

Summer 2025/26

**AMWU**

Est 1852

Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union  
Journal

**Housing is for living,  
not for profit** pg4

CHARTERING NEW WATERS FOR FAIR PAY pg16 | WORKING TO LIVE, NOT LIVING TO WORK pg36

CREDITS

Editor: Steve Murphy

National Communications Coordinator:  
Sonia Feng

Contributors: Farrah Shaikh, Kim Long,  
Alana Ramshaw, Angus Haigh,  
Jen Pearse, Josh Penhall, Gemma Beale,  
Hamish Gamble, Josh Newton, Kath Presdee,  
Rebecca Muratore, Andrea Firehock

Photographers: Linda Leman, Sonia Feng

Design: Campaign Edge

Printer: Kosdown

The AMWU Journal is proudly printed  
by our AMWU members at  
Kosdown Printing, Port Melbourne.

AMWU Journal  
Level 4 133 Parramatta Road  
Granville NSW 2142

Please submit your story ideas!  
Email: communications@amwu.org.au



The AMWU Helpdesk is a free, confidential  
service for AMWU members seeking help with  
workplace issues. It provides assistance with  
questions, problems, and access to legal advice.



AMWU Care is a 100% free and confidential  
phone counselling service for AMWU members  
run by trained professionals.

@TheAMWU fb.com/TheAMWU  
@TheAMWU bit.ly/theamwu  
@TheAMWU amwu.org.au

The AMWU acknowledges the Traditional  
Custodians of the lands and waterways.  
We pay respect to Elders and leaders,  
and stand in solidarity in the ongoing struggle  
for justice and self-determination.

Authorised by Steve Murphy,  
AMWU National Secretary, 2025.



## pg 6 Victory on the tracks

How Sydney rail  
workers secured a  
landmark agreement



## pg 9 Keeping the bastards honest

Garth Honeysett,  
can line technician  
at Jamestrong

## pg 29 The power of small wins

Anna Boatwright, microbiologist/  
laboratory technician  
at Mérieux NutriSciences



<b>Housing is for living, not for profit</b> From the National Secretary	4
<b>A new charter for AMWU delegates</b> Putting the power in your hands	8
<b>Never too late to weld a new path</b> Ana Gamero, engineering fabrication apprentice at Bucher Municipal	10
<b>Abolishing junior rates through collective action</b> Cooper Mann, fitter and turner apprentice at ASC	11
<b>The fight for Same Job, Same Pay</b> A victory against BHP's labour hire rort in the Bowen Basin	12
<b>Putting money back into workers' hands</b> Sunshine Sugar workers reclaim decades of lost allowance	13
<b>How workers saved Australian shipbuilding</b> The story of the Australian Shipbuilding Federation of Unions	14
<b>Building union strength in our shipbuilding industries</b> Dave Edwards, fabrication supervisor at Austral	15
<b>Chartering new waters for fair pay</b> Inside the AMWU's landmark victory at ASC	16
<b>Anchored in solidarity</b> How the AMWU won big and exposed wage theft at BAE	17
<b>The standard you accept</b> Shane Rovelli, HSR of the Year	18
<b>Continuing the legacy</b> Taylor Small, publisher at West Australian newspaper	19
<b>Strong, Smart, United</b> 2025 AMWU National Conference	20
<b>Driving Melbourne's Metro Tunnel from start to finish</b> The force moving Melbourne forward	24
<b>Casting the dice</b> How Star Casino workers beat the odds and the bosses	25
<b>Whyalla: The quiet backbone of our steel industry</b> Forging Australia's future in steel manufacturing	26
<b>A stitch in time</b> Brent Hamley, corrugator operator at Opal Fibre	28
<b>The fight against poultry conditions</b> From the production line to the front line: Ingham's workers rise	30
<b>Superior Pak workers rubbish the odds</b> Superior Pak workers haul a massive victory	31
<b>A just transition means justice for workers</b> Powering a future where no worker is left behind	32
<b>AMWU's Fearless Festival</b> A triumph in grassroots leadership	33
<b>Groundbreaking win for reproductive health leave</b> It's for Every Body: Silliker (MNAQ) workers secure AMWU first	34
<b>Light at the end of the tunnel</b> Beth Jones, AMWU Project Officer for Women in Trades & Tech Project	35
<b>Working to live, not living to work</b> The case for a shorter work week	36
<b>Lessons from history</b> Liam Byrne, Honorary Fellow, UniMelb School of History & Philosophy	37
<b>Workers' Fighting Fund</b> \$170,000 donation to the Royal Children's Hospital	38
<b>On the dignity in life and retirement</b> From the RMD National Secretary & President	39

# Contents

# HOUSING IS FOR LIVING, NOT FOR PROFIT

“The ‘Great Australian Dream’ — the dream of owning your own home — is slipping beyond the reach for a greater number of workers. In fact, generations now and into the future are going to miss out entirely, unless real changes are made. This isn’t some abstract problem; it’s a gut-level crisis that hits us all where it hurts.

**W**e need to talk about housing from a working-class point of view, not the one spoon-fed to us by the rich and powerful. They want us to believe housing is just another way to get rich. But for us, housing is a basic human right. It’s about having a safe, secure place to rest after a long day of work, a place where our families can grow, and a place we can proudly call our own. It’s about dignity.

## WE NEED A SOLUTION — A WORKING-CLASS SOLUTION TO A WORKING-CLASS PROBLEM.

The truth is the housing market is rigged against us. While we bust our backs to make a living; landlords, property developers, and wealthy investors treat housing like a high-stakes poker game. They manipulate supply, jack up prices, and dodge taxes to rake in massive profits. And what’s left for us? Sky-high mortgages, soul-crushing rent, or a lifetime of being shut out of home ownership entirely.

This isn’t a battle between generations; it’s a class war. The rich get richer by hoarding wealth and assets, and their primary asset is real estate. We’re told we’re just not working hard enough, but the numbers don’t lie. The average house now costs eight times the average annual income. That means we have to save for over a decade just to afford a deposit, while they make a killing without lifting a finger.

This housing crisis is a national crisis, a working-class crisis and critically, a union issue. It affects every one of us. Our brothers and sisters in the residential construction trades are often forced into precarious, non-union jobs with low pay and unsafe conditions just to build the very homes we can’t afford. The quality of these homes is dropping too. They’re packed

together like sardines, built with cheap materials, and sold to us for a fortune. This is the capitalist model in a nutshell: exploit the workers to build a shoddy product that other workers can’t even afford.

We cannot leave the solution in the hands of the same people who created this mess. Letting private developers and real estate sharks manage housing supply is like letting the fox guard the chicken coup. They’ll just find new ways to squeeze every last cent out of us.

We need a working-class solution. The answer is we must revolutionise how we build homes.

Instead of feeding the broken profit-driven residential construction model, we must have more control of the production by manufacturing modular homes in unionised factories. This serves the needs of the many, not the greed of the few.

Modular factory construction offers immediate, strategic gains for working people:

- 1. Union power and better jobs:** This creates a new sector of skilled, permanent, and unionised factory jobs. We can organise these sites overnight. That will bring thousands of workers under the banner of a strong, unified union and provide apprenticeships with decent pay and strong benefits.
- 2. Affordability and quality:** We dramatically lower the cost of production, passing savings directly to working families. We build better, stronger, and safer homes in a controlled environment; ensuring strict, high-quality standards.

- 3. Safety and control:** Work is moved off dangerous, scattered construction sites into safe, organised factory environments which will drastically reduce injuries and long-term health problems.
- 4. Sovereign supply:** We strengthen local industries and supply chains, keeping jobs and money within our communities.

Once built, these homes must be prioritised for working people:

- 1. Buy to live:** Helping working people achieve the dream of home ownership.
- 2. Rent to buy:** Enabling renters to build equity and eventually own their home.
- 3. Social housing:** Delivering secure, dignified homes for low-income workers and retirees.

To level the playing field, the government must move to abolish negative gearing and all tax concessions that allow investors to outcompete working families, by treating shelter as an asset to be traded for profit. We must prevent big capital from capturing this opportunity and turning it into another profit-making scheme.

Housing is AMWU business. It’s time we stood up and fought for a future where a good, affordable home is not a privilege for the rich, but a right for every Australian worker. ■

**In unity,**  
Steve Murphy  
AMWU National Secretary

IT’S TIME WE STOOD UP AND FOUGHT FOR A FUTURE WHERE A GOOD, AFFORDABLE HOME IS NOT A PRIVILEGE FOR THE RICH.





# VICTORY ON THE TRACKS



The air inside the maintenance sheds was often thick with the harsh symphony of sounds and smells – the screech of air tools, popping of beads of weld being laid, the whine of electric motors being bench-tested, and the constant metallic odours of grinding wheels, old gear oil, and high-voltage systems. It was here, beneath the heavy glow of overhead lights, that AMWU members – the heavy plant mechanics, fitters, and electricians – ensured the entire Sydney Trains network didn't grind to a halt.

When AMWU NSW State President Keith Lang, a veteran heavy plant mechanic hears the satisfying clatter of steel wheels of the iconic silver and yellow Tangara trains running smoothly over rail joints, there's a deep sense of pride that fills his chest. When it comes to keeping Sydney's trains running across New South Wales, our members are the mainstay of the entire operation. They are the essential workers who keep the state moving, and after a year-long battle they secured a deal that finally recognises their worth.

"I've been employed by Sydney Trains for over 20 years, and I've been at the bargaining table for the last three bargains. I have not seen an agreement this good. This is an enterprise agreement that restores some dignity and respect in our workplace," said Keith.

The fight was relentless, spanning 14 months of intense pressure and strategic action. This wasn't just about arguments in a boardroom; it was about unyielding discipline from the workforce.

After a long, hard-fought battle that included bargaining, litigation, and extensive media coverage, our members secured a massive victory. They won a 4% base pay rise each year for three years and 4% backpay to May 2024.

But as AMWU delegate and plant mechanic Sean Delaney noted, this was about more than just a number on the payslip. "The pay rise will make a big difference to people's lives. The reward of seeing the smiles on people's faces when they received their backpay shows just how vital this win was for families dealing with the cost-of-living," he said.

What makes this deal truly historic is that our members won over 100 new and improved conditions, all the while protecting every single existing condition.

That happened because we built a powerful coalition with the seven combined rail unions including the AMWU; the Rail, Tram, and Bus Union (RTBU); the Australian Services Union (ASU); Professionals Australia (PA); the Australian Workers' Union (AWU); the Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union (CFMEU); and the Electrical Trades Union (ETU). As Keith, our AMWU Convenor relayed, the unity of the collective unions made them "undefeatable".

Their campaign was a masterclass in collective power. It involved 80 full day bargaining meetings over 14 months, 160 delegates caucuses, 24 appearances at the Fair Work Commission and Federal Court, and over 1,860 emails exchanging strategies and positions.

"When you all sit down, work together and work as one," Sean



**"THE POWER YOU HAVE WHEN YOU COLLABORATE, YOU BECOME A REALLY FORMIDABLE OPPONENT AT THE BARGAINING TABLE."**  
- Sean Delaney

explained, "the power you have when you collaborate, you become a really formidable opponent at the bargaining table."

It's a testament to the determination of our union's delegates and members. They remained united through a year of uncertainty to achieve an industry-leading agreement for 1,400 workers. "Sydney Trains workers know their worth and they weren't willing to accept or lie down for anything less than what they were worth," added Keith.

The biggest victory goes beyond wages and benefits. The unions secured a new multi-employer agreement that is a crucial shield against privatisation. It ensures that if other transport agencies were to enter their workplace, they will be covered by the same agreement, protecting their jobs from being outsourced.

"That was definitely one of the biggest wins. The security of our jobs has increased substantially," Sean affirmed.

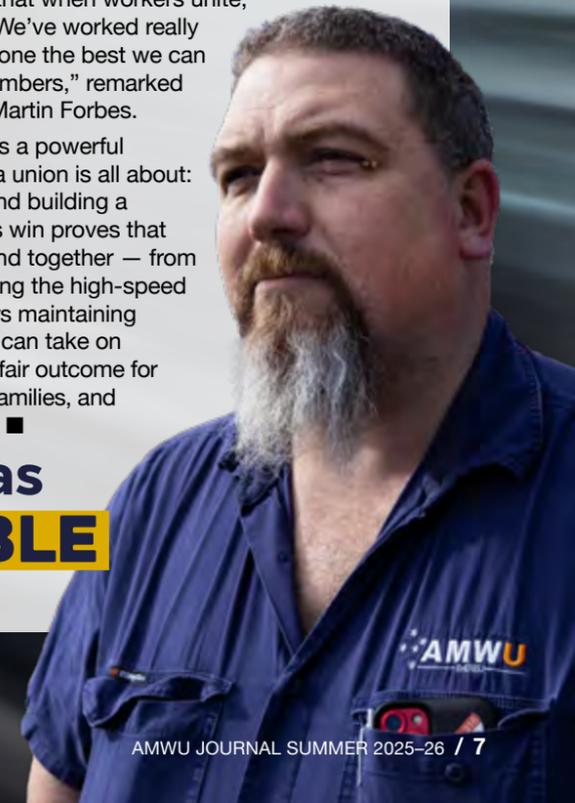
From increased allowances and training opportunities, to better health and safety provisions and more support for apprentices, women, and State Emergency Service (SES) volunteers – this agreement makes the NSW rail environment a fairer and more secure place to work.

It also champions community solidarity. Keith, who previously exhausted his savings by volunteering 55 days on a fire truck, celebrated a key demand: emergency responders can now receive up to six months of their average pay, including overtime and penalty rates while assisting in natural disasters. This ensures members never have to choose between helping their communities and putting food on their own family's table.

This win proves that when workers unite, we are stronger. "We've worked really hard, and we've done the best we can to support our members," remarked AMWU delegate Martin Forbes.

This agreement is a powerful reminder of what a union is all about: dignity, respect, and building a secure future. This win proves that when workers stand together – from the mechanics fixing the high-speed trains to the fitters maintaining the tracks – they can take on anyone and win a fair outcome for themselves, their families, and their communities. ■

**Their unity was UNDEFEATABLE**  
- Keith Lang





# A new charter for AMWU delegates

For every one of us, our workplace delegate is the face of the union. They're the ones we turn to when there's a problem, and the ones who stand in our corner. Now the AMWU has a new Delegates Charter — a clear set of rules and rights to give our delegates the power and support they need to get the job done.

This charter isn't just a piece of paper; it's a tool to strengthen our union from the ground up. It lays out exactly what our delegate's role is, what they're entitled to, and what's expected of them. For delegates, it's a shield and a guide. For members, it's a promise that your delegate is fully supported in protecting your rights.

This charter is our commitment to building a stronger, fairer union. Delegates are the heart of the AMWU in every workplace.

With this charter, we're making sure that every delegate is empowered, protected, and fully supported in their mission to make our workplaces safer and stronger — together.

Scan the QR code, or visit: [bit.ly/3Jv9ZNP](https://bit.ly/3Jv9ZNP) to read the AMWU Delegates Charter in full.



## Your rights as a union delegate

Being a delegate comes with real power, and this charter makes it official. You have the right to:

- **Speak up for everyone:** You can represent your fellow union members on issues of pay, safety, and working conditions without fear.
- **Access to union resources:** You are entitled to get the information, documents, and support you need from the union and your employer.
- **Time and facilities:** The charter ensures you get paid time, meeting rooms, and communication tools to carry out your union duties.
- **Legal protection:** You are legally protected from being discriminated against or retaliated against by management because of your union work.
- **Training and development:** You can access over 10 days of paid leave each year for union training to sharpen your skills and stay informed.

## Your responsibilities to your workmates

With these rights comes a clear set of responsibilities to the workers who elected you. A delegate is expected to:

- **Be a fair voice:** Act in the best interests of every member and ensure everyone is heard.
- **Keep everyone informed:** Be the main link between the union and the shop floor, making sure members know what's happening.
- **Uphold union values:** Promote fairness, equality, and solidarity in everything you do.
- **Lead with integrity:** Be a person everyone can trust, acting ethically and following union rules.

## The union has your back

The AMWU is committed to making sure every delegate is fully supported. That means:

- **Training:** You'll receive ongoing training to build your industrial and legal knowledge.
- **Support:** You'll have direct access to union officials and resources whenever you need guidance or help.

## DELEGATE PROFILE

Garth Honeysett

# KEEPING THE BASTARDS HONEST

For more than two decades, boilermaker-by-trade Garth Honeysett has been a pillar for AMWU members at **Jamestrong Precision Packaging** in Taree, in northern New South Wales.



As a senior site delegate of over 20 years and an AMWU member for more than 25, Garth has helped build a workplace where fairness and respect are at the forefront. "We've got a member capacity of around about 85 to 90% density," he said. "I thoroughly enjoy the role, that's why I continue to do it."

At Jamestrong, workers produce a wide variety of aluminium aerosol cans such as WD-40; Rexona, Nivea and Linx deodorants; hairsprays; olive oil sprays — products familiar in homes across Australia. But behind every can is a story of skill and solidarity. Garth has seen the site through many changes, including a renewed commitment to local manufacturing.

"We melt our own ingots from the aluminium that comes from Tomago and make our own strips at the casting plant. We then turn them into round discs, known as slugs, which we put into a press that extrudes into an aluminium can. In my section, we shape the neck of the can using necking machines," he described. "All of this brings more manufacturing back to our country," Garth pointed out.

"It brings many jobs back to the Taree area, brings manufacturing back to our doorstep, and keeps the long-term viability of our business going," continued Garth. Today, his workplace is one of the largest employers in the area.

Although he's proud to be a delegate, Garth's path to union leadership in his workplace wasn't planned. "When I first took this role on, I wasn't a unionist," he laughed. "I took a role on the consultative committee here and then got thrust into it 3 months before an EBA. [I had] no idea what I was doing, no experience. But I had a lot of good people and long-term unionists here to guide me, and without them, I don't think I would have survived as long as I have."

That early support shaped his approach as a mentor for the next generation of delegates. "You don't have to be the world's smartest man — I'm not," he said. "But if you've got the passion to protect member's rights and entitlements, get in, have a go. Don't be afraid to speak up," he urged.

"We must keep the bosses to their word, and make sure there's follow-through. Always remember the members are the union. You represent them, the good and the bad, but without them we aren't a strong union," advised Garth. "If you don't keep the bastards honest, our members get railroaded."

Through every campaign, with both wins and losses alike, Garth's motivation has remained steady. "I like seeing members achieve better wages, conditions and lifestyles for what we, the AMWU, stand for," he said. "Our biggest win has been the fact we've not lost anything or traded anything off in any agreement. We've only ever gained. It's not always perfect but all the agreements that I've been a part of, I've seen all delegates bring something new to the table. It's the strength in the collective."

Now, as he looks ahead to retirement, Garth reflects with pride. "I'm nearing the end of my working life, rather than at the beginning. I'm so proud to see the next generation of delegates. The delegates I see around me are and will be the strong leaders in our union in the future. Seeing this succession, pleases me to no end."

"The union's full of good people, right from the grassroots through to the upper echelon," said Garth. "People who stand up and fight for what's right, and that includes keeping the bastards honest." ■



Ana Gamero

# Never too late to weld a new path

Ana Gamero's journey into fabrication began at a 'Try-a-Trade' night hosted by the Victorian Trades Hall Council's Women Onsite project and AMWU Victoria — and it changed everything. That evening, when she first picked up a welding torch, she discovered a passion she hadn't expected.

At 38, and as a single mother of four, Ana was determined to build a career that could offer stability for her family — and welding became the spark that set her new path in motion.

Ana enrolled in a welding course soon after, where her talent was impossible to miss. Her skill and determination quickly earned her a highly sought-after fabrication apprenticeship at Bucher Municipal, marking a major milestone in her new career.

She transitioned from the transient work in the construction industry to a trade offering hands-on mastery and genuine potential for growth. "I absolutely love welding," Ana shared, in a testament to finding fulfilling work.

But Ana's journey goes beyond the workshop floor. Ana is not just building components; she's building rank-and-file leadership. With her sights set on becoming a welding inspector, she has proactively enrolled in a leadership course — deepening her skills and reinforcing her commitment to her trade and her union.



Ana's goal is to mobilise and inspire other working mothers hesitant about change

Her determination to break down barriers for women in manufacturing has earned her a nomination for Apprentice of the Year at the Empowered Women in Trades (EWIT) Awards.

Through the AMWU, and with the guidance of AMWU Women in Trades and Tech Project Manager Courteney Munn, Ana found a powerful sense of union solidarity and community. Her children stand as proud supporters of her efforts.

Ana's goal is to mobilise and inspire other working mothers hesitant about change. "You're never too late to study. You're never too late to get an apprenticeship. We're capable of striving for better opportunities for ourselves," she said.

Ana's story is a powerful testament to resilience and the collective strength found in the trade union movement. ■



# ABOLISHING JUNIOR RATES THROUGH

# COLLECTIVE ACTION

APPRENTICE PROFILE  
Cooper Mann

Twenty-year-old AMWU apprentice Cooper Mann was caught in a deliberate trap. Starting his apprenticeship just before the age of 21 meant being locked into junior rates for the entire contract — a system that punished him for choosing a skilled trade later in life.

"If you start an apprenticeship a day before you turn 21, you're on junior rates for the whole time. It's an unacceptable system of wage theft," Cooper explained.

Within a year of joining the AMWU, Cooper and his fellow workers at ASC in Adelaide's Osborne Naval Shipyard took militant action. Through collective action, union members delivered an average 18.5% pay rise and, crucially, the abolition of junior rates for apprentices turning 21.

The impact was immediate and life changing. "I went from \$16 an hour to \$40 an hour. I'm incredibly proud to be an AMWU member," Cooper declared.

But Cooper's fight didn't end at the gates. He took the fight against wage exploitation all the way to Canberra, joining the AMWU's National Secretary Steve Murphy and an ACTU delegation to lobby the 48<sup>th</sup> Parliament.

In meetings with the Minister for Skills and Training Andrew Giles, Cooper pushed for the nationwide abolition of junior rates for all adult apprentices and demanded accountability for failing training providers. Cooper also raised the alarm about the systemic crisis in TAFE — chronic underfunding, a severe shortage of lecturers, and the urgent need for better equipment for students.

Now a member of the AMWU Political Committee in South Australia, Cooper remains driven by one belief: the only way the working-class can win is by organising together.

"The government talks about a 'Future Made in Australia'," Cooper said. "But apprentices are the future of our manufacturing industries. Unless we support them, it just won't happen. We must abolish junior rates to secure the next generation of skilled labour." ■



"APPRENTICES ARE THE FUTURE OF OUR MANUFACTURING INDUSTRIES"

# THE FIGHT FOR SAME JOB, SAME PAY

This is a story about power — not the kind that comes from boardrooms or billion-dollar profits, but the kind that comes from us: workers united in struggle.

For years, many corporations exploited a loophole to boost their bottom line: labour hire. They divided workers into two classes on the same site, doing the same work, but for wildly different pay. While the bosses preached loyalty and teamwork, they quietly replaced permanent, unionised workers with precarious underpaid labour hire. Some even created their own labour hire companies and built a two-tier workforce — all to drive a wedge between us and our hard-won conditions.

But workers saw through it. And we fought back.

“Same job, same pay means unity,” said AMWU member and labour hire worker Sebastian Stewart. “Gone are the days of employers using pay to drive a wedge between the workers.”

And now we’ve won a major victory against BHP.

The Fair Work Commission has seen through BHP’s arguments and issued orders for our members to be paid as though they were covered by the union-negotiated BHP Coal Agreement.

For more than 1,600 labour hire workers at the Goonyella Riverside, Peak Downs, and Saraji mines, that means real money in their pockets — tens of thousands of dollars a year.

This decision proves what we’ve known all along: labour hire could be just a loophole to rip off workers.

This didn’t happen because BHP suddenly grew a conscience. It happened because we stood together.

As AMWU delegate Matt McKeiver — a heavy diesel fitter — explained, “it was organised protected industrial action, tactical coordination, and just getting the information out among our working community.”

For years, BHP dragged its feet — using stalling tactics, delaying justice, and hoping we’d give up. Meanwhile, labour hire workers were pushed to their limits.

“My dog forgot what I looked like,” Matt said, describing the long hours and endless sacrifices made by workers just trying to make ends meet.

But we didn’t give up. We got organised. We built solidarity across sites. We fought back — industrially, politically, and legally — and we won.

“This victory proves the trade union movement can deliver results on all fronts,” said AMWU Organiser Aaron Neary.

“Our campaign has delivered industrially, politically, and legally. We will not lie down and let our union be busted. We will not stand idle while big mining companies try to break our union,” he added.

And make no mistake — this win sends a clear message to every employer who thinks they can use labour hire to undercut pay and destroy union power: we’re coming for you next.

We’ll use every tool at our disposal — the law, the workplace, and the collective strength of organised workers — to make sure every worker gets the pay and respect they deserve.

“We’ve finally grabbed them,” Matt said. “We’ve finally got the justice and the outcome we deserve.”

This is not the end of the fight. But it’s proof of what we can achieve when we stand shoulder to shoulder.

We’ve shown that when workers are united — across job types, across sites, across industries — we’re unstoppable.

Our union is our strength. Our unity is our power.

And together, we’re making history — one victory at a time. ■



## Nothing sweeter Putting money back into workers’ hands

For the workers who keep Sunshine Sugar’s mills running across Northern NSW, there’s no doubt left in their minds — union pressure works.

At the company’s sites in Condong, Broadwater, and Harwood, AMWU members recently proved the power of collective action, uncovering an entitlement that had quietly disappeared from pay packets decades ago — and winning it back through persistence, solidarity, and smart organising.

During 2024 enterprise bargaining negotiations, AMWU delegates made an unexpected discovery: a tool allowance, written into agreements since 1988, had never been paid to any current employee.

That revelation sparked immediate action. Workers called mass meetings, compared records, and agreed — unanimously — to fight for what was theirs.

“When we realised it had been there all along, but no one had ever received it, people were just shocked,” recalled AMWU delegate Stephen Ackers at Sunshine Sugar’s Harwood mill. “It wasn’t about greed — it was about fairness.”

When approached, Sunshine Sugar’s management initially claimed the allowance had been “rolled into” the hourly rate over time. They offered to pay it moving forward but refused to consider backpay.

That didn’t sit right with the workforce — many of whom had dedicated decades of service to the mills. Backed by the AMWU, members sought legal advice and voted to continue the dispute, determined to pursue every cent owed.

“Our union said we had a good case, we held meetings and had votes. We decided to pursue the backpay,” said AMWU delegate Andrew Hall.

“After we decided to take it to court, the company suddenly changed their tune,” added Stephen.

In August 2025, the breakthrough came. Sunshine Sugar agreed to provide backpay to August 2018 — in line with the maximum statutory

period allowed under law — and to reinstate the tool allowance of \$0.82 per hour, to rise with future wage increases.

For many workers, that meant up to \$6,736.39 each in backpay — real money in an era of rising costs.

“The backpay did well,” Stephen reflected. “It gives us a little more money in our pay packet, which is quite handy in this time and age. It paid a couple of bills off, which was quite nice.”

Beyond the financial win, AMWU members say the victory carries a deeper message: that vigilance and collective strength matter.

“I’m proud to be an AMWU member. We’re very happy with our organiser’s efforts. The workers here are very grateful,” said Andrew.

“I think it was a great win that we had,” Stephen said proudly. “And hopefully we’ve got a few more coming up.”

From forgotten entitlements to fair pay, the message from Sunshine Sugar’s workforce is a sweet reminder that when workers stand together, they get results — and that’s the sweetest victory of all. ■

**“It wasn’t about greed — it was about fairness.”**



A little over a decade ago, Australia's shipbuilding industry was staring into a 'valley of death'. The work was drying up, and thousands of skilled jobs were on the chopping block. The government was dragging its feet, and it looked like Australia was about to lose the ability to build and maintain its own naval fleet. But we weren't going to let that happen.

# HOW WORKERS SAVED AUSTRALIAN SHIPBUILDING



**T**he AMWU saw the crisis coming. We knew that workers, their families, and whole communities would be hit hard if we didn't act. So, in late 2012, the union went to work. We commissioned an investigation conducted by a former Department of Defence expert to understand the country's future naval shipbuilding requirements, how we could save the industry, and how we could keep our sovereign capability intact. The plan was clear: we had to fight for a continuous shipbuilding program.

This wasn't a fight we could win with a few letters. We had to organise and build a movement.

In February 2013, delegates from shipyards all over Australia met in Sydney. The energy was electric. We knew what was at stake, and we were ready to fight for it. Just a few days later, we launched the 'Design, Build and Maintain Our Ships Here' campaign. We handed out pledge cards, sent letters to politicians, and started building a campaign that would reach every shipyard, every family, and every community.

Our delegates were on the front lines, heading to Canberra over a dozen times to lobby politicians. They were met with some opposition, but they never

**WE HAD TO ORGANISE AND BUILD A MOVEMENT.**



backed down. They built a broad coalition; working with community groups, employers, and industry experts. The union organised rallies and mobilised workers and their families. This was a classic union fight, and we were in it to win.

The pressure we put on the government paid off. Our persistence led to some huge wins including forcing the government to hold a senate inquiry into naval shipbuilding; forcing the government to commit to building new frigates and offshore patrol vessels right here in Australia; a commitment to build 12 new submarines in Adelaide which has secured thousands of high-skilled jobs for decades; and led to the resignation of Defence Minister David Johnston who insulted our members by saying they "couldn't build a canoe". It was a powerful message: when you attack our workers, you'll be held accountable.

By 2020, our hard work had paid off. We had secured a massive \$100 billion build program with an additional \$150 billion in ongoing maintenance.

"When the government was ready to let shipbuilding die, it was the members and their union who stood up and said: not on our watch. We fought for a continuous shipbuilding program, and we won — not just to save jobs, but to secure Australia's sovereign capability for generations to come," said AMWU National President and National ASFU convenor Glenn Thompson.

Out of this successful campaign, a new force was born. In July 2018, the Australian Shipbuilding Federation of Unions (ASFU) was created. This federation brings together four unions to speak with one voice, coordinate our efforts, and present a united front to employers and the government.

"Out of the campaign came a lasting legacy — not only a secure future for shipbuilding, but a stronger, more united movement through the ASFU. Together, we're shaping the future of this industry and making sure every worker shares in its success," elaborated Glenn.

The ASFU is now focused on building on our wins. A core goal is to create multi-employer precinct industry agreement with the same pay rates and allowances that will deliver strong protections for our shop floor delegates. This will ensure that no matter where you work, you have the same rights and conditions. ■

## THE TIDE THAT BINDS US:

# BUILDING UNION STRENGTH IN OUR SHIPBUILDING INDUSTRIES



Today, Australia's shipbuilding industry is thriving — and it's no accident. Behind every vessel in Western Australia's Henderson Defence Precinct stands the collective strength, solidarity, determination, and militant organising of AMWU members who've fought for every win.

**A**t Henderson, thousands of skilled workers are constructing the vital vessels that keep our nation secure. But just as importantly, they're building something else — a stronger, more united workforce that's setting new standards across the industry.

Across all major shipyards, AMWU members are flexing their industrial muscle and demonstrating what organised power looks like.

At ASC, our members took bold, protected industrial action and won big — a 20% pay rise over three years for tradespeople and major gains for trade planners. Their campaign was backed by 100% union density in a key section of the workforce — proof that when workers stand together and leverage a fully organised shop floor, the results speak for themselves.

Meanwhile, at BAE and Cvmec, the AMWU has been on the front foot, working to safeguard existing jobs and secure new ones under strong union conditions as major defence contracts roll out. These victories show that a militant and strategic union can adapt to industry change without ever compromising on workers' rights.

The surging strength in the shipyards is a direct result of committed union members and strong delegates like Dave Edwards. A boilermaker who has been in the industry since 2017, Dave joined the union to fight for better conditions and stepped up as a delegate to educate his comrades on their power.

Dave's story is the story of our union's growth at Austal — a key builder of navy patrol boats, border force patrol boats, and landing craft. When Dave started, AMWU membership was negligible.

Now, membership is rapidly pushing one-quarter of the workplace — a phenomenal achievement considering the uphill battle against the employers' anti-union sentiment.

That strength on the ground is built by committed members like Dave, whose leadership has transformed the culture at Austal. The moment that truly defined union growth at Austal came when management singled out one of our delegates. Instead of backing down, workers rallied around their mate in a powerful show of unity — resulting in a surge of new membership as workers witnessed the tangible power of standing together.

Dave said those moments define what unionism is all about. "The sheer force of having unions working together made a huge difference," he said. Now, as the newly elected Vice President of the AMWU WA Branch, he's driving the next phase of growth — bringing every shipbuilding company in the precinct under one powerful, united agreement that lifts standards across the entire region.

"It means boosting our membership across all shipbuilding companies and operating as one united front," Dave explained. "If you mess with one worker, you mess with us all."

This strategic unity is essential as the federal government has assigned Austal the title of Strategic Shipbuilding of Australia, positioning the precinct for massive, long-term contracts involving frigates and future shipbuilding work. The union movement must be ready to meet this growth with commensurate collective power.

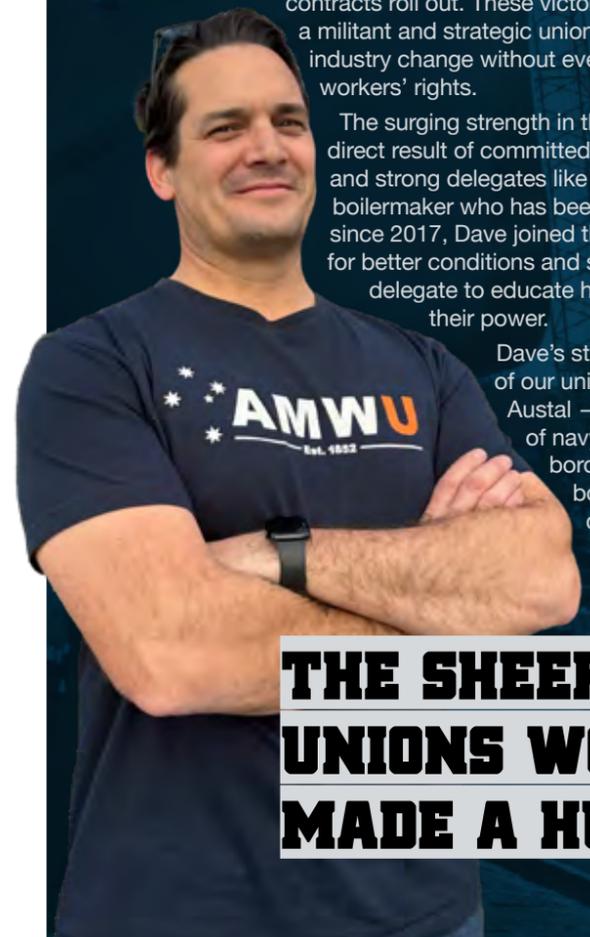
For Dave, this fight isn't just about today's contracts — it's about tomorrow's workers. "I'm instilling union values in my boy," he said proudly. "It's about showing him the importance of standing together and fighting for what's fair."

Every vessel launched from Henderson carries more than steel — it carries the spirit of solidarity. And as the industry expands, so too does the power of a workforce that knows its worth.

The next chapter of Australian shipbuilding won't be defined by governments or corporations — it'll be defined by union members who stand together, fight together, and win together.

AMWU members are proving that unity is our greatest engine — driving fair pay, safer jobs, and a future built by workers, for workers.

The tide is turning in shipbuilding — and it's powered by union strength. ■



**THE SHEER FORCE OF HAVING UNIONS WORKING TOGETHER MADE A HUGE DIFFERENCE.**

At the Osborne Naval Shipyard in South Australia, the maintenance crew responsible for the Collins Class submarines don't just keep vessels afloat — they're a vital cornerstone of Australia's naval strength and capability.

# CHARTERING NEW WATERS FOR FAIR PAY

Behind the steel and machinery are skilled tradespeople whose work ensures the nation's submarines remain ready to defend our security and strategic interests for decades to come. Moreover, their skills and experience are invaluable as Australia transitions to nuclear-powered submarines under the AUKUS partnership.

But last year, those same workers were fighting their own battle — not at sea, but on the home front — for something just as vital: fairness.

For boilermaker welder Alexandra Paris and mechanical fitter Wayne Weaver, the fight for pay parity with their Western Australian counterparts became a year-long campaign for respect. While workers in WA earned more for the same work, ASC employees in South Australia were left behind.

"It was a massive insult to our workers not having same job, same pay," said Alexandra. "The company talked about equality, but we weren't seeing it in our pay slips."

Over 12 long months, ASC workers stood their ground. They organised, strategised, and took coordinated industrial action — from 30-minute walkouts to four-day strikes — that brought operations to a standstill and forced management to the table.

"We were able to effectively communicate across the trades and unions to plan where these strikes would be most beneficial," Alexandra explained. "We remained united to the end. It was just amazing and powerful to be part of something that had all three unions come together."

Their unity paid off. The workers secured an average 18.5% up-front pay rise, with further increases locked in for 2025, 2026, and 2027 — achieving full parity with ASC workers in Western Australia.

For veteran fitter Wayne Weaver, who has spent more than 30 years at the shipyard, the win was one of the most inspiring moments of his career.

"It took a struggle; it took everyone sticking together," Wayne said. "Being positive, supporting each other — in the end, we got parity. That's what we fought for. And wage increases for the next four years. If we didn't stick together, it wouldn't have happened."

The campaign forged an unshakable sense of solidarity among hundreds of workers.

"The camaraderie and culture we built over nine months was fantastic," Alexandra said. "We had never come together like that before."

Wayne knows firsthand what it means to stand together.

"When you have to fight for equality and respect, that's when you need to be in a union," he said. "Companies will not give you what you deserve. They'll always try and make cuts at the bottom — that's usually the employees. You can't expect the company to have your back. But the union's got your back."

Both Alexandra and Wayne are proud AMWU delegates, and their message to other workers is clear:

**"If a worker is getting paid less for the same job, my first question is: are you in the union?" Alexandra said. "Because together, we can fight for what's right."**

Their victory at ASC stands as a powerful reminder: when workers stand together, fairness isn't just possible — it's inevitable. ■

**"It took a struggle; it took everyone sticking together."**

When AMWU delegate **Mitch Shippey** and his workmates at BAE Systems at the **Osborne Naval Shipyard** in South Australia saw their colleagues next door at ASC win pay parity with their West Australian peers, it was a turning point.

That realisation sparked a 14-month campaign of collective action.

# ANCHORED IN SOLIDARITY

Through unwavering determination, BAE workers won a 25.1% pay rise backdated to July last year, plus a \$1,000 sign-on bonus, a strengthened delegates charter, paid delegate training, and the right to address new starters during inductions — ensuring the transfer of union knowledge and values.

"It made us feel like we were worth the same," said Mitch. "ASC maintains subs, BAE builds ships — but we're all skilled tradespeople in the same industry. Workers deserve to be paid the same. It's making it impossible to attract and retain the critical, highly skilled tradespeople we need to deliver on our nation's defence commitments."

Mitch was a crucial organiser on the ground. "We educated members throughout the year-long dispute. Members learnt what industrial action means and why it matters because we can't effectively bargain or have a strong voice if we can't pull big numbers off the job."

Mitch and his team recruited around 300 new members, lifting AMWU numbers at the shipyard to nearly 500. "It's a good story to bring to new starters and say: this is what we've managed to achieve," he said.

Delegates built a stronger organising structure. "Members believed so strongly in the campaign that they acted collectively — sometimes without needing direction," said Mitch. "It was the most organised campaign since the site opened in 2009, and to do it with so many apprentices was huge."

National Secretary Steve Murphy said the victory "wasn't handed down to us — it's a powerful, concrete lesson that solidarity pays". He credited delegates for building power and delivering wage justice through "militant, rank-and-file organising, and shop-floor education", emphasising that "the power we have at the table, is the power we build on the shop floor".

Now, delegates are working toward future proofing the industry and trades of our members through a precinct-wide agreement across ASC, BAE and AUKUS workers to protect skills, jobs, and collective strength across the shipyard.

## HOW AMWU MEMBERS EXPOSED WAGE THEFT

A year before, when Mitch and his workmates noticed something wasn't adding up with their payslips, they didn't shrug it off — they compared notes. "We started digging," said Mitch. "There were these inconsistencies around loadings and how people were being paid when they were off sick or on certain shifts. We realised it wasn't one person. It was a pattern."

That pattern revealed a major underpayment issue. Backed by new wage-theft laws, AMWU members built a case and took it to management. The result: over \$400,000 in backpay for 289 blue-collar workers, upheld by the South Australian Employment Tribunal.

"That's life-changing money," said Mitch. "And it never would've come to light if we hadn't talked and worked together."

The lesson is clear: when workers stand together, they win. Or, as Mitch puts it, "It pays to be union — literally." ■



Shane Rovelli

## The standard you accept

It wasn't a faulty machine or a chemical spill that shut down Shane Rovelli's workshop at a South Australian defence shipyard on a September morning — it was pigeons.

**F**locks of pigeons perched in the overhead cranes, wings flapping through the rafters, constant droppings soiling workbenches and walkways where workers would walk through the pigeon waste "taking it everywhere" on their shoes. The infestation also affected the workers on a more granular level. Dusty dried up bird faeces would be suctioned into air conditioning vents that Shane and his workmates breathed in — the birds turned a high-risk worksite into a severely unsanitary hazard zone.

It was a discontent that was shared in the workforce across the years. For one AMWU Health and Safety Representative (HSR), enough was enough.

"There were dead pigeons in the netting in the workshop. Imagine our workshop, which is a huge shed 40 metres high by 150 metres long with crews working on a submarine. Not only would the pigeons shit everywhere, but the birds once dead would also fall on top of the crib room through the holes in the roof or through air con vents," grimaced Shane. "You knew when that happened because you would notice the maggots in the crib room."

"Why would you work in that, let alone eat in it?" he questioned with exasperation.

Shane knew he had to step up. He threatened management with a provisional improvement notice (PIN). But he knew from his training at the AMWU, that Section 84 in the *Work Health and Safety Act* meant he had a right to stop or refuse to perform work if there was a reasonable concern that doing so would expose him and his workmates to serious risk to their health or safety, arising from an immediate or imminent exposure to a hazard.

Armed with that knowledge, Shane issued a cease work after the company had repeatedly ignored breaches in health and safety. He called a stop work meeting at the canteen where all HSRs at the site came together with active delegates. Shane told them: "Until we get the company's response on this, we won't be going back to work". He said he used the time wisely to come together to discuss other safety issues at work.

**"Why would you work in that, let alone eat in it?"**

Management's response was a promise to get cleaning organised, but Shane stood firm and told them that "we'll go back to work when you actually start cleaning".

The company then proceeded to clean every second day after Shane raised the ongoing nature of the issue. Shane and his fellow HSRs got the company to put the practice into a management document so they would continue the policy.

"Stand up, you don't have to be treated like this. You can stop work, people don't need to work in that condition," insisted Shane.

That day last year changed everything for him and his fellow workmates. More than 500 of his colleagues now work in a safer and more hygienic workplace, even after Shane's moved on. He was recognised at our 2025 National Conference for his leadership and advocacy. His colleagues nominated him for the award for standing up to unsafe practices at his workplace and mentoring young HSRs.

When Shane became an HSR, there wasn't enough HSRs in each section at his workplace, let alone across shifts.

"At one point we had one HSR for one site which had 400 people," disclosed Shane. "It was really bad,

there was so many safety issues. And trying to cover everybody, we were spread so thin."

He ended up recruiting half a dozen young HSRs. "Companies don't hear what the workers have got to say in safety aspects. We need to police the company, and make sure they do follow legislation, so we work in safer workplaces," he said.

As a testament to the kind of delegate he was, when he left the company, he passed on his orange notebook to the other HSRs. His parting words to them were: "I've documented everything, so the guys can use it, refer to it, and show it to the next HSRs coming through."

Shane leaves behind a powerful legacy at ASC — a reminder that the standard you walk past is the standard you accept, and that workers have the power to shape the conditions they work under. ■

Taylor Small

For Taylor Small, unionism runs in her blood. A proud AMWU delegate and Mother of the Chapel at The West Australian newspaper, she's spent 16 years keeping the presses rolling — and our union heartbeat strong.



## Continuing the legacy

"I first entered The West in 2009 in the IT department while studying," Taylor recalled. "Two years later I moved into production as a press cleaner, then into publishing. I do a bit of everything including loading trucks with newspapers and palletising magazines."

Her versatility has kept her busy — but as a casual worker, it hasn't always been easy.

"We're an easy target," she said. "Because we don't have set shifts or rosters, you have to pick and choose your battles."

Speaking up came at a cost. When Taylor first became a delegate, she suddenly found herself without shifts for two weeks. It happened again last year — eight long weeks off the roster after a meeting with management. But instead of breaking her resolve, it only strengthened it.

"We didn't have a casual rep, and I knew we needed one," she said. "I decided to become a delegate to fight for the rights of myself and the other workers in my department, because we were being treated unfairly."

Her fierce passion for unionism is rooted in a deep, inherited legacy. Her father was an AMWU Father of the Chapel at The West, and her grandfather was an active member of the shipbuilding union in the UK. "It's just the way I grew up and was raised," she said.

Now, as Mother of the Chapel, Taylor is carrying that proud family legacy forward. She's turned frustration into leadership — serving on the WA Women's Committee and the AMWU WA State Council, and mentoring others to find their own voice at work.

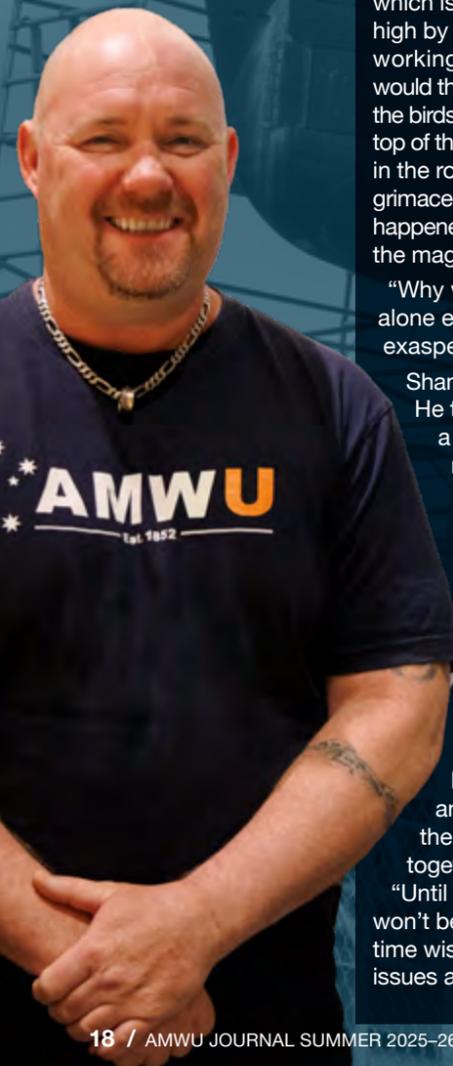
"I love the solidarity," Taylor said. "If I have an issue, I can pick up the phone and contact the AMWU — and they'll have my back."

For Taylor, unionism is about having each other's backs and never staying silent when something's wrong. "If you're the kind of person who can't just sit there and watch things go by — if you feel strongly about changing things for the better — become a delegate. You can make a difference."

She is living proof that union activism is more than a job title — it's a legacy built on courage, conviction, and the unbreakable belief that workers are strongest when they stand together. ■

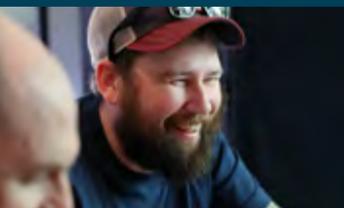
**"I love the solidarity.**

**If I have an issue, I can pick up the phone and contact the AMWU — and they'll have my back."**





The AMWU National Conference is the peak decision-making body and the supreme governing authority of the AMWU. It is, quite literally, the voice of the union's members, a powerful forum where the direction, policies, and actions of the entire organisation are determined.



# THE VOICE OF MEMBERS

## What is the National Conference and what is its purpose?



- 1. The supreme governing body:** The primary purpose of the National Conference is to act as the highest authority within the AMWU. It ensures that the union's leadership and administration are accountable to its members.
- 2. The voice of the membership:** The National Conference exists to make decisions that represent the collective will of the AMWU members. Crucially, the delegates who attend are a mixture of full-time officials and majority rank-and-file members — that is, working members elected directly from their workplaces and states. Our elected delegates participate and vote to set our union's ambition and policy at National Conference. This democratic structure ensures that the union's policies are grounded in the real-world experiences and needs of the workers we represent.
- 3. Setting the union's ambition and policy:** The National Conference is where the general policy of the union is set. It debates and passes motions (which are proposals for action) that establish the union's priorities and campaigns for the following two years. Recently, members at the National Conference have used this process to lift the union's ambitions and capacity to campaign as one.



# STRONG SMART UNITED



## Understanding the AMWU National Conference



### Key functions and powers

As the supreme governing body, the National Conference has extensive powers, including:

- **Policy and direction:** In deciding the general policy of the union and taking steps to enforce it.
- **Constitutional authority:** The exclusive power to alter or amend the union's rules.
- **Financial control:** Making decisions regarding levies, budgets, and the spending of union funds to carry out its objects.
- **Accountability and appeals:** Hearing and deciding any appeals against any decision made by the National Council (which is the interim governing body between National Conferences), ensuring internal good governance.
- **Elections:** Selecting key officers, such as the National Returning Officer to oversee elections.
- **Campaign mandate:** Debating and passing motions submitted by various levels of the union — from workshops and State Conferences to the National Council — to shape future campaigns.



## Who attends and how does it work?

The National Conference meets in person every second year. It consists of various delegates, ensuring a broad representation:

- **Rank-and-file delegates:** Our delegates are elected directly by and from the membership in each state, based on membership numbers (one for every 1,250 members or part thereof).
- **Additional women delegates:** Women delegates are elected to ensure a greater proportion of women's voices are heard.
- **Apprentice/Delegates under 30:** There's additional youth representative from each state.
- **National Council members:** Full-time national officials who sit on the Council.
- **Union employee delegates:** Members employed by the union, also elected by the membership.

Every delegate, from the newest rank-and-file member to a National Officer, has the same voting and other rights. Decisions are typically made by majority vote.



## Recent mandates: Campaigning as one

The most recent National Conference was instrumental in uniting the union behind a common agenda. Delegates passed crucial motions to:

- **Strengthen internal unity and good governance:** Ensuring the union operates efficiently, transparently, and cohesively.
- **Improve workers' rights to organise and bargain:** Focusing on campaigns to remove barriers for workers to join the union and negotiate better pay and conditions.
- **Bolster skills and training:** Mandating a push for investment in TAFE, apprenticeships, and securing the future of manufacturing jobs.
- **Energy transition:** Committing the union to advocate for workers affected by economic change, ensuring that the shift to new industries and technologies provides secure, high-wage jobs and a pathway through the transition that puts workers at the centre.

By meeting every two years, the AMWU National Conference not only acts as the ultimate authority but also resets the union's agenda, giving the organisation the mandate and capacity to campaign as one on the issues that matter most to its members.





# Driving Melbourne's Metro Tunnel from start to finish

Melbourne's Metro Tunnel is set to revolutionise the city's transport network — and at the heart of this monumental project are the dedicated members of the AMWU.

As the largest rail project in Melbourne's history prepares to open, AMWU members have been on the front lines, driving progress with their skill and determination. From the first turn of the tunnel boring machines to the intricate station fitouts, our members' fingerprints are found throughout this city-shaping achievement.

This ambitious project will ease congestion, reduce travel times, and provide direct access to exciting new destinations across the city. The Metro Tunnel project surpasses the City Loop in both scope and aspiration, featuring:

- Twin 9km rail tunnels connecting the Sunbury Line with the Cranbourne and Pakenham lines
- Five new underground stations: Arden, Parkville, State Library, Town Hall, and Anzac
- Direct interchange connections to Flinders Street and Melbourne Central stations
- Melbourne's first tram/train interchange at Anzac Station
- High-Capacity Signalling to facilitate 'turn-up-and-go' services
- World-class safety features, including platform screen doors

The backbone of this engineering effort is the skill, dedication, and resilience of AMWU members. Since the project's inception, it's our members in maintenance crews that have kept equipment operational around the clock. It's our skills and labour that kept the machines working and moving forward. It's the fitters

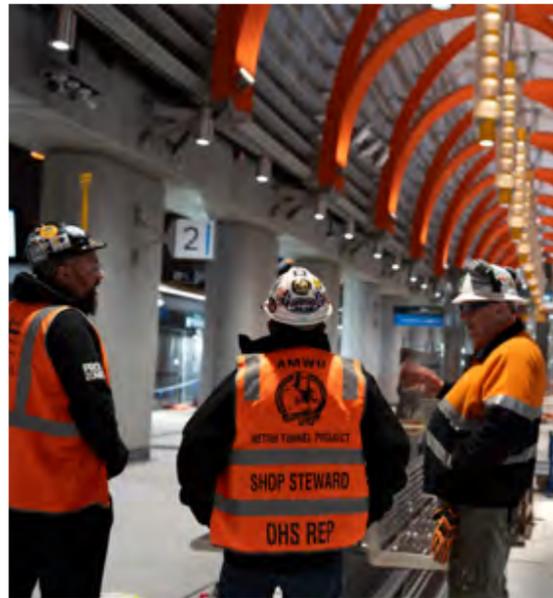
and boilermakers, the real guts of the operation, that have been crawling through muck, working diligently on tunnel boring machines to carve out new stations, one painstaking section at a time.

It's our fabrication and welding crews that have executed thousands of precision welds; welds as complex and challenging as 80mm butt welds, that have required up to five days of meticulous work to perfect. This level of technical expertise has been crucial in keeping the project moving. Every single one of those welds is a mark of our commitment to high Australian standards.

The Metro Tunnel is poised to transform the future of Melbourne's transportation. However, it is the hard-working hands of fitters, welders, boilermakers and trades assistants across the maintenance, construction, and lift industries that have made this vision a reality.

This project stands as proof of our power — the power of working people. The bosses may hold the purse strings, but it's our hands that shape the steel, our sweat that fuels the work, and our skills that make visions real. This is our achievement, built by our members. It's a monument to working-class power, and it's our victory.

Whether deep underground with the tunnel boring machines or high above installing the Southern Hemisphere's longest single-span escalator, AMWU members have shaped every stage of this project — and with it, the future of Melbourne itself. ■



## CASTING THE DICE

When the bosses at The Star Brisbane tried to shortchange their workers, they learnt a powerful lesson: our labour is the source of their profit, and we are not afraid to withdraw it.



In a historic first for the Australian casino industry, workers from maintenance, gaming, hospitality and housekeeping took protected industrial action and won. The company's insulting proposed deal of 4% over three years and a cut to Sunday penalty rates was a direct challenge to the dignity of every worker. But instead of accepting this disrespect, members of the AMWU, united with the United Workers Union (UWU), stood together and walked off the job.

They started with a two-hour stoppage, but when the bosses held their ground, the workers escalated. They hit The Star where it hurts most — its bottom line. By staging a four-hour strike during the State of Origin decider, one of the most profitable nights of the year, they sent an unmistakable message: this casino cannot run without us.

The action worked. The Star was forced back to the table, and the workers won. They secured significant wage increases, protected their vital Sunday penalty rates, and won improvements to rostering. This victory proves that when workers are organised, strategic, and willing to fight, they can force management to listen.

As AMWU Organiser Brett Felsman said: "We showed the company that AMWU members' labour is what makes this place profitable and we're not afraid to withdraw it when we're disrespected."

This is a win not just for the workers at The Star, but a signal to all workers across the country: our power isn't in playing the house's game and hoping for scraps — it's in standing together to claim our fair share of the jackpot we help create. ■

**THEY SECURED SIGNIFICANT WAGE INCREASES, PROTECTED THEIR VITAL SUNDAY PENALTY RATES, AND WON IMPROVEMENTS TO ROSTERING.**

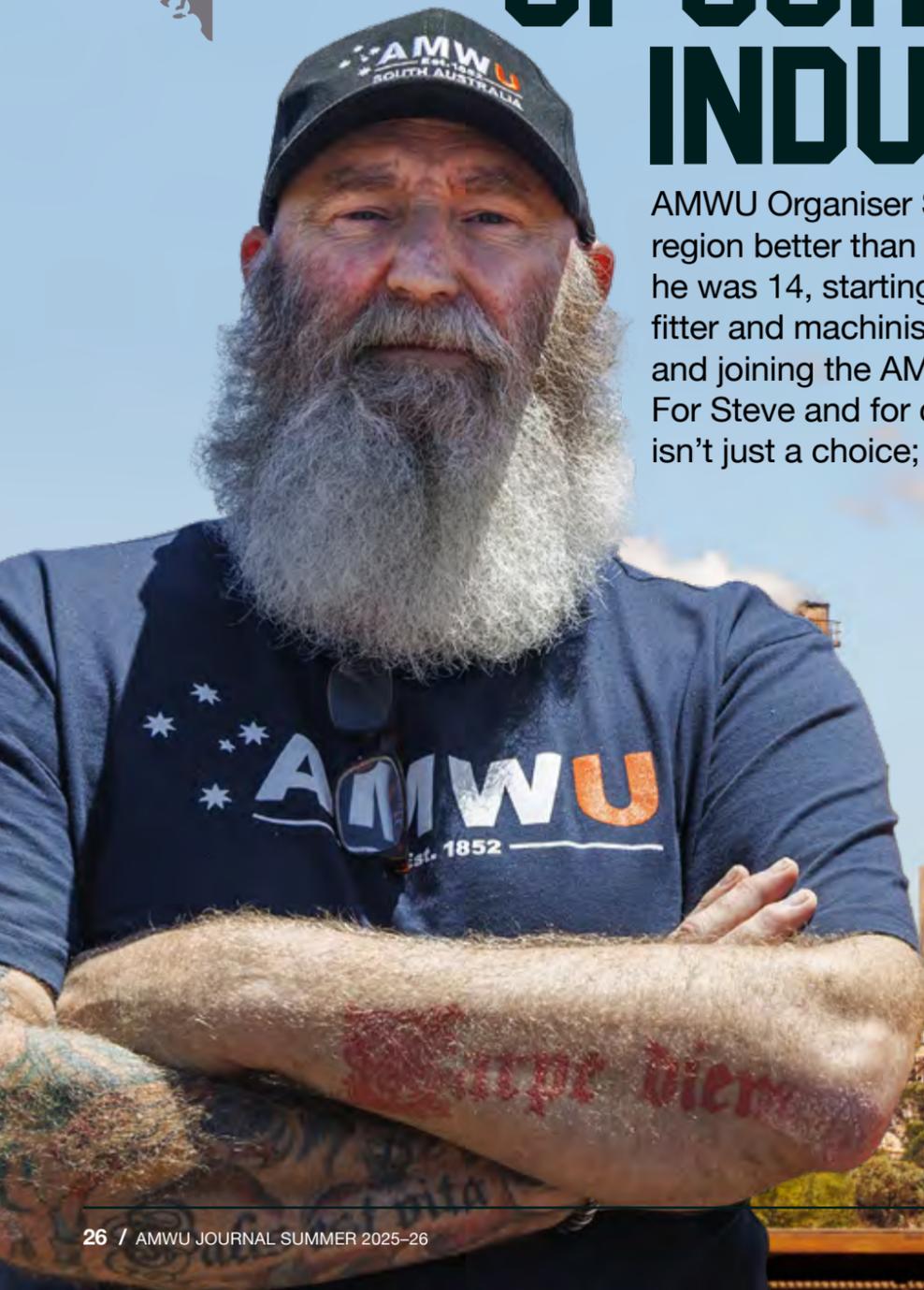


# Whyalla



In the coastal South Australian town of Whyalla, the beating heart of our nation's steel industry, the AMWU has a story to tell. It's a story of grit, struggle, and the unyielding spirit of working people.

# THE QUIET BACKBONE OF OUR STEEL INDUSTRY



AMWU Organiser Steve McMillian knows this region better than anyone. He's lived here since he was 14, starting his apprenticeship as a fitter and machinist with BHP at the steelworks and joining the AMWU almost 33 years ago. For Steve and for countless others, the union isn't just a choice; it's a way of life.



Steve's patch is vast, covering 87% of South Australia, but his focus is always on the ground in Whyalla. Here, he looks after hundreds of members. From the steelworks to the mines, to the engineering firms and lab technicians who support the entire operation. This town's sole purpose is the steelworks. Whyalla is the birthplace of Australian iron ore, dug from the saltbush country of Iron Knob and the Middleback Ranges. Our members dig it, crush it, and turn it into the raw material that feeds the nation's long-product steel industry. It's a place like no other, as our sole domestic manufacturer of long steel and structural steel. If iron ore is Whyalla's lifeblood, the steelworks' aging blast furnace is its industrial heart.

Last year, the blast furnace — which runs 24/7 — had run into serious operational issues after it cooled to a degree where the molten metal inside hardened, halting operation. Our members worked tirelessly to get it back up and running, but six months of production was lost. Over a thousand workers had their wages cut, contractors went unpaid as work evaporated, and the community of Whyalla waited anxiously as the steelworks laid dormant and idle. Without the skill and dedication of our members, their painstaking and methodical process of reintroducing heat and repairing the furnace, it would still be cold.

This struggle highlights a critical truth: our economy depends on our sovereign capability — the ability to produce what we need right here at home.

If we don't make our own long-product steel — the structural steel, beams, and rail lines that build our bridges, highways, and high-rises — we're at the mercy of overseas markets. They can flood our market with cheap, dumped steel, putting our jobs — and our entire economy — in jeopardy. The COVID-19 pandemic made this painfully clear. As an island continent, we can't afford to be dependent on others for the very foundation of our manufacturing.

Our future — and the future of our planet — lies in green steel. The steel industry is one of the highest carbon-polluting industries in the world. Our current process at Whyalla uses coal-based fuel, when converting iron ore into molten iron, that ends up generating large amounts of carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere. But a new process can use hydrogen as a fuel source, eliminating carbon as a by-product, to make green iron ready to be turned into green steel.

This is the next generation of steelmaking. It's our only way to be profitable and secure for the next 30 years and beyond. Last year, the South Australian and federal governments intervened to secure the long-term future of the steelworks. The AMWU has advocated for the \$2.4 billion investment to fund this transition. The future of Whyalla steel will be a test case for the full realisation of a 'Future Made in Australia' and the reindustrialisation of our regions. This isn't just about one town; it's about shaping the hopes of blue-collar workers across the country. Whyalla is at the forefront of our collective future, our steelmaking capability will come to support Australia's population as it expands.

The AMWU fully supports the government's intervention to secure the future of the Whyalla steelworks. We had long lost confidence in the previous owners to look after our jobs and communities. As AMWU National Secretary Steve Murphy said, "We can't leave this in the hands of private capital. We need the government to step up and work with us to establish an Australian green metals corporation to oversee the transition". Our union has a seat at the table because, during the administration, our members were owed over \$100 million in entitlements. We're on the committee of inspection, making sure workers' voices are heard and our futures are protected.

Whyalla is a close-knit community. When the steelworks suffers, the whole town suffers. When businesses weren't getting paid during the administration, our union worked with the community to ensure we were reskilling workers and getting them access to training. We are always there to fight for our people. The Whyalla steelworks remains critical to Australia's iron and steel industry, our local manufacturing capability, the decarbonisation of our economy, and the ambition of a 'Future Made in Australia'.

The expressions of interest from prospective buyers have closed, and non-binding offers are on the table. Our members voices must be heard throughout this process. They know what needs to be done. The shift to green steel will lead to higher-paid, higher-skilled jobs, and critically, a secure future for Australians. We are fighting for longevity, not just for our community but for the entire nation. ■

**AS AN ISLAND CONTINENT, WE CAN'T AFFORD TO BE DEPENDENT ON OTHERS FOR THE VERY FOUNDATION OF OUR MANUFACTURING.**



Brent Hamley

# A stitch in time

It was a single, visceral incident that has shaped AMWU HSR Brent Hamley's approach and commitment to workplace safety for the more than two decades he's been in the print industry.

**B**rent came to the AMWU from the Printing and Kindred Industries Union (PKIU) via merger, having started his apprenticeship at the Telegraph straight out of high school.

His site used large inserting hoppers — a network of chains, bars, and pulleys designed to quickly insert promotional material into newspapers. The unforgiving machinery posed a constant entanglement risk.

"When I was a young fella, I was a first-aid-er and my very first incident was when a guy got pulled into an inserting hopper," Brent recalled.

The accident occurred when a young colleague, who spoke Arabic but not English, reached into the machine to free a jammed stack. In a blink, the man's arm was pulled in.

"All the other first-aiders went stark white and disappeared, so I had to handle this myself. I was only 21," said Brent. Pushing past the shock, he acted on instinct, pulling the screaming man out. Brent assessed the damage and wrapped his colleague's hand to stabilise it before the ambulance arrived.

A couple of months later, the man returned to the site. Brent was suddenly surrounded by the man's Arabic-speaking workmates. "The next thing I was their best friend because I'd saved his hand," Brent recounted.

By physically stabilising and wrapping the injury, the microsurgons were able to successfully do their work.

"Safety became something I was passionate about because when you've seen something like that, you never want to see it again," Brent avowed. "In printing, those machines are pretty unforgiving if you make a mistake."

Years later, while working at a different but strongly unionised site with active HSRs, Brent was asked by his crew to step up. "Because of the relationship I have with my crew and my ability to articulate an argument, they asked me to do it, and I've been doing it ever since."

Brent's journey is a powerful example of a union member turning a traumatic experience into a lifelong commitment to worker protection and collective safety. ■

**"The next thing I was their best friend because I'd saved his hand," Brent recounted.**

**"By physically stabilising and wrapping the injury, the microsurgons were able to successfully do their work."**



Anna Boatwright

# The power of small wins

For more than three decades, AMWU delegate Anna Boatwright has worked in the precise, microscopic world of analytical science — testing vital antibiotics in her Western Sydney lab. But while her work focused on the smallest of details, she realised her workplace was also small in another kind of way.

**"I** felt that there weren't many union members, and if I didn't step up, we wouldn't have any representation at all," Anna admitted. Recognising the need to organise through leadership, she joined the negotiation team for her EBA.

Though a long-time AMWU member, Anna was a relatively new delegate. She learnt the process by watching and listening to skilled AMWU organisers and quickly understood the irreplaceable power of the worker's voice.

"The words are stronger coming from us workers," she explained. "Our managers listened to us because we're on the ground representing members' concerns. We couldn't do it without the backing of our union, though."

With the union's strategic support, the negotiating team felt their collective strength grow. "The power imbalance was neutralised a little bit more," Anna said.

Management was forced to listen, knowing that genuine industrial action was the alternative to negotiation.

As the company expanded into a bigger market, Anna and her workmates organised to demand their fair share. "We pushed for our share in that, about what we were wanting and our expectations," she continued.

The entire organising push began with a single member reaching out to the AMWU. From that small cell, the movement grew. An AMWU representative visited the workplace, encouraging our existing members to follow up with recruitment efforts.

This motivated Anna to speak with her colleagues directly.

The results were astonishing. "We went from three or four members to about 11 or 12 in a month. And then we grew some more and increased our union density to 50%."

This dramatic surge in membership was directly driven by the small wins achieved through the EBA process. Workers saw what was accomplished and were encouraged to join. With more members, Anna feels they have more opportunity to bargain for better wages and conditions.

"There's still more to do, but it's a good start. The power is now truly shifting." ■

**With more members, Anna feels they have more opportunity to bargain for better wages and conditions.**



# THE FIGHT AGAINST POULTRY CONDITIONS



AMWU members at Ingham's sites in Western Australia prove when workers stand together, they can take on management and win. Across Osborne Park, Hazelmere and Gingin, members have been tackling serious safety issues, fighting for better pay, and protecting hard-won conditions.



Ingham's is the country's largest chicken processor, with a workforce spanning production, distribution, hatchery, and maintenance. Our union membership stretches across all these areas, with a vast majority of our members coming from migrant backgrounds, particularly from the Philippines and Africa. Their solidarity is a powerful example for all of us.

Our members have been relentless on the front lines, organising for safe and respectful workplaces. In 2022, they refused to be bullied. They used a right won in their last EBA to get an external investigation into management. The company was forced to act, a manager was fired, and our members showed that collective action is the most powerful weapon against harassment. This wasn't just a one-off — workers have successfully pursued three separate bullying complaints.

Safety is always a top priority. In 2020, management tried to crank up line speeds, pushing them to a dangerous 30 birds per minute rate. Our members knew this was unsafe and ceased work — a legal right we've fought for. The company tried to illegally dock their pay, but our members

stood firm. In the end, their pay was restored, and line speeds are now a matter of constant consultation. It proves you don't mess with a union on safety.

Even new hazards, like freezing conditions created by air-conditioning units on the shop floor, didn't slow them down. Newly elected HSRs acted immediately, securing engineering controls like guards and new Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). It proves active HSRs, backed by a strong union, are a serious force for change.

The fight for fair pay has been just as fierce. Our members at Ingham's have won huge gains in their recent wage campaigns. In 2020, they rejected a measly pay offer from the company not once, not twice, but three times. After preparing for industrial action, they won a better deal than the company wanted to give.

But the real feather in our cap came during the 2023 EBA campaign. Our WA members joined forces with their comrades in South Australia, who are members of the UWW. This solidarity sent a powerful message. Together, union members aligned claims and tactical timelines. Both sites filed for protected industrial action

on the same day. After just two days of joint action, we all secured massive wage increases of 5.12%, 4% and 4% — far above previous years. For some workers, this amounted to a 9% pay rise in the first year. It demonstrates what union power looks like.

This campaign isn't just about scoring new wins—it's about defending what's already ours. Time and time again, the company has tried to claw back hard-fought conditions like redundancy provisions, break times, and the eight-hour workday. Each time, our members have stood firm. That same strength and determination now fuel their push for income protection in the next round of bargaining. ■

**The fight for dignity and fair conditions never stops. From tackling bullying and unsafe line speeds to winning significant pay rises and defending key conditions, our members at Ingham's have shown the country that when working people organise and stand together, they win.**



A clean sweep:

## Superior Pak workers rubbish the odds

Along Queensland's coast, in the quiet town of Bundaberg, a dedicated group of workers build something essential to everyday life. AMWU members at Superior Pak manufacture garbage trucks that are present across the country.



Week in and week out, their craft powers the vehicles that collect Australia's waste, keeping our streets clean and our cities moving. This year, our members have shown what can be achieved when we stand together, stay organised, and are willing to take a stand for what we deserve.

After more than three months of intense bargaining and seven days of protected industrial action, AMWU members at Superior Pak have delivered a significant win — securing stronger wages, better conditions, and recognition for their skills.

When bargaining first began, there were only around 30 AMWU members at the Bundaberg site. But as negotiations ramped up and workers saw the value of sticking together, that number nearly tripled to 85 members. It was a testament to the growing confidence of the workforce and the respect for the AMWU delegates and organisers leading the campaign.

"The growth in membership during this campaign shows that workers understand where real strength comes from — from each other," said AMWU Organiser Jack Hargreaves. "People joined because they saw their workmates willing to stand up and take action. Bargaining doesn't really start until you're willing to go out on the grass and these members proved that."

**There is no greater power at the bargaining table than AMWU members prepared to stand and fight for their conditions.**

Members took seven working days of protected industrial action, showing they were prepared to sacrifice pay to fight for fair wages and conditions. Their determination paid off.

Under the new agreement, workers will receive a 14% wage increase over three years, new and improved allowances (all of which are indexed) and a reclassification win that will see the majority of the workforce move up a pay level — reflecting their skills and the value they bring to the company.

Members also won a new Time Off In Lieu (TOIL) system that allows workers to buy additional leave, giving them the option of taking an extra two weeks of paid time off over Christmas — a major improvement in work-life balance for workers in an industry that runs hard year-round.

"There is no greater power at the bargaining table than AMWU members prepared to stand and fight for their conditions," said AMWU delegate Matthew Wills.

The Superior Pak campaign shows once again that it's not just about what's written in the agreement — it's about who's willing to fight for it.

"This win is a credit to the members," said AMWU QLD & NT Executive Officer Ann-Marie Allan. "It's a win off their backs and their industrial action. Every day they stood together made the outcome stronger."

The campaign has left a lasting impact on the site. With stronger union density, a reinvigorated delegate structure and a clear sense of collective strength, members are already looking ahead to how they can continue improving their workplace. ■

# A JUST TRANSITION MEANS JUSTICE FOR WORKERS

In New South Wales' Lake Macquarie and Lower Hunter region, the scheduled 2027 closure of the Eraring Power Station looms large.



For more than a thousand working people — including power station employees, contractors, miners, and those throughout the supply chain — the closure is far more than a news story. It's a direct challenge to their livelihoods, their families, and the future of their communities.

For too long, employers have expected workers to shoulder the burden of change, treating us as expendable. The AMWU won't accept that.

A just transition means justice for working people — that when industries change, those who built them are at the centre of the solution. It means our jobs, our pay, and our futures are protected.

Origin Energy's transition plan leaves too many behind. While the company has created a limited support program for its directly-employed workers, it leaves AMWU members — the contractors who keep the station running — out in the cold. That's not a just transition. That's divide and conquer.

The AMWU is fighting to make sure every single worker at Eraring gets the support they deserve, not just the ones with the right paperwork. This isn't about a few; it's about all of us.

We're demanding an Energy Industry Jobs Plan (EIJP) that puts our members' interests first. We've been meeting with the new statutory body, the Net Zero Economy Authority (NZEA), established to ensure workers don't bear the brunt of Australia's shift to a net zero economy. This year, the AMWU led and coordinated a joint union meeting with the NZEA at the Wangi Workers Club to press our case.

Our plan is simple and powerful:

- **Paid training:** Workers retraining for new roles must be paid for their time. Reskilling is work and employers should cover the cost.
- **Continued support:** Transition programs must stay open beyond the closure date, so no one is left stranded.
- **A fair exit:** Retention payments for workers who stay until closure, including a three-month demobilisation period to ensure stability and security.
- **Union jobs:** Decommissioning work must go to the skilled union members who built and maintained the site.
- **Learning academy:** A Just Transition Learning Academy to coordinate scalable training for all including direct employees, contractors, and the broader community.

If enacted, the EIJP would provide real support for every affected worker and hold Origin Energy and other employers to account. We can't let them walk away from their responsibilities and leave our people to fend for themselves. A just transition means no worker, no family, and no community is left behind.

But the best transition plan means nothing without good, secure jobs on the other side. That's why the AMWU is fighting for a national reindustrialisation strategy to rebuild local manufacturing, invest in green technology, and create the union jobs of the future.

We are a movement of working people. When we stand as one, we can secure our future and ensure justice for every worker. That's what a just transition truly means. ■

AMWU'S FEARLESS FESTIVAL:

## Empowering women with practical skills

"It all started with a conversation at a dinner table," AMWU Organiser Mick Wickham recounted. "We had a group of young women sitting with successful women from different fields like trades, law, science and hospitality, just to show them what was possible. From there, it's grown every single year."



What began as a vital discussion within the AMWU Tasmanian Branch Women's Forum has successfully transformed into the Fearless Festival — a powerhouse for building a fairer, more equitable future for women across Australia.

As the idea gained momentum, schools began to take notice, and local businesses wanted to be involved. The AMWU identified an opportunity to address one of the significant challenges facing working women in Tasmania: the scarcity of clear pathways into trades and industries where women remain underrepresented.

The Fearless Festival, formerly known as the Women's Forum, has evolved into a flagship event that inspires young women to pursue trades and technical careers. The initiative provides not just inspiration, but tangible and practical skills.

"The second year, we introduced hands-on trade sessions," Mick said. "We had girls welding, doing carpentry, learning barista skills and even trying automotive work. Some of those young women have since gone on to apprenticeships in those very fields. It's made a real difference."

The vision which is to create a space where women could step into their power and challenge entrenched stereotypes is now being realised on a grand scale. The festival's profound community impact, offering both leadership and practical mechanical skills, earned it a nomination as a Community Event of the Year for the Australia Day Awards, a high honour that validates the forum's original idea.

The strength of the Fearless Festival lies in its commitment to providing practical, life-changing opportunities. It's much more than an exhibition; it's an intensive mentorship and skill-building experience, particularly focused on trades and technical fields.

The annual event directly prepares young women for industrial careers through its cornerstone features:

- **Mechanical skill workshops:** The festival prioritises hands-on sessions focusing on practical mechanical and trade skills, giving attendees confidence and real-world experience in technical fields.
- **Elite mentorship:** The free Gala Dinner features 70+ highly accomplished women, including engineers, tradeswomen, scientists, firefighters, and police, who serve as table hosts. This unique setting provides direct advice and networking, proving that technical careers are within reach.
- **Leadership & recognition:** Alongside practical workshops, the festival offers crucial sessions on negotiation and leadership, plus scholarships based on aptitude and attitude.

The remarkable success of this Tasmanian-born initiative showcases the immense power of grassroots union activism. The AMWU is immensely proud of the Women's Forum for establishing a legacy of collective empowerment.

"It's about being fearless, breaking barriers, trying new things, and showing these young women that nothing is off limits," said Mick.



"This year's Fearless Festival was the biggest one yet. We had 52 exhibitors from a whole host of trades including welders, fitters, builders, electricians, lineworkers, motor mechanics, upholstery, spray painters, lawyers, scientists, chocolatiers and more." ■

The festival is actively building a brighter future where all workers benefit from the contributions of empowered and skilled women.

THE COST OF THE ENERGY TRANSITION MUST NOT BE SHIFTED ONTO BLUE-COLLAR WORKERS, AND NO WORKER SHOULD BE LEFT BEHIND.



# Groundbreaking win for reproductive health leave

When workers at Silliker across New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia sat down to bargain their new enterprise agreement, they had more than pay and conditions on their minds — they wanted recognition for something too often ignored in workplaces: reproductive health.

After months of negotiation, union members at Silliker — now part of Merieux NutriSciences Assure Quality (MNAQ) — have achieved a breakthrough win. For the first time, an AMWU agreement now includes paid reproductive health leave, marking a historic moment for fairness and dignity at work.

“This is about respect,” said AMWU delegate Conor McCann-Doran. The Perth-based microbiologist was deeply involved in the bargaining process. “I’ve learnt that we need to be even more staunch on the issues that matter to us. I appreciate the support of my union throughout the process.”

Under the new agreement, employees will have access to two days of paid reproductive health leave per year to manage their own reproductive health, or to care for a family or household member who needs support. The clause also allows for flexible working arrangements, ensuring workers can adjust their hours or duties when needed. Importantly, requests for flexibility can only be refused on reasonable grounds, with specific safeguards in the clause that prioritises workers’ wellbeing over the business’s needs — putting workers’ wellbeing front and centre.

**Reproductive health leave covers a wide range of needs: from menstruation and menopause to IVF, hormone therapy, endometriosis, infertility, vasectomy, hysterectomy and more. It recognises that reproductive health affects people of all genders, and that managing it shouldn’t come at the cost of income, job security or dignity.**

The win at Silliker aligns with the ACTU’s ‘It’s for Every Body’ campaign, which is pushing to enshrine reproductive health leave across industries. While the entitlement is inclusive, its impact is particularly significant for women — many of whom face health challenges that can shorten their working lives.

ABS data shows that more than a quarter of working women retire before 55, often years before they would like to. The Australian Institute of Superannuation



Trustees estimated in 2023 that menopause alone costs women aged 50–54 over \$15 billion each year in lost wages and superannuation.



**Victories like this are how unions can turn those statistics around — by making workplaces fairer, healthier, and more supportive for everyone.**

“This is an AMWU first, but it shouldn’t be the last,” said AMWU National Organising Coordinator Bec Muratore. “Every worker deserves the right to manage their health without fear or financial penalty. Provisions like these in enterprise agreements promote gender equality and create more productive and inclusive workplaces by removing the stigma around reproductive health.”

For AMWU members at Silliker, this achievement isn’t just about their workplace — it’s about setting a new standard across the manufacturing industry.

By embedding reproductive health leave in an enterprise agreement, these workers have paved the way for others to follow. It’s a reminder that real progress at work happens when people stand together and demand better. That’s what solidarity looks like. ■



Visit [www.itsforeverybody.au](http://www.itsforeverybody.au) to learn more about the broader union movement’s campaign for reproductive health leave, or contact [women@amwu.org.au](mailto:women@amwu.org.au) to get involved.



## APPRENTICE PROFILE

Beth Jones

Mechanical fitter Beth Jones didn’t just face the physical grind of a mine-site apprenticeship — she faced a system stacked against her.

# LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

Growing up in the South Australian country town of Burra, Beth followed her passion for trades into the mines, only to find herself trapped in a cycle of 96-hour weeks on junior rates, being the only female in a vastly male-dominated site, and denied even basic dignity on the job.

“Those two years were the worst thing I’ve ever been through,” she recalled.

The reality was brutal. Underground, she often had to drive 40 kilometres just to reach a single, broken bathroom — one without running water, soap, or even a door. Above ground, her choices were just as limited: seek cover behind a ute or drive hours back to site for a toilet.

But the lack of facilities was only part of it. Beth endured relentless sexual harassment and the isolation that comes from being the only woman in a hostile environment.

In the darkness of the mines, she reached out for help — and found it in her union, the AMWU.

“I wouldn’t be where I am today without the union,” Beth stated. “If it wasn’t for the AMWU, I wouldn’t be alive.”

With the support of AMWU Organiser Steve McMillan, Beth began standing up for herself and others. But management retaliated, sacking her with just four hours’ notice to pack up two years’ worth of work and leave the site.

The AMWU fought back, taking her case to the Fair Work Tribunal. The process was long and gruelling, leaving Beth mentally exhausted — but it didn’t break her.

Soon after, a mate encouraged her to apply for an apprenticeship

at Pelican Point Power Station, where she finished her training. There, she was once again the only woman in the maintenance crew — but this time, things were different.

She had her own bathroom. And she made sure it stayed that way.

“I even installed a soap dispenser!” she said proudly — a small act that symbolised a much bigger victory.

Determined to make things better for the next generation, Beth began advocating for other apprentices, especially young women entering the trades. Her passion caught the attention of AMWU SA State Secretary Stuart Gordon, who encouraged her to apply for a role with the union.

Now, as a Project Officer for the AMWU’s Women in Trades and Tech Project, Beth works with national employers to improve workplace culture and retention for women across Australia.

“Listening to these stories... it makes my blood boil,” she said. “But I’m excited that we’re changing that.”

Beth’s relentless commitment has been recognised with major honours, including the South Australian Skills Commission’s Outstanding Apprentice Award and Apprentice of the Year at the South Australian Training Awards.

Through it all, she credits the union for giving her strength, solidarity, and purpose.

“Know your rights,” she said simply. “And join the AMWU.”

Beth is proof that no matter how dark the tunnel, union solidarity can light the way forward. ■



**IF IT WASN'T FOR THE AMWU, I WOULDN'T BE ALIVE.**

# WORKING TO LIVE, NOT LIVING TO WORK

Picture this: you're in the lunchroom, sharing a cuppa with your workmates. Someone asks, "What would you do with a few extra hours each week?" You'll hear a hundred answers — taking the kids to footy, a quiet arvo with your partner, wetting a line out on the boat, or maybe just catching up on some bloody sleep.

For too long, we've been told the hustle is the only way to get ahead. That working harder and longer somehow makes us better. But the truth is, we've already worked hard enough. A shorter work week isn't a luxury — it's a right we've earned.

Generations before us fought tooth and nail for every hour of their lives. Back in the 1800s, workers were treated like machines — 84-hour weeks that broke their bodies and their spirits. But people like James Galloway stood up and said, "We have come 16,000 miles to better our condition, and not to act the mere part of machinery."

He and his fellow workers won the eight-hour day — not as a gift from the bosses, but as a victory wrestled from their grip. It proved one simple truth: the economy should serve people, not the other way around.

**Every hour we've reclaimed has been won through collective action.** Our union forebears — in the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU), the Amalgamated Metal Workers & Shipwrights Union (AMWSU), and now the AMWU — didn't ask politely. They organised. They struck. They stood strong against the bosses and their political mates.

In 1947, they won the 44-hour week, giving workers a whole extra day for family and rest. In the 1980s, they fought for 35 hours — and the bosses screamed that it would destroy the economy. They said the same thing every single time we've fought for progress. And every single time, they were wrong.

Today, nothing's changed. The same bosses, the same scare campaigns. The AMWU is leading the push for a shorter work week — and the first thing we hear? The CEOs and media shouting about "killing productivity" and "economic collapse."

## Don't buy it. It's the oldest trick in the book.

Because here's the truth: it's workers who create productivity, not the bosses. Productivity isn't about how many hours you grind — it's about how much you get done, it's about how much value you create. And that value comes from people who are rested, respected, and ready to give their best.

A well-rested worker is a better worker. When we have time to live our lives — to recharge, to be with our families, and to live our lives — we show up to work healthier, happier, and more focused. That's what drives productivity. Not some number on a CEO's spreadsheet.

**They want you to believe we haven't earned this fight.** But look at the facts: since the 1980s, our productivity has soared — and our wages have barely moved. The bosses have pocketed the profits while we've worked longer hours, paid bigger mortgages, and lost more time with the people who matter most.

We're not asking for charity. We're demanding fairness.

They'll say it's impossible. They always do. But we know better. We've been here before. Every hard-won gain in our history started with workers standing together and saying enough.

A shorter work week isn't a dream for tomorrow — it's a demand for today. It's about taking back control of our lives. It's about building a society where the wealth we create is shared fairly, and where our time belongs to us again.

So let's stand shoulder to shoulder, union strong, and tell the bosses loud and clear: we work to live, not live to work.

This is our history. This is our fight. And together, we will win it. ■

## A SHORTER WORK WEEK ISN'T A DREAM FOR TOMORROW — IT'S A DEMAND FOR TODAY.



HONORARY FELLOW IN THE  
SCHOOL OF HISTORICAL  
AND PHILOSOPHICAL  
STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY  
OF MELBOURNE

Liam Byrne



Employers opposed the union at every step of the way, even attaching a pamphlet to workers' pay packets threatening job losses if the union was successful. The Fraser Coalition government opposed the campaign every step of the way, labelling it a "dangerous folly".

It was a long and tough campaign. By late 1970, after several years, there was a new strategy. Instead of simultaneously targeting all 7,000 companies in the metal industry at once, the union focused on four sectors where their organisational strength was greatest, hoping this could get individual employers to cede the demand and break the united front arrayed against workers.

By October 1981, the AMWU reached agreement with 300 companies on the reduced working week.

In December of 1981 the metal unions reached an agreement with the Metal Trade Industry Association for a compromise deal: the 38-hour week alongside a pay increase. This would later be generalised to other workers, one of the last major victories for reducing working hours across the workforce.

**It was a proud victory that had effects for workers all across Australia** — a result of AMWU member action. Those unionists campaigning for a shorter working week today are building on a proud tradition. Such rights were never given to workers — they were won by workers who organised and took collective action through their unions. This is the vital history the bosses would prefer we forgot. ■

When AMWU National Secretary Steve Murphy recently argued that productivity gains could be returned to workers through shorter working hours, the response from some in big business and right-wing commentators was predictable: absolutely no way.

## Lessons from history: How unions have won shorter working hours

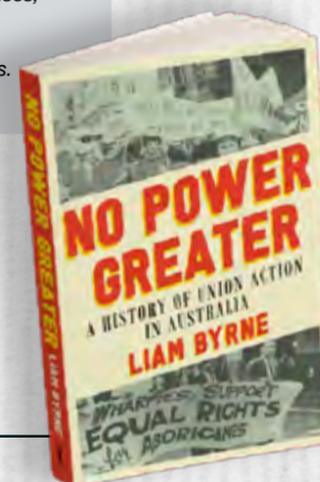
### Book giveaway:

If our campaign for a shorter work week is successful, in 25 words or less, tell us: **how would you spend your extra day off?**

Send your answers to [amwu@amwu.org.au](mailto:amwu@amwu.org.au) by March 6th 2026.

There will be 10 winners for this giveaway - each week we'll pick a winner to receive a copy of this book. Keep an eye out on our social media for the announcements!

Please note: Selected entries, including winning responses, will be shared on our social media channels.



Since unions in Australia first won the eight-hour day in the 1850s, this has been a common theme. Workers have campaigned for the fundamental right to a life outside of work — and big business has tried to stop them. Look at any of the big union wins, and it is the exact same story.

This is why it is so important to know our history — to learn the lessons from these campaigns.

This is something I write about in my new book: **No Power Greater: A History of Union Action in Australia.** The AMWU has a particularly proud history of winning shorter hours for members against the opposition of most employers.

**One of the massive campaigns for this was run by the union in the late 1970s and early 1980s.** It was striking to me when I wrote the book to see how similar the main issues in that campaign are to the issues workers face today.

In the late 1970s, unemployment was rising and new technologies was transforming the industry. AMWU leaders like the legendary Laurie Carmichael argued that the "technological revolution" of the time posed serious challenges to workers. A shorter working week would mean productivity could be shared while protecting jobs.

Multiple unions representing metal workers, spearheaded by the AMWU, campaigned for the 35-hour week. As part of the campaign, union members refused to work beyond 35 hours. The union launched a series of once-a-month rolling one-hour stoppages to maintain pressure.



# Workers' Fighting Fund: From the picket line to the hospital wing



Members of the AMWU, AWU, and ETU at the Altona Complex in Victoria transformed decades of struggle into an extraordinary \$170,000 donation to the Royal Children's Hospital Foundation, proving that solidarity doesn't just protect workers — it saves lives.

This gift came from a weapon forged in the fires of struggle: the Workers' Fighting Fund. For decades, it has been a collective shield, built brick-by-brick from the sacrifices of every member who has walked a picket line or faced down a hostile boss. Created in 1991, the fund exists to support workers at their most vulnerable — during strikes and lockouts — when companies try to starve us into submission.

Now, that same fund is giving life and hope to sick children and their families across Australia. It doesn't come from the generosity of CEOs or the wealthy elite — it comes from the power of working people acting together.

It's a reminder that our struggles for dignity and justice extend far beyond the factory floor. When the system fails our children, it is not the rich who step forward. It is us, the workers — that create and sustain our communities. The same hands that build the world are the hands that will heal it.

This is the power of working-class unity. It is not a commodity; it is a force. It is the legacy built from every strike, every protest, and every collective action ever fought.

This extraordinary donation reminds bosses — and ourselves — that our fight for fair pay, safe workplaces, and decent conditions is inseparable from the fight for a better society for all. The bosses want to see us as cogs in a machine; we show them we are the engine of change.

Thank you to every union member who contributed, endured, and stood strong. Your perseverance, unity, and generosity have created a lasting impact — not just on the hospital, but on the very idea of what workers can achieve together.

This isn't just a donation. It's a victory. A reminder that when workers stand shoulder to shoulder, we are unstoppable. When struggle turns into solidarity — we can defend each other, lift our communities, and transform the world. ■



## A MESSAGE TO OUR RETIRED MEMBERS:

“ It was an honour to represent our retired members at the AMWU National Conference in July. Meeting with delegates from all over Australia reminded me of the strong bonds that hold our union together.



I was especially proud to see a new generation of young men and women stepping up as delegates. Their passion for not just their jobs, but for our communities and our society, showed me that the AMWU is in good hands for the future.

We put forward a number of key issues at the conference, and I'm pleased to report that every single one was fully endorsed. This means our voice is being heard loud and clear.

We're continuing our Campaign Against Pensioner Poverty (CAPP). We've met with politicians and government departments, and they can't deny the facts — pensioners are living on a meagre income and it's not right. They say it will cost billions to fix, but we know that fairness and dignity for our retired members is priceless. We won't stop until every one of us can enjoy a decent retirement.

On Medicare, we won support for our call for free dental care for concession card holders. It's a disgrace that after a lifetime of work, our dental health is ignored.

We're also fighting to protect the use of cash. In a world that's pushing us towards digital transactions, we're making sure that those who can't or don't want to use cards are not left behind.

Finally, we discussed the rise of far-right groups that try to create fear and division. As retired members who have seen this before, we know that the way to beat them isn't through violence, but through education and solidarity. We will continue to remind our fellow workers of the importance of standing together, not apart.

Your continued membership for just \$5 a year is a huge support to our work. We want to wish you and your families a wonderful holiday season and a healthy, reinvigorated new year. We are all part of the same union family, and we will always look out for one another. ■

### In unity,

Colin Ormsby  
RMD National Secretary

Cath McKechnie  
RMD National President





**NEW SOUTH WALES**

(02) 9897 4200  
Level 3 133 Parramatta Road  
Granville NSW 2142

**QUEENSLAND**

(07) 3236 2550  
Level 2 366 Upper Roma Street  
Brisbane QLD 4000

**SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

(08) 8366 5800  
53-61 Dale Street  
Port Adelaide SA 5015

**TASMANIA**

(03) 6228 7099  
28 Station Street  
Moonah TAS 7009

**VICTORIA**

(03) 9230 5700  
Level 1 251 Queensberry Street  
Carlton South VIC 3053

**WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

(08) 9223 0800  
121 Royal Street  
East Perth WA 6004

