



UNIONS, CLIMATE CHANGE AND JUST TRANSITION IN THE ACT

www.unionsact.org.au/climate-action

Unions are primarily concerned with workers, their rights, their welfare and their future, the futures of workers' communities. A just and civil society is one where everyone shares in the wealth of the nation but it is also one where economic costs are equally shared.

Transitioning an industry is a massive economic and social disruption. History shows that this has often been done poorly in Australia, with workers and communities bearing the brunt of such transitions - suffering hardship, unemployment and generations of economic and social depression.

The union movement understands the challenge of climate change and wants to ensure workers can be part of the solution through creating greener and more environmentally-friendly workplaces.

In the ACT there are four industry areas that will be impacted by the ACT Government's Zero Carbon commitment:

- Transport, including cars, trucks and buses;
- Electricity and gas, including residential and commercial use of gas in particular;
- Waste, including the use of landfill; and
- Land use, including clearing of trees and grasslands.

UnionsACT's affiliated unions represent many thousands of members in industries and businesses in these four sectors. From 2020, transport will be the biggest industry contributing to carbon emissions.

Although the ACT does not have heavy industry, fossil fuel stations or a coal industry, our economy and community is nonetheless vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, whether it is structural economic change or the impacts of extreme weather. Workers are at the frontline of these impacts.

UnionsACT supports the established international principle of 'Just Transition'. The transition of the ACT economy to a zero carbon economy must be just and equitable and should be based on the following Just Transition measures:

1. Equitable sharing of responsibilities and fair distribution of the costs across society;
2. Institutionalised formal consultations with relevant stakeholders including trade unions, employers and communities, at national, regional and sectoral levels;
3. The promotion of clean job opportunities and the greening of existing jobs and industries

through public and private investment in low carbon development strategies and technologies in all nations;

4. Formal education, training, retraining, and life-long learning for working people, their families, and their communities;
5. Organised economic and employment diversification policies within sectors and communities at risk;
6. Social protection measures (active labour market policies, access to health services, social insurances, among others); and
7. Respect for, and protection, of human and labour rights.

To-date, the ACT Government has not developed or adopted a Just Transition strategy. UnionsACT is concerned of the risk that a transition to a zero carbon economy will be ad-hoc, and not effectively transition affected workers into new and secure employment. For example, although UnionsACT supported the change to 100% renewable energy, this substantial economic shift was done with almost no consultation with workers or the community; rather it was a rapidly implemented technocratic policy, albeit one that was well-intentioned.

Numerous international and domestic forums and agencies, including the International Labour Organisation emphasise the importance of a just transition when responding and adapting to global warming. The ILO states:

In order to promote sustainable development that is socially just, environmentally friendly, and economically efficient, emphasis must be placed on governance and management changes to better service decent lives of millions of people. ... A just transition is primarily about good governance. It is about applying the right policies in consultation and with the involvement of those concerned. ... Governments have to involve trade unions in addressing the needs of industries and communities at large in order to ensure that the transition to a carbon friendly future is just and fair to all – that development is sustainable. (IJLR, 2010, Vol2.2)

As the pace of industrial, social and economic change hastens, it is more important than ever to involve working people in discussions about the future of their jobs, their industries and their communities.



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UnionsACT acknowledges that Canberra has been built on the land of the Ngunnawal people.

We pay respect to their Elders and recognise the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.