

Energy Industry Jobs Plan Consultation – Eraring Power Station

Joint Union Submission to the Net Zero Economy
Authority

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Overview – Eraring Needs an Energy Industry Jobs Plan

Unions representing workers at Eraring Power Station and dependent employers view an Energy Industry Jobs Plan (EIJP) covering Origin and key contractors and suppliers as essential to giving workers the opportunity for a smooth and co-ordinated transition following the plant's closure.

Directly employed and contractor workers at Eraring have specialist skills that will be required for the safe operation of the power station through to closure, the actual timing of which is still uncertain. They will be entering a complex jobs market in a regional economy facing significant disruption, including other major closures, the roll-out of multiple new government programs and the emergence of new projects and industries. Aligning these moving pieces to ensure these displaced workers find suitable and good quality jobs will be a complex task outside the scope of a single employer-run transition program. An EIJP is required to coordinate this work.

While some direct-hire Origin employees have access to transition support, there are significant shortfalls and exclusions that would be best addressed through application of the EIJP framework. Origin's transition program does not meet best practice standards according to evidence from research into past closures, or existing transition programs in Australia as we discuss later in this submission.

Origin can do better to support workers affected by energy transition and must be held to account to do so.

Meanwhile workers employed at Eraring through contracting firms, or businesses along the supply chain including the captured coal mine Myuna, *are receiving no transition support* while facing the same uncertainties over closure dates and the future jobs market.

We submit that the circumstances faced by directly employed, contractor and supply chain workers affected by Eraring's closure clearly support the letter and intent of Part 5 of the *Net Zero Economy Authority Act* for an EIJP framework to be implemented at Eraring. An application by the Net Zero Economy Authority (NZEa) for a Community of Interest Determination including Origin, Myuna operator Centennial, and the multiple contractor and supply chain businesses with employees whose livelihoods are at risk from Eraring's closure, is justified and necessary.

As the first coal-fired power station to face closure with the NZEA in place, this is an important opportunity to raise standards for transition support and assure affected workers and communities that every effort is being made to deliver on the NZEA's mission statement that no-one is left behind in our transition to net zero.

This submission is supported by the following unions, representing directly employed and contractor workers at Eraring power station, the dependent Myuna coal mine and businesses in Eraring's supply chain:

- Mining and Energy Union
- Electrical Trades Union NSW
- Australian Manufacturing Workers Union
- Professionals Australia
- Collieries Staff and Officials Association
- Community and Public Sector Union NSW

1. Eraring's closure will bring upheaval for workers and the community

1.1 Which workers are affected and how

The closure of Eraring Power Station will directly impact the livelihoods of at least 1,000 workers, including power station employees, contractors, underground miners at the captured Myuna coal mine, and maintenance and supply chain workers. There are up to 500 employees working at Eraring Power Station, including those employed directly by Origin and contractor employees. In addition, more than 300 work at Eraring's wholly dependent coal mine, Myuna Colliery, which does not have the infrastructure to supply any other power station or the export market. Hundreds more work across the supply chain relying in part or substantially on business generated by Eraring including equipment supply and specialist technicians who work on shutdowns and outages.

Considering local businesses and indirect jobs supported by Eraring, along with the families these jobs support, many thousands of people concentrated around Lake Macquarie and the Lower Hunter will be impacted by this closure.

While the bulk of these job losses are expected to occur upon the power station's closure, or after plant decommissioning works have concluded, workers are already reporting that forced redundancies have commenced among office, maintenance, and other staff at Eraring. Further jobs at Myuna Colliery and among contractors for maintenance of the mine and power station may be lost before closure depending on contractual and operational decisions by Origin in the pre-closure period.

Origin employees

Origin employs over 200 workers directly at Eraring Power Station. Workers covered by our Unions include power station operators, electricians, engineers, fitters, boilermakers and technicians. Eraring workers range from young and newer to the site to older with many years' service. According to a survey of union members, the most represented age group is 35 to 44 years with 11 to 20 years of service. Past closures tell us this is age group is an at-risk group of workers.¹

Power station workers tend to work at the same site for the duration of their careers due to the specialist nature of their skills and the length of time taken to be fully qualified in their roles. Eraring workers tend to live locally to the power station, living mostly in suburbs around Lake Macquarie, the northern fringe of the Central Coast and outer Newcastle - and have deep ties to the community due to the long-term nature of their employment.

According to union survey results, most directly employed Origin workers (77%) expect to lose their jobs and receive redundancy entitlements when the power station closes, although about one in five (21%) are unsure how they will be impacted by the closure. None expected to be redeployed within Origin to an alternative site.

¹ Barnes, T., & Weller, S. A. (2020). Becoming Precarious? Precarious Work and Life Trajectories After Retrenchment. *Critical sociology*, 46(4-5), 527-541.

Myuna workers

Myuna is a wholly dependent coal mine, built to supply the power station with no capacity to deliver coal to alternative customers due to its geographical location and lack of transport infrastructure. There are approximately 300 to 350 workers employed at Myuna. Those covered by our unions include underground multi-skilled mineworkers, fitters, electricians and deputies and staff employed in supervisory, technical, administrative and other professional roles. Underground production operators tend to work underground for the duration of their careers and frequently come from generations of underground coal miners, especially at Centennial mines which have a long history of local employment. These mines were the old state government-owned Powercoal mines, built to provide the specific grade of coal the power station was built for.

Underground coal miners can move between different underground mines fairly easily, however this may become increasingly difficult as Australia's energy transition progresses. Underground mineworkers at Myuna include a mix of those who have worked at other underground mines and those who have worked at Myuna for their whole career. Nearly half the surveyed workers (46 per cent) are from generational coal mining families, with up to four generations working underground. Myuna coal miners have lived with uncertainty about the power station's impending closure date exacerbated by contractual issues with Origin.

Among surveyed Myuna members, there was a high level of uncertainty about how they would be impacted by Eraring's closure. Almost half (48%) were unsure how the closure would impact them. Just over a quarter (27%) expected job loss with redundancy and one in five (22%) expected redeployment within the business.

Contractors and supply chain employees

Origin and Centennial both contract out a substantial portion of the work involved in testing and maintaining the plant, equipment, instrumentation and electrical systems of the power station and mine. None of this cohort of workers have been eligible for any transition support to-date.

More than 85 workers service contracts for regular electrical and mechanical maintenance and testing, across Eraring and Myuna. A further group of at least 290 workers are engaged by contractors during outages in reactive or scheduled maintenance of turbines, generators, boiler units, fire alarm and fire-retardant systems, instrumentation and other plant and equipment. Included in those categories are electricians, electrical fitters, mechanical fitters, turbine fitters, boilermakers, trades assistants, scaffolders, crane operators, riggers, non-destructive testing (NDT) technicians, fire sprinkler fitters, and fire technicians.

The closure of Eraring and Myuna necessarily results in a significant reduction in the work available to maintenance contractors that service the two enterprises, and likely redundancy of some or all employees servicing those contracts.

While it is possible to map the expected impacts of the scheduled closure on the employees of maintenance contractors, the date of those impacts is uncertain. Eraring is not compelled to renew existing supply and maintenance contracts beyond their current term. Should Eraring take up state underwriting pursuant to the *Generator Engagement Project Agreement* it must

maintain coal supply and deliver on a maintenance plan, but it need not meet those obligations through existing contracts.

Origin has already indicated an intention to ‘in-house’ some maintenance work currently performed by contractors, with implications both for the period of service that will count toward workers’ redundancy and for access to Origin’s ‘Future Directions’ transition supports. Key elements of Future Directions are closed to new applicants, thereby locking out this group of workers from transition support.

1.2 Wider implications of the closure

The power generation industry is a major employer in the local area, generating work for local businesses and injecting the spending power of high wages into the local community via its workforce. The closure will therefore have major flow-on affects for local economic wellbeing. Currently, Eraring and Myuna are likely supporting at least 3,600 local jobs.²

Without suitable intervention that coordinates effective EIJs with comprehensive Regional Workforce Transition Plans, displaced workers will struggle to find enough good quality work in the region. Lake Macquarie will see hundreds of its highest paying jobs lost at the same moment, with inevitable implications for other local businesses and services. If the transition is poorly managed and its unemployment effects are left unresolved, the closure could precipitate an economic downturn and population outflow in the local area, driving young workers and families to relocate and property values to decline.

Closures like this can have a detrimental economic impact on local business activity through the loss of income to the supply-chain as well as local stores, restaurants, and cafes frequented by the workforce. We are also concerned about the broader impact of this closure on mental and physical health of workers’ spouses, children, and extended families. Union surveys show that workers are concerned about the impact of the closure on their own well-being, their families, and their communities.

Among Origin employees surveyed, three quarters were worried about the impact of the closure on their mental health and well-being (44 per cent very worried / 30 per cent somewhat worried). Over 70 percent were worried about their family’s security after the closure (53 per cent very worried / 20 per cent somewhat worried). This was also reflected in surveyed workers at Myuna, where 95 per cent were worried about their family’s security (49 per cent very worried / 46 per cent somewhat worried), and among surveyed contractors (55 per cent very worried / 18 per cent somewhat worried).

78 per cent of Myuna workers and 73 per cent of contractors reported being worried about their mental health and well-being. This highlights the stress on families – with reports from past

² Based on an employment multiplier of 5.1 for electricity generation and 3.8 for coal mining. Employment multiplier figures are drawn from the NSW Treasury Employment Calculator, Centre for Economic Evidence, <https://www.nsw.gov.au/nsw-government/public-sector/financial-information-for-public-entities/centre-for-economic-evidence/tools-resources>, accessed 27 June.

closures indicating that the effect on spouses' health can be 'almost as high' as redundant workers.³

1.3 Lessons from past closures

Evidence from the closure of the automotive manufacturing industry in Australia shows that the timeline of workers' support is vitally important.⁴ Transition support that begins with the forewarning of the closure and carries on long after the last day on the job mitigates the more severe and lasting negative ramifications of a closure. International research from past closures also warns that many of the most negative social problems do not emerge for 18 to 24 months, when retrenched workers' payouts diminish and holidays end.⁵ This is especially concerning given Origin closed off its Future Directions transition support program in May of this year.

Past closures in Australia, which have informed many of the transition programs to date, have been heavily reliant on the goodwill of private companies.⁶ At the time of the automotive closure, for example, Australia was still a strong consumer market for the closing OEMs and so the closing companies had a vested interest in maintaining goodwill in the community by honouring their commitments to workers and the community. Those incentives are not present for closing power stations. An EIJP would act as an accountability mechanism to ensure that companies honour their commitments. Historically, companies have made significant pledges of support but have not been required to provide evidence of their implementation.

Transition support for workers and communities affected by coal-fired power station closures has historically been lacking⁷. The closures of nine coal-fired power stations between 2012 and 2016 (Munmorah, Redbank and Wallerawang C in NSW, Morwell and Anglesea in Victoria, Collinsville and Swanbank in Queensland, and Northern and Playford in SA) occurred with little co-ordinated planning and minimal support for affected workers or communities. The closure of Hazelwood power station in Victoria with less than six months' notice in 2017 triggered community alarm and union campaigning that delivered a partially-successful plan backed by the Andrews Victorian Government, which ultimately saw 90 of about 700 displaced workers redeployed to other power stations in the region under a voluntary pooled redundancy scheme. The three-year notice period under National Electricity Rules for power station closures was introduced after Hazelwood.

Since then, we've seen the closure of Liddell Power Station at Muswellbrook in NSW, which is the first example of an appropriately-managed closure, with operator AGL facilitating worker redeployment to sister power station Bayswater, and a transition working group and

³ Davies, A; Homolova, L; Grey, C; Bellis, M. (2017). Mass Unemployment Events (MUEs) - Prevention and Response from a Public Health Perspective. Cardiff: Public Health Wales.

⁴ Beale, G. (2022). Recalibrated Expectations: A Qualitative Longitudinal Investigation into Precarious Work and Industry Closure, Flinders University.

⁵ Henderson, R., & Shutt, J. (2004). Responding to a Coalfield Closure: Old Issues for a New Regional Development Agency? *Local Economy*, 19(1), 25-37.

⁶ Beale, G. (2024). Just Transitions: Just for Whom? Lessons from Australia's Automotive Closure, in: Cebulla, A, (2024), *The Future of Work and Technology: Global Trends, Challenges and Policies with an Australian Perspective*, CRC Press: Florida.

⁷ The Ruhr or Appalachia? Sheldon, Junankar and De Rosa Pontello, 2018.

commitments to no forced redundancies both enshrined in the enterprise agreement.⁸ As has been widely noted, most power station closures do not occur in circumstances where workers can be redeployed to the site next door.

Through their networks, power station workers are keenly aware of the situation facing communities who are unsupported and face economic and social decline following power station closures, such as Lithgow in NSW and Morwell in the Latrobe Valley.

2. There are significant shortfalls in support for Origin employees

2.1 Future Directions support was limited in scope

Origin's Future Directions program has been in place at Eraring Power Station since 2022, after the company gave notice that it would close the power station in 2025 (some seven years early). The program remained in place after an agreement was reached with the NSW Government to extend Eraring's operations to either 2027 or 2029, but it has been effectively closed off since May of this year. The Future Directions program is an Origin policy but has never been a binding commitment or formed part of an enterprise agreement or other industrial instrument, making its commitments unenforceable.

The most substantive element of the Future Directions program was the funding of training courses for workers affected by the closure, subject to strict eligibility requirements (as outlined below in 2.2). While the Future Directions program nominally provides 'career planning', as touted in Origin's public-facing materials⁹, workers report being provided with little to no assistance in selecting the most appropriate retraining or skilling pathway for their future and no effort to ensure that worker pathways supported by the program aligned with the available or emerging job opportunities in the local region.

"No one knows what jobs will be available, so you don't know what to retrain for." - Origin worker

While some workers reported a positive experience of accessing preferred training courses through the Future Directions program, this experience was far from universal, even among those workers who satisfied Origin's strict eligibility requirements for the program.

Future Directions' financial advice program is also limited, with Origin not arranging financial advice for employees. Instead, eligible workers could obtain a set amount of funding from Origin towards engaging their own financial advisor in their own time.¹⁰ Uptake of this support has been low, with many workers hesitant to use up their limited financial advice funding now while there still remains so much uncertainty around the actual closure date. Access to this funding is limited to those eligible for the Future Directions program, which excludes significant cohorts (as outlined below in 2.2).

⁸ Clauses 42:8-10, AGL Macquarie Enterprise Agreement 2020 (AG2020/1165).

⁹ <https://www.originenergy.com.au/about/who-we-are/what-we-do/future-directions/>, accessed 27 June.

¹⁰ Allowing employees 'time off work or flexible working arrangements' to receive financial advice is an action under Section 59(3b) of the *NZEA Act*. This has not been provided in the Future Directions program.

2.2 Significant cohorts of Origin workers were excluded

Strict eligibility requirements for Origin's Future Directions program have created large gaps in the support available to workers. About one quarter (26 per cent) of surveyed workers employed by Origin reported that they had not been offered any transition support. The following groups of workers are *entirely excluded* from Origin's Future Directions program:

- Those not directly employed by Origin.
- Those who commenced as an Origin employee after 23 May 2024, even if working on-site as an employee of a different employer prior to that date.
- Certain groups of workers, including engineers.

As Future Directions has been the only support program made available to affected workers to-date, those who have been ineligible have not received any support from any source. It is not only employees of contractors and supply chain businesses who are unfairly missing out on transition support, we also wish to highlight some of the perverse exclusions of direct Origin employees from access to Future Directions, including:

- Workers who started performing work at Eraring prior to 23 May 2024 but were employees of group training organisations for the duration of an apprenticeship, becoming direct employees of Origin after 23 May 2024.
- Workers who commenced at Eraring as contractors employed by Downer, but were later employed by Origin after 23 May 2024 due to the insourcing of the work that was contracted to Downer.
- Workers who were made redundant while in the process of completing an approved, Future Directions-funded course and had their training discontinued.

For example, an MEU member started as a direct Origin employee in December 2024. However, he started at Eraring in January 2021 as an apprentice. He was not a direct employee because Origin outsources employment of apprentices to a group training company. After becoming an Origin employee he enquired about Future Directions and was told he was ineligible due to his starting date. Numerous employees who have worked at the site for years as contractors before being directly employed are also excluded.

"The majority of workers in our crew are not entitled to Origin's Future Directions due to when they were employed even though they were previously on labour hire to Origin before employment." - Origin worker

The NZEA should therefore not assume that all Origin employees have been afforded access to the Future Directions program.

2.3 Paid study time has not been provided

While the Future Directions program provided funding for training courses approved by Origin, workers were not provided with paid time or flexibility to attend those courses. In many cases, workers had to dip into annual leave entitlements, while in others, course applications were rejected due to inflexible approaches to rostering. Commitments made by Origin to allow paid time for exams (if not course content itself) in some workers' 'Individual Support Plans' have not been honoured, and individual study plans have been retroactively altered by Origin to

remove study leave entitlements – further exemplifying the lack of enforceability behind Origin’s supports and commitments. Of surveyed union members at Eraring:

- Only 15 per cent of Origin employees had undertaken any part of their course during paid work time.
- 54 per cent had used weekends or days off.
- 44 per cent had used their own paid leave entitlements, including annual leave.
- 18 per cent had taken unpaid leave.

Some Origin workers reported being knocked back for leave to meet study commitments.

“When Future Directions first commenced I applied to do training for a year course which involved 1 day a month for 12 months. But because 2 out of 10 days conflicted with my work shift pattern, I was not allowed to do the training. Even though I was going to take annual leave.”
- Origin worker

The importance of allowing workers paid time and flexibility to attend training is acknowledged in Section 59(6) of the NZEA Act, and accordingly forms a core component of employer obligations under EIJs. Lack of paid time for study has been especially challenging for those workers with family responsibilities.

“Started training but could not complete due to family [commitments] as well as working a full-time job.” - Origin worker

“Started a Tafe course but found it too hard to complete as a working mum.” - Origin worker

“Very difficult to fit it in doing shift work and doing it in your own time. Wife runs a business if she needs to take time off to look after kids for me to do training, we lose money on both ends.” - Origin worker

2.4 Training approvals are arbitrary and unevenly applied

Workers eligible for Future Directions have also raised concerns about the discretion held by Origin over whether to approve or reject their preferred training courses. Instead of a transparent test to assess whether training requests were reasonable, workers found the approval process to be arbitrary and unevenly applied. When asked whether all affected workers had been given fair opportunities to access available support, more than two-thirds of surveyed Origin employees disagreed.

“Future Directions was very limited and did not let me choose or explore the options I requested. In the end I was allowed to do a one-week course on my own time.” - Origin worker

“Managers seem to be able to do it during work or paid leave. [For non-managers] if it relates to your job they don't care and will still make you take leave. Some people get a lot of funds available others get minimal, some get pilot licences while others struggle to get truck licences.” - Origin worker

2.5 New and amended training requests closed in May

We are highly concerned by Origin’s communication to workers confirming that all new and amended training and Recognition of Prior Learning course requests would be closed off on 23 May 2025. With Eraring’s closure potentially still four years away, and a rapidly changing

industrial and economic landscape in the Hunter Region, it defies reason to lock in training pathways so prematurely and prevent workers from adapting their skills to the most promising emerging opportunities.

2.6 Career guidance and employment pathways have been absent

Career planning advice is a pillar of the EIJP, provided for in Section 59(3) and 59(4) of the *NZEA Act*. However, guidance on future opportunities and suitable skilling and career pathways has been seriously lacking in the Future Directions program. Workers reported that they were not supported to understand the types of roles that may be available for them, and how to align their training pathways to prepare for them. Nor were they assisted to understand how their existing skills may be transferable to new opportunities, allowing for a more efficient retraining pathway. Workers described Origin's general attitude towards career guidance as 'you're on your own.'

"(You have to) sacrifice leave or earning capacity to complete courses that we don't know will provide an employment outcome at the end. No study was presented to us of emerging areas of employment or local positions to target, it was all on us to develop our own plan and research our own future." - Origin worker

The EIJP would oblige closing and dependent employers to facilitate engagement between transition employees and receiving employers, as provided for in Section 59(8) of the *NZEA Act*. None of the surveyed Eraring workers were aware of Origin engaging with other suitable local employers to understand their projected workforce needs and skills requirements, or to build pathways which connect them with Eraring workers who may have suitable skills profiles.

"Many operators would like to move into a similar role with another company for example control room operator with Ausgrid/Transgrid. The Future Directions program has failed to provide a pathway to achieve this which is disappointing." - Origin worker

2.7 How Origin is lagging other Australian power station transition programs

Origin's Future Directions program is not the best example of an employer-led transition program in Australia. For example, the standards of support provided to workers at Muja and Collie Power Stations by employer Synergy exceed those provided by Origin to direct Eraring employees – most notably through allowing paid time for completion of training courses, and extending support to embedded contractor employees. Synergy's program included:

- Individual case management and training according to a training plan for both direct employees *and* eligible contractors. The program initially only applied to direct employees, but unions and Synergy identified that embedded contractors were not receiving equivalent support, and Synergy then undertook to allow contractor employees to access Synergy supports.
- Paid time to complete training courses.
- Continued access to the program for redundant employees beyond the closure date.
- Retention of up to 25% of employees, where the employees have worked until closure and do not have alternative employment, for a three (3) month demobilisation period beyond the closing date.
- Preference for direct employment of transition employees for plant decommissioning.

- A Just Transition Learning Academy to coordinate training delivery in a scalable manner, accessible to direct employees, contractors and the community at large.

However, workers face challenges accessing support even from the most comprehensive programs offered by employers, and union advocacy has invariably been the driving force in improving employer programs so that they are fit for purpose. This underlines the need for programs to be enforceable, such as through an EIJP, and for there to be mechanisms to hold employers accountable to their commitments made to workers.

3. Contractors and supply chain workers are missing out

3.1 Myuna Coal Mine workers

Centennial does not have a plan to support its Myuna workforce. It has been very transparent that its current business and transition plan hinges on Eraring's life being extended to 2029 and Myuna securing the supply contract until closure. Following Eraring's closure in 2029, Centennial hopes to have obtained the relevant approvals to re-open Newstan and the Myuna workforce in its entirety would be redeployed to that site. Centennial do not have a back-up plan and have been clear in communications with employees that they don't intend to formulate a transition plan unless required by NZEA.

While, if it eventuated, redeployment to Newstan would be a good outcome for Myuna workers, it should not be treated as a certainty, or as evidence that Centennial's Myuna workers will not meet the definition of transition employees under the *NZEA Act*.

The Newstan redeployment plan hinges on a number of outcomes that Centennial has little to no influence over. If Newstan fails to restart on Centennial's proposed and arguably optimistic timeline, it will be too late to implement a transition plan. If an EIJP framework is not in place for Myuna workers, Centennial will not develop a transition plan for workers and in the event that Newstan is not ready to re-enter/host the entirety of the workforce, the probable outcome for workers is redundancy.

3.2 Contractors at Eraring

The need for additional supports for employees of dependent contractors is pressing. Origin's Future Directions program does not provide *any* transition support for contracted workers. Existing supports are limited to the direct-hire workforce and will not assist employees of contractors at all.

As discussed at 2.7 above, the exclusion of contractor employees from support programs offered by the host employer is at odds with the approach taken by Synergy at Muja and Collie Power Stations in Western Australia, who accepted that contract workers were falling through the cracks. Synergy agreed to extend access to paid training to contractor employees including operators and maintenance workers employed by WorleyParsons at Collie A Power Station and workers employed by Monodelphus at the Muja coal handling plant.

Similarly, Energy Australia extends transition support beyond its directly employed workforce at Yallourn Power Station. For example, mineworkers employed by mine operator RTL at the dependent Yallourn mine can access Energy Australia's program including career counselling and paid training – noting that the paid training requires approval of both employers.

Contractors have the same requirement for transition support as directly employed workers. Employees of dependent electrical and mechanical maintenance contractors who are working at the Power Station or Coal Mine have the same need for assistance to access employment opportunities with receiving employers as direct employees of Origin Energy and Centennial. Inclusion of those contractors in a Community of Interest Determination would ensure reasonable access for those employees to recruitment related activities and training to assist with finding other employment.

3.3 Dependent employers

The NZEA must cast a wide net when including dependent employers in its Community of Interest (COI) application. All dependent employers that cannot confirm that they will redeploy all affected employees to other roles in their business after the closure must be included in the NZEA's COI application. It is preferable for the COI to capture some workers who may not end up requiring the EIJP supports, than for it to exclude any workers who may meet the definition of 'transition employee' under the *NZEA Act* – noting also that those employed by dependent employers are less likely to have generous redundancy entitlements that they could rely on during a period of unemployment.

The relative size and resources of the dependent employer should bear little weight on the NZEA's determination to name a contractor as a dependent employer in its application for a Community of Interest Determination, as the drafting of the *NZEA Act* provides for responsiveness to individual employers' circumstances. Section 59(1) allows for the operational requirements of closing and dependent employers to be taken into consideration when determining the extent to which taking certain actions in Section 59 may be unreasonable for that employer. Furthermore, the contractor, the transition employees, and the closing employer have a common interest in the continuing viability of the contract up to the point of closure.

When considering a community response, the definition of contractor should be expanded to consider the reduced scope of contracts held by each maintenance contractor because of the closure, and the reduced work available to workers who service those contracts. Essentially, that this closure will likely impact workers employed by contracted companies who do not work on-site.

Where any number of roles are expected to be impacted by the closure or by restructuring of the closing employer's operations in preparation for the closure, that should weigh in favour of naming the contractor as a dependent employer in a Section 56 application for a Community of Interest Determination.

Employees of maintenance contractors to the power station and supplying coal mine are transition employees notwithstanding that their work at the power station or supplying coal mine may be:

- of a casual, seasonal or part-time nature;
- shared among multiple employees according to a rotating roster; or
- provided on an as-needed basis.

The closure will impact workers employed by following dependent employers:

- Centennial's Myuna coal mine
- Downer EDI Engineering Power Pty Ltd
- PGSR (Toshiba)
- Veolia
- Chubb Fire and Security Pty Ltd
- Flyash Australia
- UGL
- AJA Electrical Engineering Services Pty Ltd T/A J. A. Martin Electrical

4. Barriers to a smooth workforce transition

4.1 Regional economic challenges

Although the Hunter Region including Lake Macquarie has long been a host for major industry, the challenges of transitioning workers impacted by the Eraring closure into new employment should not be underestimated.

The Hunter economy is largely reliant on coal mining and power for jobs and economic activity, with mining the second biggest employer after Health Care and Social Assistance.

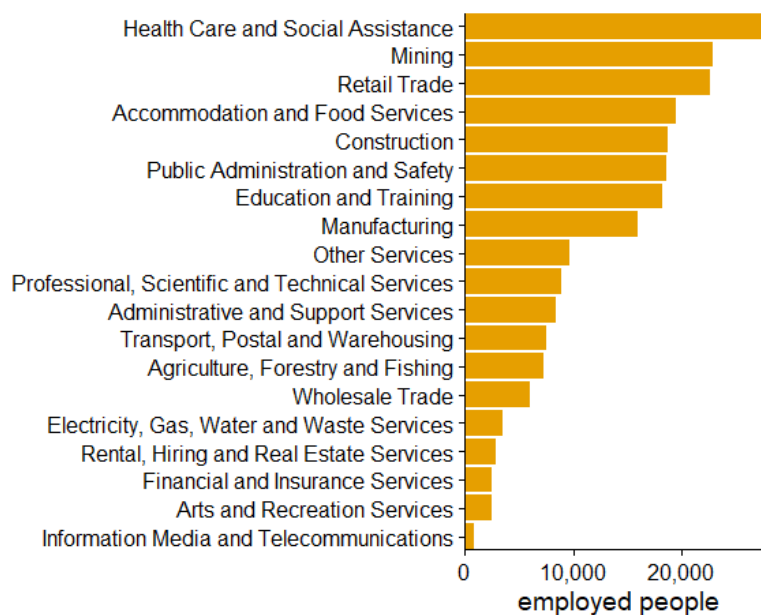


Figure 11: Employment by industry, Hunter Valley excluding Newcastle, Census 2021

Job similarity analysis shows that it is difficult to transition to other industries in the region from jobs in the mining industry.

As the coal industry declines, reducing access to and increasing competition for the familiar and transferable employment the industry can provide, the Hunter region is also the focus of numerous programs and initiatives to develop renewable energy projects and foster economic diversification.

Coal mining and power jobs are generally high-paid, with limited skill transferability. The earnings of power station operators are higher than most heavy industry jobs. Origin operators

recognise that this means that they are unlikely to match their current pay levels when moving into new employment, and view their redundancy entitlements as providing the financial security to support them to transition into lower-paying work. Underground coal mine workers are also well-paid compared to other industries.

Mine and power station operators displaced by the Eraring closure must be redeployed into quality, ongoing industrial jobs, with good pay and conditions, union enterprise agreements, and robust safety standards. This should be the measure for 'suitable' new employment. However, workers are not confident of securing quality work locally.

Over three-quarters of surveyed Eraring and Myuna workers intend to stay in the region after closure, with the remainder largely undecided. But concerningly, almost two-thirds of surveyed Eraring workers and over half of Myuna workers are not confident that they will find such suitable employment in the local area after Eraring closes.

Indeed, over half (56 per cent) of surveyed Eraring workers would sooner choose to take an 'unsuitable' job that paid poorly or did not utilise their skillsets than relocate away from the local area. Only 17 per cent said they would consider relocating if there were no suitable jobs available locally. A higher proportion of Myuna workers (32%) would consider relocating to find coal mining work.

"Besides Mandalong (underground coal mine) there is no jobs that would pay the same in the area unless I travel hours each day." - Myuna worker

It is unlikely that other underground mines currently operated by Centennial in the region (e.g. Mandalong) will be able to adequately accommodate a substantial portion of the Myuna workforce, if any at all. The other nearby underground mine, Chain Valley Colliery, supplies Vales Point Power Station, which is also scheduled to close in the next decade. In the broader Hunter Valley, the outlook for underground mining is uncertain.

Though underground coal miners may move into open cut mining, it is not a straightforward transition. This is particularly so in relation to those performing supervisory and technical roles within an underground environment, such as Deputies, Undermanagers and other statutory officials, who are highly specialised.

While workers with electrical trades qualifications are well-suited to take up opportunities in the burgeoning renewable energy sector, there are significant complexities regarding timing, co-ordination and worker qualifications. For example, the Eraring Power Station and Centennial Myuna Mine are both located within the Hunter-Central Coast Renewable Energy Zone (HCC-REZ). There are a number of large transmission and renewable generation construction projects announced for the HCC-REZ including an upgrade and rebuild of sub-transmission infrastructure currently in an environmental approvals process. Successful transition of workers into construction and maintenance work in the HCC-REZ will require coordination with registered training organisations and receiving employers in the HCC-REZ to ensure that relevant training can be delivered in time for project commencements.

It is clear that a significant amount of regional coordinating work, outside the scope of the Future Directions program, is necessary to manage this transition.

4.2 Skills mismatch and training gaps

The skillsets of power station operators are highly specialised to the thermal generation sector and workers will require recognition of prior learning and retraining to bridge the skills gap for work in other industries.

For 48 per cent of Origin employees surveyed, TAFE or vocational training was their highest level of formal education. However, 36 per cent had not completed any post-school qualifications (including 21 per cent who did not complete high school). Many highly-skilled power station operators possess company-endorsed certificates and competencies that would require a recognition of prior learning assessment before being externally recognised as qualifications. Additionally, many operators who hold trades qualifications have not performed those trades in years or decades meaning their skills lack currency.

Trade qualification and licencing of maintenance workers facilitate a higher degree of labour mobility for those workers than for most power station or coal mine operators. However, maintenance of a power station and underground mine is specialised by experience and training in the maintenance of proprietary products, with the relevant training often provided at the enterprise level. Trade-qualified workers transitioning into maintenance work in new industries will require product training, hazardous areas training, and other training specific to the maintenance operations of the receiving employer. Trade qualified workers transitioning out of power station and mine maintenance work into construction work for new industry, renewable energy and transmission infrastructure will also require post-qualification training. For workers without trades, formal recognition of existing skills and competencies will be needed to understand their retraining and reskilling pathway, and their suitability for redeployment to receiving employers. We expect that many workers will be better prepared for retraining opportunities than they may have realised.

Underground coal miners at Myuna Colliery are expected to face even more heightened challenges in finding new work that attracts a comparable income, unless they can be accommodated at other coal mines. This will be challenging with a large number of underground coal miners looking for work at the same time.

“As of right now, nobody could provide suitable employment, as I will be 1 of roughly 200 Multi Skilled Mine Workers looking for employment.” Myuna worker

Underground mining is a difficult and highly specific type of work unique to that sector. Compared to power station operators and other transition employees with trades qualifications, this cohort of workers are less likely to have completed school or obtained post-school qualifications (excluding Deputies, Supervisors and other statutory roles).

Of surveyed Myuna coal mine workers, half did not complete year 12. A further 11 per cent completed year 12 as their highest level of formal education and 30 per cent had completed TAFE or vocational training. Therefore, this cohort may require additional support to undertake new or bridging qualifications for skilled roles in other industries. Though Myuna workers typically do not earn as much as operators at Eraring, they also face the likelihood of significant post-closure income loss. “Comparable rate of pay” was the top concern about finding suitable alternative work for Myuna workers, nominated by 73 per cent of respondents, followed by

competition for jobs. Asked about potential suitable alternative employers, Myuna workers largely said they were not sure / didn't know.

"Unsure, there are very [few] large businesses in this area that pay well." Myuna worker

4.3 Age-based vulnerabilities

The impacts of Eraring's closure will be experienced differently by workers depending on their age. Almost half of surveyed Origin (40 per cent) and Myuna (46 per cent) employees are concerned about their age affecting their ability to find suitable employment after closure. For about a quarter, this is their top concern above all others.

There is a clear danger of workers who are considered 'too young to retire and too old to retrain' falling through the gaps. This cohort are particularly vulnerable to long-term income loss through movement into low-paid, insecure work or unemployment.

The majority of Origin employees we surveyed have decades of working life ahead of them, with the biggest cohort being in the 35-44 age bracket. Fewer than one in 10 Origin and Myuna employees said they would retire early if they could not find suitable work locally. This points to the importance of strong transition support shaped around training and skilling for the future labour market so that early and mid-career workers do not become entrenched in unsuitable, poor-quality jobs or get forced out of the labour market before they are ready.

With the correct support, workers who are earlier on in their careers should be in a strong position to retrain and forge new career paths. However, those with families and caring responsibilities are likely to be less able to afford the time and potential income loss involved in taking on retraining courses or apprenticeships, reinforcing the importance of being allowed flexibility and access to paid time by their employer as part of a transition support package, and the need for transition support to continue after closure.

Recognition of existing skills is similarly important, especially for workers later in their careers, as it will enable the identification of shorter training pathways based on transferability and upskilling, preparing them for new work sooner – as discussed in the previous section.

4.4 Uncertain closure date of Eraring

Eraring's scheduled closure date has changed twice in the past three-and-a-half years and is still uncertain. This has been a major source of stress for affected workers. Most surveyed Origin employees (68 per cent) think that the lack of certainty around Eraring's closure date will be one of the biggest challenges to finding suitable alternative employment.

Coordinating the timing of the closure, so that Eraring can operate safely and workers can commence with new employers at a suitable time, is a major logistical challenge. The EIJP can assist in addressing this challenge because of the framework it provides for the participation of receiving employers, and the obligations it places on closing and dependent employers to facilitate activities that connect their participating employees with receiving employers.

The changing timing of the closure has already had implications for workers who have accessed the Future Directions program. Many Origin employees gained new qualifications – on their own

time – that were funded by the Future Directions program, with the understanding that they would be seeking new employment in August 2025. At that time, their redundancy payment would financially enable them to transition to lower-paying work matching their new qualification. But with the closure now pushed back to 2027, or possibly 2029, those workers are still required by Origin (so cannot access the redundancy entitlement) and, if remaining at Eraring, now face the possibility that their new qualifications will need to be updated for currency.

“Training for things now could [lead] to uncertainty... if the closure of the station is extended. Making you hesitate [about whether] you can utilise the ticket or upskill you might have done whilst [still] employed at the power station.” Origin worker

“Origin have stated we will be open to 2027 and possibly until 2029, but they had a final date of May 2025 for our training to be approved and in the system. We don’t know when the closure date of Eraring is. So any training we have taken, could be 4 years or so before we will actually be needing to rely on it.” Origin worker

4.5 Challenges connecting to new roles

A key barrier in enabling workers to find new employment has been a lack of guidance or certainty around what the most promising sources of new work in the region will be and the skills that work will require. Workers are motivated to pursue training courses and develop their skillsets but frequently report that they do not know what industries or roles they should be retraining for.

It is difficult to fully predict the types of jobs that will be available upon the 2027 or 2029 closure date. The Hunter Region is a focus of numerous state and federal government investment schemes seeking to drive economic transformation as the region decarbonises and reduces its economic reliance on the coal industry, such as Future Made in Australia, Renewable Energy Zones, the Powering the Regions Fund, and the NSW Government’s Future Jobs and Investment Authority. While this signals a welcome intent to facilitate investment in the region, of the many project proposals and announcements, few have progressed beyond MOU stage.

Furthermore, we note that many renewable construction jobs in the Hunter REZ are short-term roles, for which security of employment is more often linked to work continuity across a pipeline of projects than to permanent roles on a single project. Where permanent direct employment is not achievable, the NZEA should look for receiving employers to provide fixed term employees with the conditions necessary for secure careers, such as portable entitlements, income protection and redundancy trusts.

For transition employees to take full advantage of opportunities that arise out of this investment, it is essential that the NZEA is empowered to play a coordination role, supporting redeployment pathways to receiving employers and identifying potential skills matches. The implementation of an EIJP is the only way to guarantee that this work gets underway in time for the Eraring closure.

5. An EIJP would support a smoother transition

5.1 An EIJP will improve and add to existing supports for workers

For the Eraring closure, the establishment of an EIJP would provide greater certainty to workers, and much-needed coordination, in a context where workers have witnessed the expected closure date move from 2032, to 2025, and now 2027 or as late as 2029.

An EIJP for the Eraring Power Station closure would complement existing arrangements put in place by Origin. The existence of some limited support offered through the Future Directions program is not an argument against the establishment of an EIJP. Instead, it is a baseline above which the EIJP can promote best practice, filling in any gaps in support, setting enforceable standards, providing links to receiving employers, managing complex redeployment timelines, and holding employers accountable on the commitments they make to their workers. This is especially important for the Eraring closure, where existing supports are not enshrined in any enforceable industrial instrument and new and altered training requests have been closed since May.

Surveyed workers at Eraring expressed strong support for the establishment of an EIJP for Eraring's closure, with 84 per cent rating 'co-ordinated government support to ensure appropriate transition support and pathways into new employment' as important.

5.2 An EIJP will help link workers with new employers

An EIJP would be an appropriate vehicle for employee representatives and employers to agree on proactive steps that the employer must take to identify potential receiving employers, connect the receiving employers with transition employees, and arrange with the receiving employers for transfer of employees.

With the support of the NZEA's mapping of the local labour market and how local skills needs overlay on the existing skills profiles of transition employees, the EIJP will set workers up to be as competitive as possible for new jobs in the region. Transition employees will finally have guidance on the types of jobs they should be shaping their skills and training plans for. Incentives offered by the NZEA to encourage the participation of receiving employers in the EIJP will provide a concrete pathway into new work. And the delivery of reputable financial advice as part of an EIJP will assist workers to successfully navigate changes in income on the way to new employment opportunities.

Timing the redeployment of workers from Eraring (and supply chain businesses) to new employers is a major challenge for executing a successful workforce transition. To operate safely until closure, Eraring must retain appropriate and safe staffing levels until its final day. At the same time, workers need confidence that new job opportunities won't pass them by due to their need to remain at Eraring, or because they won't have access to redundancy entitlements if they make that move early. It is in the interests of both Origin and transition employees for the timing of redeployment to be carefully coordinated, and the presence of the NZEA through an EIJP is the best way to facilitate this coordination in a consultative manner. An EIJP allows parties to agree on retention arrangements as well as the timing at which employees can be released for new roles.

The coordination that the EIJP can offer will also prove valuable due to the complexity of the regional transition in the Hunter, with economic diversification a key focus for state and federal programs. Successful economic diversification that plays to the existing strengths of the Hunter Region would see transition employees will take multiple different redeployment pathways into new work across energy, manufacturing, defence, and other industries. Navigating the complexity of numerous redeployment pathways will necessarily require more planning and coordination than if all workers were to hypothetically redeploy to one major new worksite.

5.3 Origin must be included in a Community of Interest Determination

The application for an EIJP for the Eraring closure must include Origin as a closing employer in the Community of Interest Determination. The standard of support provided by Origin to its employees should not satisfy the NZEA that obligations to Origin employees have been met. Critically, Origin's supports do not even cover all Origin workers.

Future Directions offered welcome but ultimately inadequate support to some, but not all, Origin workers – higher standards of support have already been set in Australia at Synergy's Muja and Collie Power Stations. While undertaking only its second COI consultation, the NZEA should not be prematurely setting its standards for employers demonstrably lower than existing better-practice examples in Australia.

There is no evidence to suggest that the inclusion of Origin in a COI would be a disincentive for other employers to take their own initiatives in support of workers. An EIJP does not 'punish' employers. Instead, it lifts the standards of any existing support to reflect best practice approaches, fills in gaps, ensures that support is provided fairly to all transition employees, and coordinates redeployment to receiving employers – something the NZEA is uniquely well-placed to oversee. Moreover, the NZEA should also consider the consequences of sending a message to employers that simply offering training on a discretionary basis to some employees, with minimal to non-existent career guidance, can relieve them of the obligations of the *NZEA Act*.

Indeed, as the Future Directions program has not involved engagement with receiving employers, a COI which excludes Origin may have the effect of excluding hundreds of affected workers from engagement with receiving employers that are participating in the EIJP, as set out in Section 59(8) of the *NZEA Act*. This is because Section 58(1) of the *NZEA Act*, which sets out the process for transition employees to express interest in becoming 'participating employees' for the purposes of the EIJP, applies only to employers named in a Community of Interest Determination. Furthermore, if receiving employers have been offered incentives to participate in the EIJP, and those incentives are based around the number of *participating employees* hired by the receiving employer, this could disadvantage affected workers that have been made ineligible for 'participating employee' status due to their employer's exclusion from the Community of Interest Determination.

We understand that the NZEA received strong positive feedback from prospective receiving employers during the Torrens Island COI consultation process, with power station operators widely regarded as qualified, skilled, experience, and WHS-aware. Excluding Origin's large and skilled cohort of workers from a Community of Interest Determination could significantly

reduce the incentive for prospective receiving employers to participate in the EIJP, reducing opportunities for all participating transition employees. It would also represent a huge missed opportunity to smooth Origin workers' path to a well-suited receiving employer, with implications for allocative efficiency in the local labour market during a challenging transition period.

5.4 The Eraring EIJP will set the standard for future closures

As the first coal power station closure to be overseen by the NZEA, the Eraring EIJP will set a precedent for how workers are supported through future closures over the coming decades. This precedent must be set at best practice standards, and, as we have argued above, Future Directions does not represent Australian best practice.

An early positive experience of a coal power closure under the NZEA will be critical for building long-term support among workers and communities for the work of the NZEA. Whether on a national or individual power station scale, a successful transition depends heavily on building the trust of affected workers. The presence of the NZEA and the implementation of an EIJP at Eraring will give workers confidence that, instead of deferring to business, the Government has their back during a challenging time.

If there is no EIJP implemented at Eraring – the largest coal power station in the country – or if an EIJP with only partial coverage of affected employers is implemented, coal workers and communities across the country could quickly lose faith in the NZEA and in the broader net zero transition. Accordingly, the NZEA must apply to the Fair Work Commission for a Community of Interest Determination covering Origin, Centennial, and dependent employers across the supply chain, to establish an Energy Industry Jobs Plan for the Eraring closure.

6. Suggestions for receiving employers

When considering the suitability of other employers in the area for participation as receiving employers, the NZEA should prioritise employers that can offer work that is well-paid, secure, ongoing, safe, and utilises as much as possible the existing skills and talents of transition employees.

We expect that future opportunities for affected workers will be spread across multiple employers, with only a handful of vacancies available at each – though the number of vacancies created may depend on incentives offered to participating receiving employers. There remains uncertainty around the number, type, and timing of jobs that may arise from emerging industries supported by various government initiatives, including Future Made In Australia. Without the coordinated intervention of an EIJP, the fragmented nature of the future labour market in the region will be difficult for workers to navigate, train for, and transition smoothly into.

Suitable receiving employers for transition employees working at Eraring Power Station and in the supply chain, including trades-qualified workers, could include:

- Other coal power stations – Vales Point, Bayswater, Mt Piper. These may be most suitable for workers closer to retirement, allowing some extra years of work without committing to extensive retraining.

- Other power generation – e.g. Kurri Kurri gas peaking plant, Hunter Offshore Wind Zone.
- Transmission and distribution – Transgrid, Ausgrid, REZ projects, Hunter Transmission Project.
- Manufacturing – Tomago Aluminium, Ampcontrol, Varley Group, Infrabuild (steel and recycling facilities), Energy Renaissance, Orica Kooragang Island, Martin Baker.
- Rail and ports – Mariyung Maintenance Facility, Downer (rail maintenance), UGL (rail maintenance), Port of Newcastle (including NCIG and PWCS terminals), Thales Maritime Precinct, Cvmec (naval ship cell fabrication).
- Water treatment – Hunter Water.
- Defence industry (Williamstown) – Kongsberg guided weapons production factory, Lockheed Martin, BAE Systems.
- Announced projects within the Solar Sunshot, Hydrogen Headstart, Battery Breakthrough, and other Future Made In Australia initiatives that may be in a position to employ workers at the time of Eraring’s closure. There is strong potential for linkages to be made between FMIA Community Benefits Principles and participation as a receiving employer in an EIJP.

For transition employees at Myuna Colliery, other coal mines would be appropriate receiving employers. Other underground mines in the Lake Macquarie area, such as Mandalong and Chain Valley, are appropriate potential receiving employers, but as they are likely to be limited in numbers they could absorb, the NZEA should also approach other coal employers.

Underground and open cut mines across the wider Hunter Valley region should be approached for interest in participation as receiving employers, noting that, while working on open cut coal mines is substantively different to working underground, open cut mines can offer quality jobs to underground miners that may face challenges in matching their earnings and working conditions in any other industry. Transition employees at Eraring Power Station, including those in maintenance and trades roles, may also be interested in work that could be offered by coal industry employers.

The NZEA should, however, be cautious in its assessment of reemployment prospects in the Hunter’s coal mining industry. While the region’s large export coal industry has in recent years enjoyed an extended ‘boom’ which has supported historically high numbers in the production workforce, the mining industry is cyclical and global coal demand is projected to decline over the longer term as part of the global energy transition.¹¹ The labour market situation of the Hunter at the time Eraring closes in 2027 or 2029 may be different to the current situation, with five potential coal mine closures in the Hunter by 2030¹², including BHP’s Mt Arthur mine which could displace approximately 2600 workers.¹³ It has been well established that the economic shock of closures is substantially different if they occur during economic downturns, as compared to periods of economic growth.¹⁴ Thus, the ability of export coal mines to absorb transition employees under an EIJP will become more limited over time.

¹¹ Department of Regional NSW, Future Jobs and Investment Authorities Issues Paper, May 2024.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ BHP Mt Arthur Coal Annual Review FY24, p. 16.

¹⁴ Spoehr, J. (2014). Foundations for Industrial Rejuvenation: Lessons from International and National Experience. In G. r. Roos & N. Kennedy (Eds.), Global perspectives on achieving success in high and low cost operating environments (pp. 72 - 110): Hershey, PA : Business Science Reference.

7. Appropriate geographic area boundary for EIJP

The NZEA's proposed geographic area is broadly appropriate for supporting the implementation of an EIJP for Eraring Power Station, but the NZEA must also ensure that its labour market analysis goes into detail at a subregional level and is sensitive to the vastly different local economies across the broader Hunter area. The Hunter area is made up of multiple regions with differing industrial profiles and high potential for mismatch between where jobs will be lost and gained as the energy transition progresses.

Including areas such as the Upper Hunter supports future employment opportunities at sites like Bayswater Power Station to be considered. However, the NZEA should remain conscious of the vast distances between the Lake Macquarie area, where Eraring Power Station and Myuna Colliery are located, and some parts of the proposed geographic area which could lead to one-way commutes of up to two hours. We note that this is in excess of the threshold for the number of kilometres that would trigger the payment of a travel allowance under the enterprise agreements of some of the contractors identified above for inclusion in an EIJP. Specifically, Downer, the largest electrical contractor, already requires payment of a travel allowance for travel in excess of 140km/day, that scales higher at 180km and 220km/day. More substantial living away from home allowances kick in for any day that a worker cannot reasonably return home after work.

This is not to say that employers from further afield would not be valuable participants in an EIJP, only that the NZEA should go to special effort to secure redeployment opportunities that provide most convenience to affected workers. Furthermore, if redeployment pathways for transition employees are disproportionately concentrated elsewhere in the Hunter, this will entrench the local economic impacts of the Eraring closure for the Lake Macquarie community, especially if workers feel pressured to relocate.

The need for a sub-regional approach to labour market testing and attracting new regional employers should be considered in the development of Regional Transition Plans, to ensure that the attraction of new industries using government incentives takes into account the different sub-regional profiles and needs of workers captured under EIJPs.

8. Further considerations

8.1 Life of station contract with dependent mine

To support smooth transitions for workers at wholly dependent coal mines, like Myuna Colliery, there should be obligations placed on closing power station owners to negotiate life of station supply contracts with dependent mines on fair and reasonable terms, from at least two years out from the scheduled closure date. This would prevent situations arising where hundreds of workers face abrupt job loss, and ensure that workers at dependent coal mines can benefit fully from the longer-term transition planning and support offered by an EIJP.

Origin has diversified its supply sources for coal since announcing the closure of Eraring Power Station. In September 2024, Origin Energy declined to renew a supply agreement with Centennial Coal Ltd for coal taken from its Mandalong mine, causing significant stress for Myuna workers whose jobs were placed at risk. While we understand that forecast FY25 coal

consumption is fully contracted,¹⁵ there is no guarantee of Eraring taking its coal supply from the Centennial Myuna mine into FY26 and beyond and thus there is a risk Myuna may close earlier than the identified Eraring date.¹⁶

Wholly-dependent coal mines are built specifically to supply the grades of coal that are optimal for their power station. Origin is in a position to provide certainty through to closure to the Myuna coal mine that was built to supply the Eraring Power Station and is solely equipped to do so – and should do so.

8.2 Responsibility of closing employers to the dependent workforce

While we understand that the current legislative framework limits the obligations of closing and dependent employers to provide transition support only to their own employees, we hold the strong view that Origin has a responsibility to ensure a high and consistent standard of support is provided to all affected workers. Best practice examples of transition have seen closing employers fund support for transition employees at dependent employers – this is occurring at Synergy’s power stations in Collie where Synergy has extended its programs to embedded contractors at the power stations. Where this has happened, it has been because closing employers and unions have recognised that dependent employers have not had the capacity to offer a standard of support to their workers that is equivalent to that received by direct employees.

Origin is the largest energy company in Australia, reporting a statutory profit of \$1.4 billion in the 2024 financial year, which was then followed-up by an extraordinary half year statutory profit of more than \$1 billion in the six months to 31 December 2024.¹⁷ Origin’s operations at Eraring are also effectively underwritten by the New South Wales Government, after the deal to delay closure was struck last year.¹⁸ Dependent employers, including small supply chain businesses, clearly do not have the same capacity as Origin to provide comprehensive transition supports to their employees. As unions, we would take into account the varying financial capacities of dependent employers when negotiating on the details of EIJP support, but we would also seek out any available avenues for Origin to fund support for workers at dependent employers. This would enable a higher standard of support to be offered, prevent certain cohorts of workers from missing out or falling through the cracks, and ensure Origin fulfils its responsibility to the wider Eraring and Myuna workforces and communities which have supported their operations for decades.

8.3 Mental health support for workers

EIJPs are an opportunity to embed mental health support into worker transition programs. Workers in closing power generation facilities and their families face major upheaval to their

¹⁵ Origin Energy, [Annual Report 2024](#), p.18.

¹⁶ Source of supply is not prescribed by the *Generator Engagement Project Agreement: Eraring Power Station* (2024): <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/tp/files/188681/Document.pdf>.

¹⁷ Origin Energy, [Annual Report 2024](#), p.13, Origin Energy 2025 Half Year Report, p. 5.

¹⁸ <https://www.energy.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-05/NSW-202405-Public-summary-of-Generator-Engagement-Project-Agreement.pdf>, accessed 9 July 2025.

lives, with uncertainty about future earnings and employment prospects likely to cause significant stress and heighten mental health risks.

This is evident in responses from surveyed workers, who reported high levels of concern about their families, communities, finances and mental health.

Survey questions: How concerned are you about Eraring/Myuna's closure impacting ...

'my mental health and wellbeing'

- Eraring: 74 per cent total concerned – 44 per cent very and 30 per cent somewhat
- Myuna: 78 per cent total concerned - 36 per cent very and 42 per cent somewhat

'my financial future'

- Eraring: 76 per cent total concerned – 46 per cent very and 30 per cent somewhat
- Myuna: 95 per cent total concerned – 53 per cent very and 42 per cent somewhat

'my family's security'

- Eraring: 73 per cent total concerned – 53 per cent very and 20 per cent somewhat
- Myuna: 95 per cent total concerned – 49 per cent very and 46 per cent somewhat

'prosperity of my community'

- Eraring: 72 per cent total concerned – 39 per cent very and 33 per cent somewhat
- Myuna: 72 per cent total concerned – 31 per cent very and 41 per cent somewhat

Suicide is the leading cause of death among people aged 15-44 in Australia, with males consistently accounting for approximately three-quarters of suicide deaths. The highly male-dominated nature of the mining and energy workforce combined with high anxiety about the future put the cohort facing displacement by the closure of Eraring and other power stations at risk. Mining has a significantly elevated suicide rate compared to the general population at 25 per 100,000 compared with 11 to 15 per 100,000.¹⁹

Workers often struggle on their own for a long time before seeking mental health support. Equipping workers with access to resources, trusted support pathways, and tips for starting conversations, can reduce stigma and help to overcome barriers to seeking help.

Unions would seek to embed mental health and suicide prevention programs into agreements with employers developed under EIJs, providing access to mental health support for workers and their immediate families. Origin should be working to ensure access to quality mental health programs for workers throughout their supply chain.

¹⁹ <https://colliejusttransition.podbean.com/e/ep21-why-mental-health-is-becoming-a-part-of-the-transition-conversation/>

About our Unions

The Mining and Energy Union (MEU) is the principal union in the coal industry, including mines, power stations and ports. The MEU is the majority union at both Eraring Power Station and Myuna Colliery. In power stations, the MEU's members are responsible for the safe operation of units during normal operation and for the permitting of any tasks involved in scheduled and unplanned maintenance, with a wide variety of roles including power station operator and unit controller. We have members performing all roles necessary to the operation of the Myuna mine. The MEU also covers workers in metalliferous mining including iron ore train drivers, oil, gas, electricity and the coke industry, with over 25,000 members nationally. MEU members are significantly impacted by decarbonisation and highly represented among workers displaced by coal closures. The MEU has long advocated for co-ordinated national support for workers displaced by emissions reduction policies, to ensure workers and communities don't pay an unfair price for action to address climate change.

The Electrical Trades Union of Australia (ETU) is the principal union for electrical and electrotechnology tradespeople and apprentices in Australia, representing well over seventy-thousand workers around the country. ETU members are engaged in work that is integral to the electrical maintenance of plant and equipment, instrumentation, fire alarm and fire-retardant systems, electrical supply, and electrical isolation and safety at both Eraring and Myuna. Reactive and proactive maintenance performed by ETU members at the Closing Enterprises is critical for continuing operations to closure and for decommissioning work. Local retention of that workforce is also critical to the delivery of renewable generation and storage projects and transmission projects in the Hunter-Central Coast Renewable Energy Zone (REZ), adjacent REZ, and offshore. The ETU advocated for the creation of the NZEA, to ensure that our members in fossil fuel industries, who have powered our country to become what it is today, are assured needed certainty from government and the energy sector to allow them to plan for their futures. The ETU is a division of the Communications Electrical and Plumbing Union (CEPU).

The Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) is the primary union representing Australian manufacturing workers. We are 60,000 members strong, and we live and work in every region and city of the country. We represent contractors at Eraring and Myuna and we are especially concerned about their exclusion from any transition support to date. Our union played a central role in the last industry wide closure in Australia (the automotive industry) and we are committed to ensuring workers are adequately supported to seize the opportunities presented by the transition to a net zero future.

Professionals Australia represents the industrial interests of Scientists, Engineers, and other Technical Professionals across the Energy Industry including Generation, Transmission, Distribution, and network services. Our members are highly skilled, degree-qualified professionals who have spent decades refining Australia's energy systems into the world-class powerhouses they are today. They continue to play a critical role in shaping the future of the industry, driving innovation and sustainability. Through advocacy and leadership, PA members influence decisions at all levels of government and industry and have successfully secured protections for workers transitioning through the energy transformation.

The Collieries Staff and Officials' Association (CSOA) represents employees engaged in supervisory, technical, professional and administrative roles in and about black coal mines. CSOA is a division of Professionals Australia. CSOA members are generally highly specialised to their specific form of mining (open cut or underground). A significant portion of CSOA's membership hold statutory functions under relevant Work Health Safety legislation and are legally required for the continued operation of black coal mines. Without CSOA members, black coal mines across Australia cannot operate, and as such, they will be required up to, and following, the cessation of production. Their critical safety function creates a further barrier in sourcing alternative work and/or undergoing retraining. Our members will require ongoing support and assistance to navigate a transitioning industry.

The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) NSW represents workers in various industries, including those in the state's power-generation sector. The electricity industry in NSW has a history of both public and private ownership, with the CPSU NSW advocating for its members within the changing landscape of the industry. The CPSU NSW has coverage over (AO) Administration Officers, (PO) Professional Officers) & (EO) Engineering Officers and covers employees from Ausgrid, TransGrid, AGL Macquarie, Energy Australia NSW, Delta Electricity and Origin Energy.

About survey data

This submission is directly informed by the experiences of workers at Eraring, Myuna Colliery, and in the supply chain. These views and experiences were captured through in-person consultation held at union-organised meetings, and through online worker surveys which were open to respondents for approximately one week. Surveys were initially sent to union members, who were encouraged to share the survey more widely among their workmates. A total of 139 responses were received across surveys distributed to different cohorts.