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August 2025

Members at Helensburgh

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Two Big Wins at Helensburgh: Pay rises locked in, job security reinforced

After a six-week dispute on the gate and five years in the courts, MEU members at Peabody's Metropolitan mine have delivered a double victory - securing real pay increases in a new enterprise agreement and a landmark High Court ruling that strengthens job security across the industry.

A deal won the hard way

Striking Helensburgh miners have voted up a new enterprise agreement that delivers significant pay increases and defends core job-security protections - bringing to an end a tough six-week dispute.

Negotiations broke down on Wednesday, 18 June when Peabody locked MEU members out for three weeks in retaliation for one-hour stoppages. Members responded with rolling strike action and a determined picket at the mine entrance. Unity held, an in-principle deal was reached, and members endorsed the agreement by a strong majority.

South West District Vice President Mark Jenkins said the result shows what happens when workers stand together:

"Peabody leant hard on the MEU members at Metropolitan, but they stood firm to win this new agreement. Peabody's lockout was disgraceful, but it only strengthened the resolve of the miners. The best - and only - way to stand up to the hardball tactics of mining multinationals is to stand together through our union."

Helensburgh site delegate Matt Potter said members made sacrifices to defend a principle:

"Being locked out and then on strike put real financial strain on many of our members, but now was the time to stand up for job security in the coal industry. I'm immensely proud of the unity and strength of the Helensburgh lodge and how we stood up for our rights and conditions."

What the EBA delivers

● Pay rises that matter: 5% per year over a three-year term, clawing back ground after pay freezes and high inflation.
● Job security in writing: Peabody must lift permanent and fixed-term employment this year and staff to full manning levels before using contractors beyond ancillary work.
● A clear signal: Direct, secure jobs can't be quietly replaced by outsourced labour when ongoing work exists.

Two Big Wins at Helensburgh

(Continued from page 2)

A legal line in the sand

On the legal front, the High Court of Australia has confirmed that the sacking of twenty-two underground miners in 2020 was not a case of genuine redundancy. The Court upheld the Fair Work Commission's findings that those workers could have been reasonably redeployed to similar roles being performed by contractors Menster and Nexus. Peabody has now failed three times to overturn that ruling.

MEU General Secretary Grahame Kelly said the decision sets an important precedent:

"For over five years, these workers have fought to protect the very principle of job security in the mining industry. The High Court has been clear: permanent workers cannot be removed in favour of contractors through dodgy corporate restructuring. In a sector where labour hire is too often used to undercut pay and conditions, this matters.

Why the High Court win matters beyond Helensburgh

- Redundancy must be real: If comparable work exists, whether done in-house or by contractors, employers must look at redeployment.
- Contracting is not a loophole: Shifting work to third parties does not make permanent jobs disappear for legal purposes.
- Stronger leverage at the table: When the law backs redeployment and secure jobs, workers have greater power to secure fair agreements like Helensburgh's EBA.

The thread that ties it together: secure, well-paid work

The EBA victory and the High Court judgment tell one story: when miners are organised, persistent and united, they can win - on the gate and in the courts. The new agreement puts real money back into workers' pockets and keeps the permanent workforce at the heart of the mine. The Court's ruling makes it harder for any employer to pretend a job is gone when the work rolls on.

These wins also rebut a tired corporate playbook: starve wages, casualise core work, and cry "redundancy" while the same tasks are outsourced. Helensburgh miners have shown there's another way - stand together, hold the line, and insist on secure jobs with fair pay.

Learn more about this story

Take a listen to our latest podcast - Scan the QR code or visit https://meu.org.au/podcast-helensburgh-miners-chalk-up-two-wins/

Energy delegates fight for a fair future

Over 70 delegates from power stations and captured coal mines across Australia met in Sydney this month for a two-day meeting on the shared challenges facing our industry and the actions needed to deliver the best outcomes for MEU members and their communities.

This marked the first national meeting of energy industry workers since the establishment of the Net Zero Economy Authority, long advocated for by our union.

With workers from Collie, Latrobe Valley, Central Queensland, Lithgow and the Hunter Valley represented, there were varied experiences and common themes. In Collie, the WA Government has invested heavily in worker support schemes and backing for new industries – including a medicinal cannabis facility, Green Steel smelter, and Green Magnium smelter; MEU members in the Latrobe Valley expressed dismay at lack of support by the Victorian Government for numerous projects proposed for the region, raising fears for the future of the region after further power station closures.

Queensland Delegates are grappling with having commitments to worker transition support ripped up by the new Crisafulli LNP Government; while in NSW, delegates from Eraring Power Station and Myuna coal mine are the first to engage formally with the Net Zero Economy Authority about establishing an Energy Industry Jobs Plan to support workers affected by Eraring's closure, scheduled for 2027.

Delegates from the Lithgow area raised valid and deeply held concerns about the allocation of supports to region, and its exclusion from being a NZEA focus region. They were able to express these concerns directly with the CEO, David Shankey, and the MEU is committed to continuing to advocate for targeted supports for the Lithgow region.

Common themes raised throughout the meeting included uncertainty about reskilling for future jobs, fear for regional communities and concerns about the safe operation of power stations amidst lack of investment in maintenance and fluctuations in renewable energy entering the grid.

MEU General Secretary Grahame Kelly said that with rapid change occurring in the energy industry – including closures at Eraring and Yallourn power stations by 2028 – the MEU would continue to foster engagement between sites and Districts; and would use all avenues to secure improved outcomes including backing new industries and technologies; getting better conditions in Enterprise Agreements and working with state and federal governments to maximise support for workers.

See the next page to read the statement the delegates supported.

Delegates agreed on the following statement:

MEU Delegates from power stations and captured coal mines across Australia have met for a constructive two-day meeting to discuss the shared challenges we face, political and industry developments, and actions to improve outcomes for our Members.

Delegates expressed concern and called for urgent action to address:

• Mental health and psychosocial well-being of members and families facing uncertainty about the future
• Safety, investment in maintenance, reliability and stability of the energy grid as facilities head towards closure
• Support for new industries to provide jobs in energy regions for the current workforce and future generations
• Support for coal-related industries and technologies including carbon capture, storage and utilisation (CCSU).

We will work together to address these issues through: lobbying and public advocacy, investing in relevant research and capacity-building projects, sharing experiences and information, and collaborating with employers and project proponents who align with our priorities regarding jobs and community support.

We will stand up for all regions affected by energy transition to receive the support they need. Delegates welcomed the establishment of the Net Zero Economy Authority with its remit to support workers displaced by the closure of power stations and captured coal mines. A statutory federal Authority is a significant achievement that was called for at our previous meeting in February 2023; and we recognise the efforts of MEU Delegates in advocating for this outcome.

...

We are committed to working with the NZEA to achieve concrete outcomes for members facing closure, including the establishment of comprehensive Energy Industry Jobs Plans at closing facilities; while also working to strengthen the powers of the NZEA, including to compel employer participation in worker redeployment schemes, and expanding the scope to ensure all affected sites and communities receive support.

We call on State and Federal governments to fast-track investment and remove barriers to the development of new projects and industries in energy regions to create future well-paid jobs in our communities.

We call on mine and power station operators to take a proactive approach to supporting workers facing closure and to prioritise worker health and safety, including mental health, and to invest in the highest standards of maintenance.

We thank Industry Minister Tim Ayres and NZEA CEO David Shankey for attending our meeting to update delegates on Federal Government activities relating to workforce support and industry development.

Images from our energy delegate conference

Rio Tinto is moving to slash sick leave entitlements for its WA Iron Ore workforce – from three months down to just 12 days. That's a staggering 70% cut, leaving workers with barely more than the National Employment Standards minimum.

This is nothing short of a betrayal. For years, iron ore workers have accepted lower wages in exchange for better conditions and policy entitlements – a deliberate trade-off negotiated in good faith. Now, management is trying to tear up that deal and strip away a basic safety net for thousands of workers.

Let's be clear: iron ore workers generate billions in profits for Rio every year. Those profits fund executive bonuses and shareholder dividends, yet when it comes to looking after the people who actually dig the ore and keep the operation running, Rio wants to penny-pinch. Squeezing sick leave is not only unfair – it's unsafe. Mining is a tough industry. Workers need the security of knowing that if they get injured or fall ill, they won't be thrown on the scrap heap after just 12 days.

The Western Mineworkers Alliance is the biggest union in the Pilbara, and we won't be standing by while Rio rips up hard-won conditions. Our message is simple: workers will not cop cuts to their sick leave. We've fought too long and too hard for decent conditions to let Rio strip them away.

It's time to stand up and send Rio a message they can't ignore. Join our campaign, add your voice, and sign the petition to Stop the Rio Sick Cuts!

Together, we can make sure Rio remembers that its wealth comes from the workers – and workers deserve respect, not cuts.

Same Job Same Pay: win at HVO while BHP keeps stalling

Same Job Same Pay pay rises at one of the largest mines in NSW – Glencore's Hunter Valley Operations – are finally coming into effect, with new rates to be paid from this Sunday.

Meanwhile, labour hire workers at Queensland BHP mines have been given a long-awaited start date of 14 September, which BHP is desperately trying to further delay.

Workpac and Programmed labour hire workers at Hunter Valley Operations are set to be up to $40,000 a year better off following the dismissal of mine operator Glencore's legal challenges in the Federal Court.

The MEU's Same Job Same Pay application, which was made on 4 October 2024, has faced strong opposition from Glencore in the courts.

Along with BHP, Glencore has been one of the most aggressive in its legal challenges against Same Job Same Pay applications. While ultimately unsuccessful in preventing Same Job Same Pay being applied to HVO, Glencore's legal challenges did delay Workpac and Programmed workers having their pay raised in line with their directly employed workmates – with orders coming into effect some 11 months after our application was made.

Labour hire workers at BHP's Saraji, Peak Downs and Goonyella Riverside mines in Central Queensland have finally received the news they've been waiting for, with the Fair Work Commission issuing Same Job Same Pay orders for their sites and setting 14 September as the date for pay rises to take effect.

Same Job Same Pay: win at HVO while BHP keeps stalling (Continued)

These orders follow a decision on 7 July by a full bench of the Fair Work Commission, which found that Operations Services, Workpac and Chandler Macleod labour hire miners at the three mines were eligible for Same Job Same Pay.

Thanks to these orders thousands of labour hire workers are set to receive a pay rise of around $30,000 a year, in line with their BHP-employed workmates. We estimate that this is around $66 million dollars a year being returned to workers and our mining communities.

BHP wasted no time telling workers they would seek a stay on implementing the orders, while the appeal the Fair Work Commission's 7 July decision in favour of Same Job Same Pay.

Read the member update ->

At this stage, 14 September is the date for new rate of pay to be applied for Operations Services workers at the three mines; and 15 September is the date for new rates to be applied for Workpac and Chandler Macleod employees, in line with pay cycles. Pay rises will be received in the first pay packet after that.

We are hopeful of defeating BHP's application for a stay on the orders, meaning pay rises will soon be flowing! BHP has undertaken to provide backpay for Same Job Same Pay rates to 7 July, when the Fair Work Commission decision was made, however have not indicated when this may be paid.
We will keep up the fight and keep members up to date with legal developments.

From underground to safety oversight: meet check inspector Todd Jones

For Todd Jones, a career in mining wasn't always the plan—but it has become a 25-year career. Now serving as an Industry Safety and Health Representative (ISHR) for the MEU's South West District, Jones oversees coal mines from Lithgow to Mudgee and supports operations in the Illawarra. His mission: to ensure the safety of workers in one of Australia's most demanding industries.

Jones began his mining journey in 2000 at Springvale Underground near Lithgow, starting as a mechanical apprentice. Over the years, he rose through the ranks—first as a fitter, then a step-up operator, and eventually an underground deputy. By 2013, he was stepping in as a relief ISHR, covering for full-time inspectors. In November 2024, he stepped into the full-time ISHR role, meaning he spends his time investigating incidents and conducting regular site inspections.

A typical day for Todd is anything but typical. He reviews incident reports, catalogues investigations, and hits the road—logging over 38,000 kilometres in his work vehicle since November. "People would be surprised how much driving we do," he says.

The best part of the job? "The variety of places I go and the people I meet," he says. "Coming from underground, it's eye-opening to see how things are done at open cuts. And nothing beats improving safety for other workers."

But the role comes with emotional weight. "The worst part is getting that call in the middle of the night. You're just hoping no one got hurt." Jones admits that mastering safety legislation "you have to know it back to front" and public speaking are challenging parts of the job. Still, he's passionate about mentoring the next generation.

His advice to newcomers: "Listen to the experienced workers on your crew and keep an eye out for each other. We've lost a bit of that over the years, when I started the crew looked out for you and gave you most of your safety advice. It could seem like they're having a go sometimes, but they're just looking out for your health and safety. I always tell new starters that there's no such thing as a stupid question, if you don't know something don't be afraid to ask."

ISHRs – also known as check inspectors - are a statutory role unique to the coal industry that have been in place for almost 150 years. They are elected positions employed by the Union who have powers to investigate incidents on coal mines and halt production if considered necessary for safety.

Find out more about check inspectors and what they do in this episode of the MEU podcast. https://mining-and-energy-podcast.simplecast.com/episodes/how-the-union-is-keeping-you-safe

New Komatsu EA lifts pay, restores long service leave

Field service technicians at Komatsu's Gunnedah branch in NSW are celebrating a new enterprise agreement that boosts pay and restores workers' Coal Long Service Leave entitlements.

The new three-year deal marks the first MEU agreement for Komatsu workers in the Gunnedah region.

The agreement includes strong annual wage increases (5%, 4% and 3%), additional annual and personal leave, overtime paid on training, an increased redundancy cap, higher on-call allowances and even an extra public holiday on Easter Tuesday (miners picnic day).

It also strengthens job security with a rate comparison clause to ensure contractors are paid the same and can't undercut permanents; and a strengthened dispute resolution clause.
Workers received their first boosted pay packet two weeks ago, along with over 12 months of backpay.

One of the most important wins for Komatsu workers was establishing their access to the Coal Long Service Leave scheme including recognition of existing leave balances.
Like many of his workmates, MEU delegate Joshua Dowse came to his role at Komatsu from working in the local coal industry.
Even though the Komatsu technicians are embedded on local coal mines at Boggabri and Maules Creek, they lost access to the Coal LSL scheme in taking jobs with Komatsu.

"Getting our Coal Long Service Leave recognised was massive," he said. "I'm nearly ready to take mine, and now it's backdated and counted. That's something the boys really pushed for."
While the Gunnedah Komatsu Enterprise Agreement had previously been negotiated by another union, Joshua said he and his workmates took note of the EA outcome for Komatsu field technicians at Mt Thorley Warkworth mine in the Hunter Valley, who recently joined the MEU and won a significantly improved pay deal.

He said joining the MEU gave the work crew a stronger voice at the bargaining table and they were very pleased with the outcome.

"For anyone who thinks the union's a waste of money—this agreement proves otherwise," said Joshua. "We wouldn't be where we are without the union standing up for our conditions."

MEU Northern Mining and NSW Energy District Vice President Michael Taggart said standing together through the MEU put the Komatsu Gunnedah team in a strong negotiating position which has paid off.

"This agreement delivers leading rates of pay for the Gunnedah Basin – the MEU Komatsu members should be proud of what they've achieved.

"Thanks also go to MEU Organiser Adam Lain who did a great job building membership among the group and ensuring they stayed informed."

Leadership Message
Queensland shows how to get a fair return from resources

It's company reporting season and that means it's time for our big mining companies to complain about Queensland coal royalties. BHP boss Mike Henry is a regular offender. While announcing BHP's US$10 billion profit earlier this month, he said BHP would not invest further in Queensland coal and flagged 'pausing' low-margin operations.

But remember, BHP had already started divesting Queensland coal assets before the change to royalties as part of their strategy to diversify away from coal and focus in Queensland only on the highest grade metallurgical coal. We note that BHP has also announced closure of its Mt Arthur mine in NSW in 2030 under the same strategy – nothing to do with Queensland royalties.

Peabody has had a go too – suggesting royalties had a role in their scrapping their deal with Anglo, which was really about the underground fire at Moranbah North. The deal with Anglo was struck in full knowledge of the Queensland royalties regime.

The Queensland Government introduced a revised royalties scheme in 2022, introducing additional tiers to deliver better returns to the state when coal prices are very high.

The timing ensured that Queenslanders received a fair return on the sky-high coal prices in 2022 and 2023 – due to supply chain disruptions from the pandemic and global energy shortages, mostly due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict.
The new scheme added additional tiers of 20, 30 and 40% for coal sold at prices above $175, $225 and $300 a tonne.

This saw Queenslanders benefit enormously from the incredible coal price spike in 2022-2023, which saw prices tip over A$500 a tonne at some points (the premium hard coking coal spot price peaked at A$924/t in March 2022). In 2022-23, coal royalties generated over $10 billion for the budget and accounted for more than 20% of state revenue – compared to a more typical share of 7 or 8%. That's a lot of schools, hospitals, roads, teachers and nurses.

Leadership Message Cont'd

This is the exactly the kind of return that communities should get from coal price booms, which are genuine unexpected windfalls.
We understand that mining companies would love to keep these windfall profits for themselves and hurts their cold hearts to see it returned to the state that owns the resources.

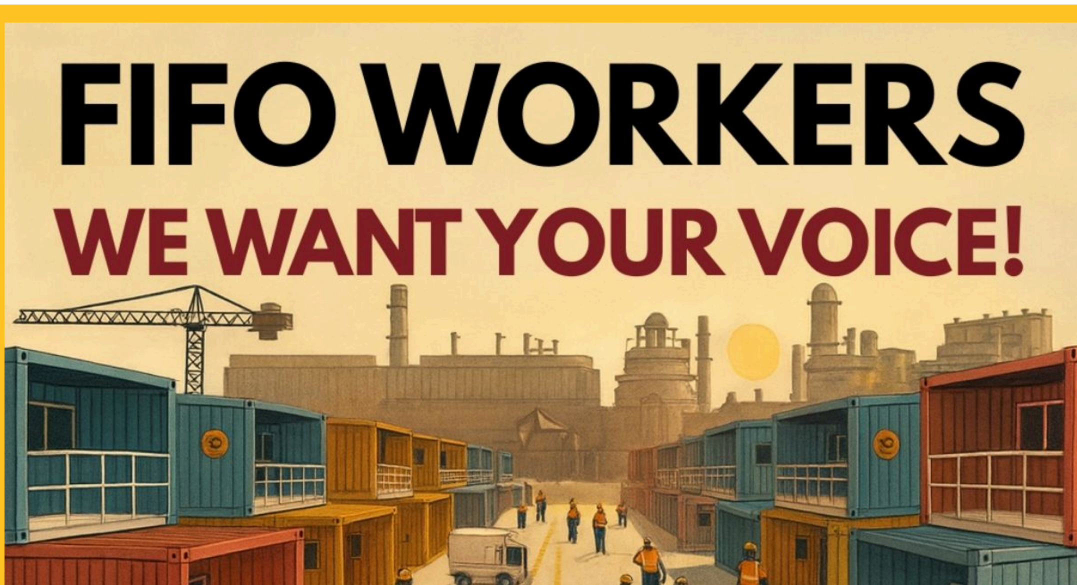
But the reality is that mining investment decisions are made on realistic long-term coal prices which are covered by royalty rates that are unchanged – 7% up to A$100 a tonne, 12.5% from A$100-$150 and 15% from A$150-$175 a tonne.

The tiered nature reduces the burden when times are tough and shares the benefit when prices are high.

Mining companies might complain about Queensland's royalty regime being high compared to other countries – I think that's something we should be proud of, along with our good wages and work conditions.

Australia produces some of the best quality coal in the world, including the highly-sought metallurgical coal from Central Queensland. Let's make sure we all benefit from it – and that includes making sure the coal royalty budget boom is invested back into better roads and services in coal communities.

Stephen Smyth
General Vice President



FIFO and DIDO workers: help design better camps

Do you stay in camp accommodation while you're working? Researchers at Murdoch University are conducting a landmark study into how camps can be designed better for workers. It's anonymous. Take part here or scan the QR code
https://unisasurveys.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_1EQJxtDIHv5LIci