the site.

### ***How will the closure of Torrens Island Power Station impact you, either personally, as a community, or as an organisation?***

MEU members work in coal-fired power stations across Australia and in the dependent coal mines that supply them. Experiences of past coal-fired power station closures, including Hazelwood and Wallerawang, demonstrated the shortcomings of transitions left to the private sector without national government involvement. The communities of the Latrobe Valley and Lithgow continue to be deeply impacted by those closures, with their local economies left reeling.

A successful transition for energy workforces and communities will require a tremendous amount of local buy-in and trust in the NZEA. Coal communities across the country will be closely

observing what unfolds at Torrens Island as the NZEA's first real test. If the NZEA is successful at implementing an effective Energy industry Jobs Plan at Torrens, workers in other power stations will have greater confidence in the process, improving its chances of success and reducing any scepticism that might otherwise become an obstacle to the achievement of the NZEA's already challenging policy objectives.

***Will workers at Torrens Island B and other impacted businesses be able to find and transition into new employment in the Adelaide region quickly once the station closes?***

We understand that the unions and workers at Torrens hold concerns about insufficient coordination with potential receiving employers to connect affected workers to new opportunities. This lack of coordination makes it challenging for workers to identify the most suitable training and reskilling courses, and impedes an organised transition where workers are released to new opportunities at an appropriate time while the power station operates safely through to its final day.

The SBU unions expect that the closure of Torrens Island will impact the operations of several contractors with regular workforce on site. However, to-date, engagement with dependent employers has been lacking, which impacts negatively on the prospects of this cohort of workers to successfully transition. The NZEA must include these dependent employers within the Energy Industry Jobs Plan for Torrens Island.

There will not be enough new – and decent – job opportunities for affected Torrens Island workers without NZEA involvement. With nearby power generation sites, such as Pelican Point and Osborne, hosting small workforces, job openings are unlikely to arise at these sites without incentives delivered through the NZEA. Similarly, the backing of the NZEA is required to broaden the search for suitable receiving employers across the Adelaide region, while heeding concerns about the need for secure work with comparable pay and conditions.

***Are there gaps in the current supports available to affected workers?***

The SBU unions consider that there remain gaps in the transition support available to affected workers, despite some achievements in the most recent round of enterprise bargaining. For example, a major gap at present is the absence of arrangements that enable attendance of training courses on paid time. Individual transition plans for employees are minimal, described by workers on-site as box-ticking exercises. And the provisions achieved in the enterprise agreement, however limited, do not extend to workers at associated sites and entities (i.e., dependent employers) that will be impacted by the closure.

***Would the establishment of an EIJP support a smoother transition for impacted workers and their local community?***

The establishment of an EIJP is essential for Torrens Island workers. A smooth transition for workers and their community will almost certainly be out of reach without the coordination and support provided by an EIJP.

We understand that, to-date, engagement between AGL and potential receiving employers in the Adelaide region has been too limited to build the necessary redeployment pathways in time for closure.

With the support of an EIJP, tangible pathways into industrial roles at sites nearby Torrens Island (along with those further afield) can be developed for workers in an orderly way, with access to necessary reskilling and training courses, and timed so that the power station is adequately staffed until its final day of operation and eventual decommissioning.

The implementation of an EIJP is particularly time-sensitive for Torrens Island workers, with less than 18-months until the closure date submitted to AEMO. The time-sensitivity of the process, however, is not unique to Torrens.

Though future power station closures will benefit from at least two years of NZEA involvement in closure planning (as required by the legislation's provisions on community of interest declarations), we remain concerned that broader transition planning has been taking too long to unfold. For example, it has now been more than two years since the announcement of Queensland's Energy and Jobs Plan in September 2022, but plans for workers and communities are still not in place. The NZEA has a critical role to play in addressing situations like this across the country and, in future, it must act far earlier than is required by the legislation to adequately prepare workers for closures and deliver the necessary investment in local economies.

***Do you think the current geographic area will accurately support local labour market analysis for Torrens workers?***

The SBU unions argue that the proposed geographic area should be expanded to include the local government areas of Onkaparinga, Adelaide Hills, Mount Barker, Adelaide Plains, and Light Regional. We understand that this expanded area would better reflect where some current employees live and commute to Torrens Island from.

Torrens Island's urban location distinguishes it from future closures that will come under the remit of the NZEA. It is likely that the distinct regional geographical areas surrounding coal-fired power stations will be more easily identifiable for labour market analysis. In the less easily defined Torrens closure context, a broad approach is suitable as it will ensure that important opportunities for redeployment in close proximity to some workers' homes are not overlooked.

For workers facing significant upheaval, an Energy Industry Jobs Plan provides a pathway to the future. This is necessary for Torrens Island workers and, in-time, the thousands employed in Australia's coal and gas power industries.