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June 2025



Locked-out Helensburgh Mineworkers

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# Helensburgh Lockout Shows Why Laws Must Change

**Peabody has locked out mineworkers at its Helensburgh mine for 19 days, after they took just one hour of stop-work action. Laws must change to prevent disproportionate retaliatory lockouts by employers during bargaining.**

The Mining and Energy Union and ACTU are demanding a change to unfair and punitive lockout laws, following members at the Metropolitan Mine near Helensburgh being locked out by their employer for almost three weeks in retaliation for taking one hour of industrial action.

Since November the MEU Helensburgh lodge has been engaged in bargaining with Peabody, the owner of Metropolitan. Peabody has consistently failed to cede ground on many of the Lodge's claims, leading to multiple conciliation hearings in the Fair Work Commission.

Particularly contentious is Peabody's efforts to remove the mine's longstanding job security clause, which sets the ratio of directly employed workers to labour hire contractors, and prevents Peabody from replacing permanent jobs with labour hire. The Helensburgh Lodge is also seeking pay increases to bring the site in line with Illawarra standards.

In pursuit of these claims, MEU members voted overwhelming to pursue industrial action, notifying Peabody of their intent to take one-hour stop works at the beginning of some shifts, as well as placing partial work bans on the transport of wide loads through the main drift and on training.

Having only undertaken a single one-hour stop work each, the Helensburgh miners were shocked on Wednesday 18 June to discover that Peabody had locked them out for over a week, denying wages to the workers and their families. Expecting to return to work on Thursday 25 June, they again had the rug pulled out from under them when Peabody extended the lockout to 6 July.

Helensburgh Lodge President Matt Potter said that workers were undeterred by Peabody's strategy of coercion and would continue to fight for fair pay and job security.

"Peabody's standover tactics are designed to intimidate us into giving up our bargaining rights, but we aren't ready to roll over," Matt said.

"We've been through several years of stagnate wage growth and cost of living pressures, while continually setting production records at the mine.

"We're not ready to give up yet, this isn't our first rodeo."

Indeed, punitive and disproportionate lockouts have long been a favoured tactic of Peabody, and they are becoming increasingly prominent in other operations. This is Matt's fifth lockout in as many EAs at the site, making vindictive employer response depressingly routine for the miners.

ACTU Secretary Sally McManus called on the Federal Government to reform the laws which enable disproportionate Employer Response Action, drawing a comparison to TFTU members who were locked out by their employer in January.





## Helensburgh Lockout Cont'd

“Whenever a multinational attempts to crush a workforce, the union movement will oppose the sort of heavy-handed punitive action we’re seeing being exercised by Peabody mining.

“We saw it earlier this year, when the Japanese multi-national, Opal locked out 300 pulp and paper mill manufacturing workers in Victoria’s Latrobe Valley” McManus said.

“These completely disproportionately harsh lock outs need to stop; and our outdated lockout laws reviewed so that employers can’t unilaterally shutout workers taking protected industrial action.”

McManus’ views were echoed by South West District President Bob Timbs, who also called for the law to be changed to prevent draconian response actions.

“Peabody’s disproportionate response reveals a totally uneven playing field. Union members are required to hold a vote, reach a consensus on industrial action and notify employers in advance; employers are able to unilaterally lock out workers in response for as long as they want, denying the workers and their families an income.”

This is an important unfinished reform that we urge the Government to address without delay, to fulfill their commitment to fair and genuine workplace bargaining.”

District Vice President Mark Jenkins, who sits on the MEU bargaining team for Metropolitan, hoped that US coal giant would recognise that their strategy was failing, and come back to the table in good faith.

“Peabody needs to drop the Trump-style bullying tactics and engage constructively with MEU members demands.

“Helensburgh miners aren’t intimidated by Peabody’s heavy-handed strategy; it has only strengthened their resolve to secure a better deal for their families and workmates.”



# Narrabri Miners Beat 7/7 Roster In New Deal

**Unity at Narrabri underground mine has seen MEU members defeat an attempt by Whitehaven to impose an unpopular roster pattern and has locked in improved pay and entitlements.**

Narrabri Underground coal miners have successfully defended their preferred mid-week/weekend roster pattern in their newly approved enterprise agreement, defeating an attempt by Whitehaven to impose 7/7 rosters.

The new EA, which also includes a strong pay increase and improved entitlements, is a big win for the majority-local workforce, many of whom live in Narrabri and Gunnedah.

Narrabri Underground Lodge President Ben Manchee said local Whitehaven management had done the right thing by hiring locally, but there was a long-term push from the board to introduce the longer roster pattern in line with other operations.

"We're a local pit," said Ben. "Our guys live here, play footy here, raise families here. A 7/7 roster just doesn't work for our community."

The pushback against the proposed 7/7 roster was overwhelming. In a decisive vote, 125 out of 130 employees voted 'no' to Whitehaven's first offer proposing the change, with just three in favour.

"That was a really good result for us," Manchee said. "It showed the company just how united we were."

Negotiations for the new enterprise agreement were led by Manchee alongside Lodge Vice Presidents Matt Launders and James Belcher, with the support of District Vice President Chad Hanson.

The united position of the workforce backed up by strong union density at the site of around 95% meant the workforce could not only reject the roster change but also secure a clause in the agreement that prohibits the company from implementing such a roster.

Beyond roster protections, the new agreement includes key wins for workers including:

- Annual increases of 5, 4 and 4% in the 3-year deal.
- Shift loadings increased from 15% to 20% for the rotating afternoon / night shift.
- Maximum retention bonus increased from \$10,000 to \$15,000, at \$1000 for every year of service.
- Attendance bonus of up to \$5,000.
- Workers compensation provisions improved.
- Backpay to December 2024, covering 21 weeks.





The agreement also secured a three-year term, despite the company's preference for four, and maintained the maximum 10.5-hour shift length established since the mine's early days in 2010.

Ben, who has lived in Narrabri for 25 years and is deeply involved in the local junior rugby league, said the camaraderie of working underground and community ties among workers were key to the union's strength.

"We've always had strong density - 90 to 95%. A lot of the guys come from rural backgrounds so they aren't always familiar with unions when they start. But we've had some good delegates who have shown the value and importance of standing together."

Reflecting on the process, Ben said the early engagement with members and transparent communication were crucial. "We got onto it early, had conversations really early. The guys were bought into the process. That made all the difference."

The final vote on the agreement saw 103 in favour and 32 against - a stark contrast to a narrow result for the 2022 EA that was voted up with a majority of just four votes. "It's a good deal after a period of not making a lot of progress in bargaining," said Ben. "The majority understood that."

## Gupta Woes Lead To Uncertainty At Tahmoor And Bell Bay

The fallout of the collapse of Sanjeev Gupta's business empire is continuing to reverberate for MEU workers in NSW and Tasmania.

ABC's 7:30 spoke to some about how their lives have been upended through the financial mismanagement of the operations.

To watch, scan the QR code:





# Queensland Checkies Prepare For New Safety Challenges



**More than 70 Site Safety and Health Representatives (SSHRs) from across Queensland gathered in Mackay in June for the 2025 SSHR Conference - an intensive five-day event focused on equipping workplace safety leaders with the tools, knowledge, and confidence to keep their workmates safe.**

With 20 first-time attendees, the conference underscored the growing importance of SSHRs in Queensland's mining industry and the need to keep up to date with emerging issues.

Queensland District ISHRs Jason Hill, Blair Kidd and Craig Smith led the conference with a strong message: "Safety is union business - and it's up to us to lead from the front."

The conference provided a mix of expert presentations, practical training, and peer-to-peer learning. A key focus was on empowering SSHRs, especially those newly elected to their roles, to return to their sites with the confidence to challenge unsafe practices and audit safety plans effectively.

Topics ranged from respiratory health and fatigue management to risk assessment and hazard identification.

Dr Bob Cohen (Clinical Professor of Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences, University of Illinois) and Dr Nikky LaBranche (Dust & Respiratory Health Program Lead, Minerals Industry Safety and Health Centre, The University of Queensland) delivered critical updates on respiratory health risks, including dust exposure, welding fumes, and spirometry standards.

The United Mine Workers of America's Safety representative Josh Roberts gave an update on the state of OHS and safety standards in the United States.

Professor Maureen Hassall (Director of the Sustainable Minerals Institute's Industrial Safety and Health Centre at The University of Queensland) led a full-day session on risk management, emphasising the need for SSHRs to understand hazards deeply and implement hard controls.

"It's about knowing what can go wrong, and making sure it doesn't," she said.

Attendees also examined past incidents involving cranes and slings to identify gaps in previous safety protocols. These case studies helped SSHRs understand how to audit current practices and prevent repeat failures.

The conference also addressed emerging risks, such as the psychosocial impacts of digitalisation and algorithmic-managed work, with insights from Professor Michael Quinlan (Emeritus Professor of Industrial Relations, School of Management and Governance, University of New South Wales). MEU National Vice President Stephen Smyth provided updates on national and international occupational health and safety developments.

Beyond physical safety, the conference highlighted the importance of mental health. A session with Mates in Mining reinforced that looking out for each other's wellbeing is just as vital as managing physical hazards.



## Old Safety Conference Cont'd

Thanks were extended to Queensland Safety Policy Officer Stephanie Kameric, who presented valuable statistics on reported safety events, helping SSHRs understand trends and areas for improvement.

With a new conservative Queensland Government in place, concerns were raised about upcoming policy reviews and what might be triggering them. The MEU committed to working through these changes with transparency and continued advocacy for worker safety.



**As the conference wrapped up, the message was clear: SSHRs are not just safety reps. They are leaders, educators, and protectors of their crews. And with the right support, they are ready to take that responsibility back to their mines.**

## Eraring Workers Hopeful Of Support



The federal transition authority has begun consultations on transition support at NSW's Eraring Power Station, and workers are hopeful it will lead to enforceable requirements for employers to provide training and clear pathways into new employment.

The Net Zero Economy Authority (NZEa) was established by the Albanese Government to ensure energy workers and regions benefit from the ongoing energy transition. While the NZEa does not set closure dates or determine Australia's emissions reduction trajectory, it plays a vital role in supporting:

- Workers - by offering direct support to those at closing power stations and associated employers, as well as broader assistance for workers in affected regions.
- Communities - by facilitating investment in new industries and economic opportunities in identified regions, including the Hunter Valley.
- Investors - by coordinating across all levels of government to drive investment in energy regions, diversify local economies, and create jobs.





## Eraring Workers Hopeful Of Support Cont'd

A key mechanism the NZEA uses to support power station workers is the Energy Industry Jobs Plan (EIJP). This tailored and enforceable plan can place obligations on employers to provide a minimum level of support, including training packages and redeployment opportunities. The NZEA can also offer incentives to regional employers to hire workers affected by mine closures.

Currently, the NZEA is consulting with workers, employers, and stakeholders in the region to determine whether it will apply to the Fair Work Commission for an EIJP at Eraring.

The MEU will strongly advocate for Eraring workers and those in the supply chain - including the captured Myuna coal mine - to receive the coordinated and enforceable support an EIJP can deliver.

Find out more about the Eraring consultation:



Meanwhile, the NSW Government has announced the creation of a Future Jobs and Investment Authority (FJIA) to support coal communities across the state. The FJIA will operate in four coal-producing regions: the Hunter, Illawarra, Central West, and North-West.

The Authority will have a wide remit, including:

- Planning and land use
- Workforce support
- Skills training
- Attracting investment

The MEU is committed to engaging with all programs that support coal workers and communities affected by the energy transition. We will continue to hold governments and employers accountable for delivering real, positive outcomes.





## Leadership Message

# The US Shows Threats and Opportunities

**This month, I had the privilege of joining our brothers and sisters in the United Mine Workers of America at their annual Black Lung Conference in West Virginia – arguably the world’s foremost summit on the disease.**

I’ve attended many times as a MEU official, but this year felt markedly different. While some have welcomed Trump’s re-election and his pledge to revive American mining, his return has already had devastating consequences for the coal industry - particularly in health and safety oversight.

The conference theme, “Those that forget history are doomed to repeat it,” couldn’t have been more fitting. Trump’s push to cut red tape and maximise efficiency has come at the cost of the very safeguards meant to protect the workers he claims to champion.

Most troubling are the deep funding cuts to two critical institutions. NIOSH - the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health - lost 85% of its funding in Trump’s initial DOGE cuts. NIOSH leads global research into black lung and runs essential health surveillance programs, including lung screenings and B-Readings that are vital for early detection and treatment.

Over the years, I’ve adapted many NIOSH-developed standards for use in the Australian coal industry. Their research underpins our push for tighter dust regulations and black lung prevention. Seeing such a vital institution gutted in the name of cost-cutting is deeply distressing.

Following public outcry, the administration rehired some of the sacked NIOSH staff - but not all.

# Leadership Message Cont'd

Worse still, the proposed 2026 budget calls for eliminating NIOSH entirely, transferring its responsibilities to the Department of Health. History shows that generalised services rarely meet the specific needs of coal miners, and there's little reason to believe this time will be different.

Similarly, Trump has heavily defunded the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) - the US equivalent of Resources Safety and Health Queensland or the NSW Resources Regulator. MSHA inspectors ensure mines comply with safety standards and have the authority to halt unsafe operations.

Trump proposed closing over 30 inspector offices across coal regions, severely limiting enforcement capacity. This decision, too, was reversed after community outrage - but the damage was done. The administration has since frozen all new mine safety regulations, preventing experts from addressing emerging risks.

I spoke with John, a miner living with advanced Progressive Massive Fibrosis - the most severe form of black lung. He voted for Trump, hoping for industry revival, but now regrets it. "I didn't realise he was going to do this," he told me.

What's worse, Trump's promises haven't delivered. Since January, three mines have closed in West Virginia, and not a single new one has been announced. His "Dig, Dig, Dig!" slogan increasingly appears to have been about boosting mine owner profits - not helping workers.

Despite these setbacks, US mine workers remain resilient. The UMWA continues to recruit and organise, even in some of the most anti-union states in the country. They're looking to the progress we've made in Australia - particularly our Same Job, Same Pay campaign - as a model for organising in an industry that's becoming more casualised and reliant on labour hire.

They're also continuing to push for reform around black lung and respiratory protections, even as their calls are increasingly ignored by an indifferent government.

This trip left me feeling profoundly grateful to live in Australia, where union voices are heard in policymaking and where we can address problems more directly. I'm thankful we've elected another strong Labor government - one that listens to workers and values their input.

It also served as a stark reminder: when mining companies call for less red tape, they're really calling for fewer safety measures and weaker worker protections. And it's always the miners who end up paying the price.

**Stephen Smyth**  
**General Vice President**







# What To Do If You've Been Injured at Work

**Being injured at work can be traumatic and very stressful. It is important to follow correct protocol, as what happens in the hours and days after your injury can have a serious impact on your life and career.**

If you've been injured on the job, the company may insist that you see an on-site doctor. You are under no obligation to do this, and you should see the doctor of your choosing.

Fill out an Incident Report as soon as you can to pass it on to your employer. Keep a copy on hand for yourself, and refer it to your supervisor, HSR, or Delegate. Note any witnesses to the injury.

When you visit your doctor, make sure they perform a detailed check-up and give you a plan to recover from the injury. This might entail medication, a referral to a specialist, or simply telling you to rest.

Take a mate or a relative to appointments if you need support. Never take an employer or a manager with you to medical appointments and consultations; it's none of their business.

Get your doctor to write you a medical certificate and ask them to fill out their section of a Worker's Compensation claim form. No matter how minor the injury might be, you may be entitled to compensation. Don't let your employers talk you out of submitting a claim.

Whatever the injury is, take some time off work, even if it's only for a few days. You may be physically fit to work, but it's important to give your mind a chance to recover as well.

Trust your doctor and be patient during the recovery process. If your doctor says you're not fit to work, don't ignore them. If they say you are fit for less strenuous work, talk to your supervisor about being reallocated or working less hours. Pushing yourself can worsen the injury, and it may even put you out of work permanently.

Don't let your employer determine when you're fit for work. Especially not without consulting you first. They're not medical professionals, and they can provide you with the wrong advice if they wish.

During this period from the injury occurring and through to the end of your recovery, keep a diary and document everything that has happened. Keep copies of all documentation and medical certificates.

The MEU is always here to support you through injury. If you need support, guidance, or advice, please contact your local branch or your delegate.