

Paul Bastian, AMWU National Secretary

SHEETIES VOTE SETS UP ACTION

Strike action is likely to disrupt construction projects across Sydney within days after AMWU sheet metal workers voted overwhelmingly this week to take protected industrial action.

Feelings were strong among the AMWU members who gathered at two sessions at Sydney's Trades Hall over the refusal of NSW employers to give them pay equity with sheeties doing the same job interstate.

The vote went 91 per cent in favour of industrial action, with members set to walk off the job for an initial four hours next Wednesday for a mass meeting back at Sussex Street to plan their industrial campaign.

NSW State Secretary Tim Ayres said the members, which total about 400 across the state, were being paid almost a quarter less than workers doing the same work on construction sites in Victoria.

"Our sheet metal members are determined to come up to the standard in other states for skilled work which is extremely demanding and integral to completing these new buildings," he said.



Sheet metal strength: AMWU members and officials met at Sydney Trades Hall, determined to win justice on wages and conditions for NSW sheet metal workers.

"Unless the contractors sit down with us again and negotiate in a fair and realistic way, our members will go ahead with protected action that will have a real effect on sites across the state, including major projects in the heart of Sydney."

The sheet metal workers install the air-conditioning systems for buildings under construction and any industrial action would stop fit-out, plastering and all internal building work.

The workers want an hourly site allowance on projects matching the building industry scale, the existing award incorporated into the new agreement and wage rises of five per cent yearly over a three-year agreement.

The AMWU has been trying to negotiate a new contractors agreement for the past three months with the Australian Mechanical Contractors Association, which represents seven large sheet metal companies.

"The result of the vote indicates real feeling across the industry, the members are prepared to back up the improvements they need by taking action," said Steve Isberg, a member of the AMWU Consultative Committee.

The companies concerned are Sublime Contracting, Croydon Industries, Fredon Air, TMS, Citiwide Installations, Airborne Installations and Triple M. ■

ABBOTT BLOWS ILL-WIND ON WIND JOBS

Dismayed workers at a major wind tower maker have hit out at PM Tony Abbott's latest attack on renewable energy for jeopardising local jobs as the industry gets back on its feet.

Tower fabrication workers at Keppel Prince in Victoria fear that Mr Abbott's hatred of wind farms risks scaring off billions of dollars in energy investment which had begun to flow again with the new Renewable Energy Target.

AMWU member David Mills said workers' "jaws dropped" when they heard the Prime Minister's tirade against wind towers as "utterly offensive" and "visually awful."

Having failed to abolish the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, Mr Abbott is now trying to ban it from assisting firms with any projects in wind or small-scale solar. Mr Mills said: "We'd had our hopes raised, we thought the Government was getting back on board for the renewables industry to pick up again, to meet the RET."

"It seems Abbott is pandering to his friends in the coal industry.

"He should walk out near Portland, the noise from the wind towers is nothing compared to the din from the rubbish coming out of Canberra. That's bad for everyone's health."

Keppel Prince has won the contract to supply six wind towers for the small Coonooer Bridge wind farm near Bendigo. But its best chance of recovering nearly 100 jobs lost at the firm a year ago is a \$450 million wind farm near Ararat announced by a consortium the day after the new RET was formally approved.

That would require 75 wind towers, which Keppel Prince is competing to build.

AMWU delegate Craig Mannix said members were "confused and angry" over Mr Abbott's statements, which wrongly equated renewable

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energy with upward power prices.

“Here is a bloke completely opposed to renewable energy as an alternative, thinking that there will be more jobs under threat if he doesn’t stick only to coal – he’s got it totally wrong,” he said.

The AMWU members are backed by National Secretary Paul Bastian, concerned at the blow to business confidence and investment from the Abbott Government war on renewables and the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, which it had tried and failed to ban.

“This is about growing Australia’s energy mix, growing innovation and manufacturing in wind power and solar, but Tony Abbott is addicted to coal even if it will cost this country the jobs of the future,” Mr Bastian said. ■



FREE TRADE ANGER RISES TO TOP END

Concern is mounting across Australia at the potential jobs impact from the wave of free trade deals, as AMWU members realise that in the future they could be competing for work against imported labour forces on substandard conditions.

The union has been hammering the message of the negatives of the China Free Trade Deal around the country; through social media, community campaigning and radio ads.

The giant Inpex Ichthys gas processing project off Darwin is the latest site where members have met and strongly opposed the China Free Trade Agreement (ChAFTA).

AMWU delegate Terry Barnes said many members had “hit the roof” when they realised the enormous implications of the China FTA, which allows workforces to be imported for \$150 million projects with 15% of Chinese investment.

“There’s a feeling of ‘how has this been rolled out without proper public debate’ and ‘why weren’t the Australian people told more about this, why is it secret?’” he said.

“If overseas workforces are permitted to be brought in for a project so the work is taken off us, what are our children going to do?”

AMWU NT Organiser Bryan Wilkins said the 400 AMWU members on the nation’s largest gas project were already frustrated that most skilled manufacturing work on the gas plant was done overseas, leaving imported modules to be assembled. Now the China FTA even threatened their labour.

“This is a giant project with two years left to run but the workers are already looking to the future,” Mr Wilkins said.

“There are no other major NT projects on the horizon, work in the capital cities may be hard to come by, then on top of that you have a free trade agreement which will open up the labour market and undercut our skilled trades.”

Many members asked about Labor’s national policy on Free Trade Agreements, set to be an important topic at this month’s ALP National Conference.

The AMWU is among unions urging the Labor Party to extend its policy opposing any agreement that includes



Hold it: union members on the Inpex gas site want changes to any ChAFTA.

Investor State Dispute Settlement (ISDS). It gives foreign firms the right to sue Australian governments for any local law they believe disadvantages them.

The past Howard Government and Labor Governments refused to allow ISDS in major trade agreements, but the Abbott Government have relented to secure agreements with South Korea, Japan, China and the Trans Pacific Partnership.

A Labor Government would not permit any agreement containing an ISDS, but this policy is not binding on the party when in Opposition, an inconsistency which saw Labor MPs support the recent free trade agreement with South Korea. ■