

# Powering Australia: A Fair Transition to a Clean Future

A recent report by Jobs & Skills Australia estimates Australia will require an additional **32,000** electricians by 2030 growing to a further **85,000** workers by 2050.

This means an extra 20,000 apprentices commencing their apprenticeship each year for the next three years.

Australia needs a dedicated energy workforce plan to address this looming crisis.

## **The Energy Transition is Now**

More than one third of Australia's electricity generation now comes from renewables but already our workforce shows the strain.

Unprecedented labour shortages and competition means skilled workers have never been more valuable or harder to find.

## **Transition in Peril**

Australia's energy transition requires government, employers, unions, and communities to work together to deliver a renewable system that delivers for everyone.

But currently the patchy and slow pace of developing social licence and workforce planning threatens its success.

Projects that deliver secure jobs and good wages, while growing the community skills base will face an easier road to social licence and more readily find welcome homes in regional and rural communities.

## **Workers experiences on renewable projects are poor**

Characterised by poorer safety standards, high rates of migrant worker exploitation, unlicensed electrical work and a chronic underinvestment in training and apprenticeships, the renewable sector needs to urgently lift its performance.

## **A Renewed Approach to the Workforce that Powers Australia**

Skills shortages in the critical trades and occupations our energy transition relies on are common, and persistent gaps in the labour market are widening.

Compounding this problem, declining apprentice completion rates and the failure of the Australian Apprenticeship Support Network model is leaving many good apprentices jaded and ripped off.

A workforce development plan that learns the lessons from overseas and is tailored to Australian energy system needs will unlock enormous economic value in the transition and provide secure employment to thousands of Australians.

The ETU propose the following eight actions to enable Australia's energy transformation and to drive towards a more diverse, skilled, and expanded energy workforce we need to deliver it.

# Rising to the Challenge of the Clean Energy Capacity Study

## 1. New Energy Standards

Government should urgently move to mandate industry conditions into CEFC funding and other Special Investment Vehicles (SIVs), starting with Rewiring the Nation projects.

New Energy Standards will serve to maintain healthy and competitive employment conditions and strong training requirements, such as apprentice ratios. They will improve recruitment into the industry and grow social licence for new energy projects.

## 2. Expansion of Industry RTOs and TAFE Campuses

Australia lags the rest of the world in training due to long term underinvestment in electrical education. Both in terms of training capacity and education quality, existing training centres are languishing around the country.

There is an urgent need to identify RTOs capable of scaling and expanding investment in strategic locations to meet student need. It is vital this work is delivered in partnership with industry-led not-for-profit RTOs and the TAFE system.

## 3. Industry-led Apprentice Recruitment and Mentoring

Apprentice mentorship is enthusiastically supported by Australian industry. This is demonstrated by industry-led, not-for-profit RTOs achieving completion rates above 90% compared to the below 60% industry average. We need to replicate this success in a fundamental redesign of apprentice support structures, redirecting existing supports to augment and expand existing industry schemes. This is especially important for driving up the number of women in the electrical trades.

#### **4. Group Trainer Coordination**

There are potential crises all around the country with projects won through tender by contractors hoping for the best when it comes to finding apprentices to complete the work. This environment is antithetical to creating a healthy training culture.

Federal and state governments should collaborate on mandating group training arrangements which apprentices can commence prior to the awarding of individual project tenders – granting contractors a modicum of workforce certainty and boosting the productivity of the workforce.

#### **5. Wage Supplements for Trainers**

The shortage of electrical technology trainers is a brake on growth. To move out of electrical work into teaching currently brings the prospect of a severe salary cut and little support. Wage supplements are essential to attracting more electrical trainers.

Government should also explore partnerships with industry to better integrate trainers into the workforce, reducing the friction of moving between tradesperson and trade teacher.

#### **6. Industry Migration Agreements**

Providing opportunities to Australians must be the primary goal in meeting the coming workforce crunch. However, the scale of the challenge facing the country – aggravated by nearly 10 years of the previous government's inaction – means we're unlikely to fully meet skills demand through domestic development alone.

Government has already embarked on a process of reforming the migration system. Building on recent achievements in Aged Care, this reform process must include the development of industry-led migration agreements in sectors of acute shortage – like electrical trades.

#### **7. Public Perception of Clean Energy Jobs**

The clean energy sector is facing an identity crisis. Too few know where and what the jobs are or how to get them. Government should partner with industry and unions on a coordinated national campaign to improve the perception of clean energy occupations.

This generation of school leavers must be inspired: if they want to save the world, they should do a trade.

#### **8. Clean Energy Jobs Advocate**

To meet the challenges of the energy transition, we must sustainably scale the workforce, creating jobs where they are needed and supporting further workplace learning and development.

Government should appoint a Clean Energy Jobs Advocate to support and provide assistance to government and industry through the transition and provide planning and coordination of the multitude of important workforce programs.

The Advocate would lead the promotion of the electrical technologies as a positive career choice, especially amongst women and First Nations people whilst playing a central coordination role in assisting the multitude of agencies currently focussing on addressing the workforce challenges.

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“ Green is not just about renewable energy. It’s also about creating a new direction for the whole economy. This requires governments to step up, not step back, creating the kinds of mission-oriented public organisations that will enable us to tackle climate change - as ambitious as those that got us to the moon.”

– Mariana Mazzucato