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18 April 2024



Senate Finance and Public Administration Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
By email: fpa.sen@aph.gov.au

Re: Net Zero Economy Authority Bill 2024

The Australian Services Union (ASU) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the *Net Zero Economy Authority Bill 2024*.

The ASU is one of Australia's largest Unions, representing approximately 135,000 workers with members working in a variety of classifications across electricity generation, distribution, retail and transmission.

The ASU welcomes the Government's objectives through the NZEA Bill to ensure workers, regions and industries can transition to a net zero economy. We recommend the Bill is passed in full.

We support the establishment of the Net Zero Economy Authority that will "assist in:

- facilitating public and private sector participation and investment in greenhouse gas emissions reduction and net zero transformation initiatives in Australia, including in new industries;
- supporting workers impacted by the net zero transformation to transition to new opportunities, including through the Energy Industry Jobs Plan;
- coordinating net zero efforts across government and key stakeholders, and in key regions, to facilitate the achievement of Australia's greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets and support Australia's transition to a net zero emissions economy; and
- building community understanding, confidence and engagement with the net zero transformation".¹

The Net Zero Economy Authority must have presence in the regions with facilities identified for closure before 2030, to facilitate long-term regional planning and coordination and to reduce the negative impacts associated with Australia's transition to net zero.

The NZEA Bill will establish the Energy Industry Jobs Plan (Plan). The Plan will support employees impacted by the closure of some coal-fired and gas-fired power stations and will support all affected employees to access new employment, including dependent employees who have a commercial

¹ The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, [Explanatory Memorandum](#), Net Zero Economy Authority Bill 2024 and Net Zero Economy Authority (Transitional Provisions) Bill 2024

relationship with a closing power station. The Plan also enables employees to access new employment through pooled redeployment schemes.²

We recognise the importance of a Plan that obligates closing employers to provide supports to workers, including training, financial and career advice, redeployment and paid time off to access them.

We support the provision for a formal statutory review of legislation and operational framework to identify any issues raised during the initial 12 months of the Authorities work. Any issues or flaws identified must be addressed.

We recognise that participation of receiving employers in the pooled redeployment scheme is entirely voluntary for now. However, there is a risk that receiving employers will not opt-in to the scheme and employees will be unable to find work. Conditionalities, including fair and legally binding labour conditions, should be attached to any incentives proffered to receiving employers to encourage their voluntary participation. If the statutory review shows that voluntary approach hasn't resulted in adequate participation, then it should recommend alternative ways to rope receiving employers in.

The Bill provides a procedure for settling disputes between the closing/dependent employer and the relevant unions for any matters arising under a Fair Work Commission (FWC) determination regarding the required supports to impacted workers. However, as drafted, the FWC itself would not be able to resolve the dispute, as the Fair Work Act does not explicitly include determinations made under the NZEA Bill among the kinds of enterprise agreements disputes the FWC deals with.

This could be strengthened simply by amending the Fair Work Act to include determinations made under the NZEA Bill, or by amending the NZEA Bill to make clear its determinations are categorised as enterprise agreements under the Fair Work Act.

For more than a decade the ASU has been campaigning to ensure the expertise and knowledge of highly skilled energy workers is not lost from the local energy industry through the transition to net zero, and that these workers are provided with the opportunity to transition into good secure jobs. We believe the NZEA Bill achieves this.

Finally, the ASU is aware that several other unions and affiliates are making submissions in response to the proposed Bill. The ASU supports those submissions and the recommendations contained within. In particular, we support the additional recommendations made by the Australian Council of Trade Unions to strengthen the Bill.

Yours faithfully

Robert Potter
NATIONAL SECRETARY

² The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, [Explanatory Memorandum](#), Net Zero Economy Authority Bill 2024 and Net Zero Economy Authority (Transitional Provisions) Bill 2024