

ETU NSW

LIVEWIRE

AUTUMN 2020 ■ OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE ELECTRICAL TRADES UNION

From extreme weather to pandemic:
ETU members essential in every crisis

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OF EXTREME
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ETU
Electrical Trades Union

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Nathan Ryan, Yagoona NSW
Electrician and EISS Super Member

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ETU PUTS SAFETY FIRST

JUSTIN
SAYS ...

ETU members have weathered many challenges since the NSW & ACT Branch was founded in 1902.

At school we studied two world wars and the great depression that fell between. Students of the future will add the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic to that list of world-changing events.

As we send our magazine to print, it's impossible to confidently predict the duration, scale or outcome of the global crisis. Livewire takes two weeks to print and mail. The pandemic is transforming our world by the hour.

When the COVID-19 challenge emerged, the ETU National Executive met to set 'guiding principles' that would govern the union's response to the crisis.

At the top of the list was safety first. Every electrical worker knows that safety is paramount. The ETU is working with our members, with employers and with governments to ensure that wherever work continues it is performed safely.

Since the pandemic was declared, our union has collaborated closely with contractor group NECA to provide industry leadership in the construction and contracting sector. This has allowed the industry to speak with a common voice and to quickly reform work practices in this time of need.

In the electricity, transport and all sectors, the ETU is working with companies while advocating for the most effective safety measures.

“ I know every ETU member has been profoundly affected by this global crisis. For those who need mental health support, I encourage you to contact the ETU-supported Mates in Energy or Foundation House (see page 23 for details). ”

The union values of solidarity, unity and mutual care have never mattered more. Let's keep looking after each other.

In unity

JUSTIN PAGE
SECRETARY ETU NSW & ACT



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UNION CONTACTS

 SYDNEY: 02 9267 4844
NEWCASTLE: 02 4968 2488
CANBERRA: 02 6163 6666

Contact the ETU immediately in case of stand down or redundancy

CONTACT THE ETU TO ENSURE YOUR RIGHTS ARE PROTECTED AND ENFORCED

BEFORE any worker is stood down, consultation between the employer, employees and their representatives should occur to exhaust the following options:

- Relocation of work
- Access to accrued personal leave or sick leave/carer's leave
- Agreed leave without pay
- Access to excess RDOs
- Access to annual leave - extended at half pay if requested
- Access to Long Service Leave
- Access to any other leave provisions eg. time off in lieu

PAYMENTS THAT MAY BE AVAILABLE

If you are stood down or made redundant, there is a range of significant government support including JobKeeper that may be available. ETU members may also be able to access funds from MERT, Chifley Income Protection or superannuation accounts.

ACCESS TO MERT REDUNDANCY TRUST

ETU members who are members of the MERT Redundancy Trust are eligible to access funds in cases of stand down or redundancy.

If you are stood down, a \$2,000 Stand Down payment (taxable) is available from MERT to assist with hardship, followed by a second \$2,000 payment five weeks later.

If you are made redundant, you can access your redundancy from MERT.

For a claim form or information on payments, contact mert.com.au or call 1800 023 692.

CHIFLEY INCOME PROTECTION & COVID-19

For ETU members covered by Chifley Income Protection, Covid-19 is a covered event under your Policy. Members may be covered if there is an inability to work through sickness and accident as a result of Covid-19.

Go to www.chifleyservices.com.au or call 1800 800 002.

SUPERANNUATION

The ETU strongly urges members to seek financial advice through your super fund before considering any withdrawal from your superannuation.

If you are stood down or made redundant, up to \$20,000 may be withdrawn from your superannuation tax free. \$10,000 in the 2019/20 financial year (up to 30 June 2020) and an additional \$10,000 in the following financial year (from 1 July 2020).

CALL OR CONTACT YOUR FUND ONLINE

EISS SUPER
1300 369 901
www.eissuper.com.au

NESS SUPER
1800 022 067
nessadmin@nesssuper.com.au

Apprentices: Know your rights

Apprentices are employed under a training contract which is a legally binding agreement between an employer and an apprentice.

The contract remains valid until an apprentice has completed their training and they are competent in the skills required for the trade or vocation and qualification specified within the training contract, unless it is terminated.

IF YOUR EMPLOYER ATTEMPTS TO CANCEL THE TRAINING CONTRACT

- 1 Contact an ETU organiser immediately
- 2 Do not sign any forms relating to the suspension or termination of a training contract
- 3 If you have signed a training contract suspension or cancellation form, you have seven days to contact Training Services NSW to withdraw your consent



HELP THE ETU STAY IN TOUCH:

CHECK YOUR EMAIL

The union is using all available channels to communicate with members during the pandemic.

'Events are changing rapidly. We regularly send updated and industry-specific information to members,' said ETU NSW & ACT Secretary Justin Page.

'We ask members to monitor their email accounts and to check their junk email to ensure they are not missing ETU messages.'

The ETU NSW & ACT website has a dedicated Coronavirus blog, plus four industry-specific blogs.

The union's social media on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram post about work-related issues including COVID-19.

CHECK, VISIT & FOLLOW

- 1 Ensure you get ETU communications by monitoring your email & check junk mail
- 2 Visit ETU website www.etunsw.com.au
- 3 Follow us on

@ETUnsw

@NSW_ETU

@etunswact

ETU SUPPORTS MEMBERS THROUGH COVID 19

ALL ETU SERVICES FOR MEMBERS ARE FULLY OPERATIONAL THROUGHOUT THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

This includes all organisers, the union's administration team and professional officers delivering industrial, legal, IT and communication services.

Secretary Justin Page said the union had quickly re-organised operations once the scale of the pandemic was recognised.

'We've made necessary changes, employed available technology and made sure the ETU is on the job every day for members.'

Members are asked to call organisers directly with workplaces issues. For other inquiries, please contact etunsw@etunsw.com.au for response and referral.

The union's Sydney office phone line remains open and available to members who need to call.

1 FOR WORKPLACE ISSUES, CALL YOUR ORGANISER



ANTHONY O'SULLIVAN
0429 429 234



ANTONY STEGIC
0414 877 943



BEN LISTER
0400 264 007



BRAD CURREY
0431 838 852



BRAD MCDUGAL
0438 777 653



DARRAN MILLER
0447 784 572



FRED BARBIN
0437 031 840



JAMES DARTON-TURNER
0467 607 698



LAWRENCE DUFF
0400 749 008



MATT MCCANN
0416 236 646



NICK BLYTH
0475 284 234



STEVE BANKS
0414 877 553



STEVE MAGANN
0487 298 010



STEVE ROBINSON
0414 877 5814



STEWART EDWARD
0419 210 442



STUART ELLIOTT
0458 911 414

2 FOR ANY OTHER ISSUE, EMAIL ETUNSW@ETUNSW.COM.AU WHERE YOUR INQUIRY WILL BE DIRECTED TO THE STAFF MEMBERS BEST-PLACED TO ASSIST

3 IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO CONTACT YOUR ORGANISER, AND UNABLE TO EMAIL, CALL THE ETU'S CENTRAL PHONE (02) 9267 4844



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The ETU is modernising the way we present Livewire by moving it to an interactive digital format. This will make the magazine and its content easily accessible and mobile for all members.

We will be providing key stories and features to members via a range of digital sources, such as our website, email, sms and social media channels.

However, the traditional printed magazine will continue to be delivered free-of-charge to every member who chooses to receive it.

The print edition of the magazine is now available via an opt-in subscription. Honorary ETU members will be automatically added to the subscription list.

4 ways to opt-in and keep getting mailed your free printed Livewire

- 1 **Email us at feedback@etunsw.com.au.** Put Opt-in in the subject and provide us with your name and membership number or home address and mobile.
- 2 **SMS: "opt-in" to 0432 664 336** with your name and membership number or home address and mobile.
- 3 **Facebook messenger: "opt-in"** with your name and membership number or home address and mobile.
- 4 **Phone: Call the ETU office on (02) 9267 4844** and provide your name and membership number, or home address and mobile and ask to Opt-in to Livewire.

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ETU members

RE-CONNECT NSW & ACT

The summer's extreme weather was unprecedented in duration, scale and impact.

The damage to our power networks far exceeded anything experienced in more than a century of NSW electricity supply.

Thousands of poles burnt or broken in storms. Entire feeders, substations and numerous other assets destroyed. Hundreds of thousands of homes and businesses without power, many for days or weeks.

Into the breach stepped hundreds of ETU members employed by Essential, Endeavour, Ausgrid, Transgrid and Evoenergy.

Between October and February, distribution & transmission workers were the first on the ground, once the fire, flood and storm zones were declared safe.

Crews travelled the length of the state, working long hours in adverse conditions and unfamiliar areas. ETU members met the challenge and got the job done.

The network is largely restored, power is re-connected to customers, devastated communities have the electricity supply they need to rebuild.

The gratitude expressed by many in those communities directly to our members has been deeply moving.

The ETU salutes the magnificent sustained effort from so many members under such pressure.

ARMY CANNOT *replace* SKILLED ELECTRICAL WORKERS

The State Government's mishandling of the electricity crisis took a surprise turn when Ausgrid attempted to call in the army to re-connect Ausgrid customers.

The request, made on 12 February, was dead within 24 hours after the defense forces declined it.

But ETU Secretary Justin Page was scathing of the absurd proposal.

'Given the state the network was in, we had no problem if the army was to clear trees and debris, but they certainly don't have the skills to repair poles and wires.'

'The Government and Ausgrid's panicked move highlights the unsustainable staff cuts made by the company,' said Justin. 'It underlines the deeply flawed regulatory framework that has pressured Ausgrid to cut and keep cutting. 'Yes, these are huge weather events presenting substantial challenges. But an adequately-staffed company would have been far better-placed to organise a timely comprehensive response.

'We used to have an army that assisted with restoring power following storms, floods and fires - it was an army of workers,' said Justin.

'Sadly, privatisation and the regulator's deep funding cuts left Ausgrid and the community exposed to unacceptable risk.'



SIDE-BY-SIDE: QUEENSLAND ETU MEMBERS *help restore* AUSGRID NETWORK

More than 30 ETU members from Brisbane arrived to help restore the Ausgrid network after heavy storms on the Central Coast.

The workers employed by Queensland distributor Energex received a hearty union welcome as they worked side-by-side with ETU NSW Ausgrid members.

Union members from all quarters gave their best together on the frontlines.

Power restoration *delayed after* **5,000 JOBS CUT IN 5 YEARS**

Talkback radio lit up with calls in the last days of November.

An extreme storm, described by locals as a 'mini-tornado', had ripped through Sydney.

The city's northern suburbs were worst hit with trees tossed around like matchsticks, cars overturned and infrastructure pulverized.

Ausgrid's power network suffered extensive damage. More than 50,000 homes and business lost power.

Around 1,800 hazards were counted, mainly fallen trees that had to be cleared before work could commence on the poles and wires.

Restoring power was a mammoth task but tempers flared as residents were forced to camp out for days, with many waiting more than a week.

Radio hosts like 2GB's Alan Jones began to ask questions as their switchboards melted down under the weight of calls. Why was power restoration taking so long? Did Ausgrid have sufficient resources to tackle the task?

ETU Secretary Justin Page revealed that 5,000 jobs had been lost in five years at Ausgrid and fellow NSW distributors Endeavour and Essential. This left the companies understaffed and exposed in the face of the summer's emergencies.

THE CULPRITS ARE THREEFOLD, JUSTIN TOLD MEDIA:

- The privatisation agenda of the NSW Liberal Government
- Deep funding cuts driven by the Australian Energy Regulator
- The ideologically-driven policies of the NSW Government.



Regulator's funding *cuts* cripple Ausgrid

Ausgrid faces an uphill battle to rebuild resources and meet the increased threat of network damage caused by extreme weather events.

The company's budgets has been dramatically reduced by the Australian Energy Regulator (AER).

In 2019 the AER handed down a five-year ruling that slashes Ausgrid's capital expenditure by 14 per cent and operational expenditure by 17 per cent.

ETU Secretary Justin Page said the summer's electricity crisis should force a rethink of the regulatory framework.

'The AER framework is a flawed economic model. It needs reform to consider best prices for consumers but also a quality, safe, reliable and secure electricity supply.

There are too many electricity regulators. The whole regulatory framework needs an overhaul.'

EXPOSED

Premier's lie *on* Ausgrid staff numbers

There are lies, there are big lies, and there is Gladys Berejiklian.

The NSW Premier was caught telling a giant porkie on the live television program Sunrise.

She was seeking to counter the ETU's factual assertion that power restoration to communities was delayed because of job cuts at Ausgrid and other distributors.

'There's actually more full-time staff today (at Ausgrid) then there was five years ago,' Gladys claimed.

The ETU was able to categorically disprove the Government's claim thanks to a leaked internal Ausgrid document in the media. The company's own numbers show conclusively that staffing had plummeted from 5,400 in 2014 to just 3,238 in 2019: a 40 per cent decline that leaves the company with 2,162 fewer workers.

'It's unbelievable that the Premier claimed that Ausgrid has more workers today than five years ago,' said ETU Secretary Justin Page.

'Five years ago, Gladys Berejiklian was the Shareholder Minister for Ausgrid. She signed off on their annual report that showed 5,400 workers at that time.

'She's either lying or totally incompetent because today there are clearly fewer than 3,500 employees at Ausgrid.'

The NSW Government stood totally exposed - but worse was to come.

A further ETU investigation revealed that the Government has breached laws passed in 2015 to enable the part-privatisation of Ausgrid and Endeavour Energy.

That legislation includes a five-year guarantee that requires Ausgrid to maintain at least 3,570 full-time staff until 30 June 2020. The leaked document established that in December 2019 the company's payroll was 10 per cent below that minimum.

'The company's current staffing levels appear to be both inadequate and unlawful,' said Justin Page.



JOB CUTS FACTS

- **40% fewer workers: 5,000+ jobs cut**
- **Ausgrid (part-privatised)**
- **2014 > 5,400**
- **2019 > 3,238**
- **A reduction of 2,162 jobs in five years**
- **40% fewer staff 2014-19**
- **Minimum number of staff legally required under privatisation law: 3,570**
- **Essential Energy (100% publicly-owned)**
- **More than 2,000 jobs cut since 2015**
- **Endeavour Energy (part-privatised)**
- **Estimated 1,200 jobs cut since 2014**



MORUYA: 'WE HOPE WE NEVER SEE THIS AGAIN'

We woke up on New Year's Eve and the sky was a brown-orange colour with a howling westerly wind. Mogo, about 8 kilometres away, was being evacuated with properties lost. The fire had travelled about 40 kilometres overnight.

That was an intense day but I got lucky at home because the wind changed direction and turned the fire back on itself which saved a lot of houses in our area. I went for a drive to see if there were any mates that needed help.

The next couple of days were crazy as the fire went through. One of our ETU lineworkers lost his house and others at our depot were really lucky to keep theirs.

Moruya and Batemans Bay were isolated for three days with every highway closed. The comms towers had burnt down so we had no radio, phone or internet.

Around 8-10 Essential Energy staff were in town. Some returned from annual leave and met at the depot to start creating a plan. It was the first time we had seen or heard from each other. We started realising how widespread the damage was.

Jy Fraser, a local zone sub manager, worked in the emergency operations centre with the RFS, police and shire council to help coordinate areas. We patrolled all the feeders to identify defects and what was needed to get customers back on. The next few weeks was flat chat with all crews working 12-14-hour days.

Around 4 January, help started rolling in with Essential crews from across NSW. About 160 people worked out of our depot which normally has 30. Together we replaced up to 600 poles, 150 transformers and entire feeders.

The travelling crews finished here on 23 February, but the response will be ongoing for the local depot for a long time to come. The towns and communities have been through something we hope we never see again.

**Matt O'Neill, NETWORK DESIGN,
ESSENTIAL ENERGY, MORUYA**



MATT O'NEILL
WITH HIS
SISTER
LARISSA.



A REAL SENSE OF PRIDE

I spent four days in Bendalong and Fisherman's Paradise on the South Coast with crewmates from Cessnock, Ku-ring-gai and Zetland.

Faced with scenes of utter devastation, our spirit was to get the power back on for the people. That's what we do, that's what we're there for.

There was a real sense of pride working with colleagues from all power companies and all corners of NSW.

Locals were pulling up to thank us. After what they'd been through, they were so grateful.

**Jason Dallen,
LIVE LINWORKER
AUSGRID, CESSNOCK**



THOMAS
MORTLOCK
ESSENTIAL
ENERGY



'WE BANDED TOGETHER & GOT IT DONE'

The fire season started in November with multiple local fires in our own backyard around the Manning Valley and Great Lakes.

For 20 days we had a hub in Taree. Around 200 Essential workers from other depots helped us replace 300 poles, six HV cables and some LV cables.

Then in early January Essential Energy asked for volunteers to help our southern colleagues whose network was also devastated. I went with an MNC underground crew with blokes from Coffs, Kempsey and Port Macquarie.

The scale of the damage around Batemans Bay was vast with up to 600 poles and a large amount of HV and LH cables and assets gone. We banded together and got into it over the next 13 days.

An elderly couple cried with joy when we reconnected them. They'd been doing it tough without power and hot water.

It's hard to see your local community struggling. The biggest satisfaction was being able to help.

**Thomas Mortlock,
CABLE JOINTER,
ESSENTIAL ENERGY, TAREE**



Bushfire Report



300 POLES, SUBSTATIONS LOST

It started with a small local fire and the loss of a couple of poles at Bawley Point in early December.

By New Year, we were dealing with the gigantic Currowan Fire, which burnt half a million hectares and hundreds of houses.

When it was safe to go in, we found our region lost 300 poles plus substations, conductors, sheds and bridges.

Support poured in until we had 200 people in our depot including from Ausgrid and northern Endeavour.

Our encounters with the general public were solemn and emotional. They were just glad to get the power back on, even though many no longer had a house.

We were thankful when the rain extinguished the fire. But that also brought floods and further damage that restricted our access.

**Glenn Kelly,
LEADING HAND LIVE
LINWORKER,
ENDEAVOUR, NOWRA**



'GREAT TO WORK WITH QUEENSLANDERS'

Our crew of 11 workers was in constant action over summer. We responded to fire damage around Wiseman's Ferry, a mini-cyclone on the Upper North Shore, two huge storms on the Central Coast and another storm around Cronulla.

We had crews pull out of the Hawkesbury because trees were still coming down while they were working.

The second Central Coast storm was so severe we had feeders going out every five minutes, with thousands of customers losing power each time.

At Holgate, near Gosford, we got locked in when a tree fell across the single access road. There were wires down everywhere from some of the worst wind gusts I've ever seen.

It was great to work with the Queenslanders who came down to support us. Around 50 Energex people with around 20 trucks worked out of Ourimbah depot in February.

We worked 12-14 hour days in adverse conditions to get the job done. I'm proud of our guys!

Luke Sheridan,
LINEWORKER,
AUSGRID, OURIMBAH



'FEELINGS OF MATESHIP & SADNESS'



I've never seen a summer like it. With my Grafton crewmates, I worked from October to January restoring the network in the far north and the far south of NSW.

I came out of it with two overwhelming feelings: mateship and sadness.

The camaraderie among ETU members working around the clock at different locations was special. It was good to be with our colleagues from different companies, striving together to use our skills for the community.

But I also experienced the intense misery of the people we met who had lost everything. It was heartbreaking to see our fellow Australians at breaking point.

Our work started locally in October after fire ravaged the north in Rappville and Nymboida. We spent nine days replacing poles in what felt like a warzone.

In January I went to the Bega area twice, mixing with 250 workers from all over.

We worked around Cobargo which was decimated. I will never forget the endless dead wombats strewn by the side of the road.

As we made the long journey home to Grafton, driving rain set in, extinguishing fires but also bringing new problems with floods.

Dave Bender,
LINEWORKER,
ESSENTIAL ENERGY, GRAFTON

Union EBAs lift industry standards



ETU MEMBERS AT 21 CONTRACTORS WIN IMPROVED PAY & CONDITIONS

More than a thousand workers at 21 Sydney electrical contractors are enjoying pay rises and improved conditions thanks to union EBAs. The agreements cover all Tier 1 companies in Sydney plus a growing list of medium and smaller firms. Workers have received at least one pay rise with wages set to jump between 12 and 14 per cent over the life of the agreements.

The EBAs deliver a raft of gains including productivity allowance rising to \$3.50 per hour and site allowance to be phased in on eligible projects. Rights for union delegates and health and safety representatives are protected.

The 21 union EBAs have been achieved through the ETU's 'It's Time' campaign which was launched in 2018 aiming to lift standards across Sydney construction.

'These EBAs are a great outcome for our members and for the industry,' said ETU organiser Fred Barbin. 'In less than two years we have turned the industry round and made it a better and fairer environment for all parties.'

'It's been inspiring to see our members stick together at company after company and take the action required to get a positive result.'

The agreements in place have set a new recognised industry standard however the It's Time campaign continues.

'We're working hard to extend the benefits of union EBAs to all our members at all contractors in Sydney construction,' said Fred. 'The ETU is in negotiations or building towards negotiations at a long list of electrical companies. We need to stay strong and active to ensure no-one is left behind.'

The campaign has seen the union combine organising, industrial, media and legal tactics in a successful strategy to upgrade the sector.

A team of dedicated organisers fully supported by the ETU leadership has ensured that members have the resources needed to win.

More than 1,000 workers joined the ETU as recruitment laid the base for the campaign.

ETU NSW & ACT Secretary Justin Page congratulated both members and officials on the great results to date.

'There's still a way to go, but this inspirational campaign demonstrates that solidarity works. When organised workers stick together, they win.'



IT'S TIME

Union EBAs deliver

➤ PAY RISES OF 12-14%

➤ PRODUCTIVITY ALLOWANCE RISING TO \$3.50 PER HOUR

➤ SITE ALLOWANCE PHASED IN

➤ ALL OVERTIME AT DOUBLETIME

➤ DELEGATE & HSR RIGHTS

➤ AND MUCH MORE

UNION EBA THE ONLY WAY



SOLIDARITY WINS F.I.P. AGREEMENT

Workers at contractor F.I.P. have secured a union EBA after taking industrial action for the first time in the company's history.

The three-year agreement includes a total pay rise of 12 per cent, productivity allowance rising to \$3.50 per hour, all overtime at double time and many other improvements.

The battle for a union EBA dates back to 2018 when F.I.P. and six other major contractors attempted to ram through a non-union 'multi-enterprise agreement'. When that plan failed, all of the majors except F.I.P. eventually negotiated union EBAs with the ETU. The campaign to bring F.I.P. up to industry standards accelerated in February 2020 when the company released an inferior non-union agreement for an employee vote.

At the same time, F.I.P. workers were voting in a Protected Action Ballot that could lay the platform for an industrial campaign.

Both ballots went the union way: the company's non-union EBA was voted down, while 90 per cent of votes cast in the PAB endorsed industrial action. Company management came back to the table after ETU members applied two days of work bans on various tasks.

In-principle agreement was soon reached and on 14 March F.I.P. employees voted overwhelmingly to approve the union EBA.

'To see F.I.P. workers take action for the first time in the company's history shows how far our campaign has come,' said ETU Secretary Justin Page.

'This is a great result for the 90 union members at F.I.P. Workers stuck together until they got what they deserve: improved conditions on a union EBA. They will now enjoy the same standards as ETU colleagues across the sector.'

JUSTIN PAGE
ETU NSW & ACT SECRETARY

IT'S TIME

UNION EBA THE ONLY WAY

NORTHCONNEX & M5 TUNNEL SAFETY ALERTS

The ETU has backed members' safety concerns at the two big tunnel projects.



Heavy rains in February flooded the M5 WestConnex tunnel, blocking one of two exits relied on for emergency evacuation.

Organiser Nick Bligh inspected the tunnel and notified the regulator SafeWork NSW.

At NorthConnex, ETU members called in organiser Lawrie Duff after mould was documented in lunch sheds, air vents and tea bags.

The hazard was reported to Safework and to Northconnex joint partner management.

Safety must always be paramount for electrical workers, especially in tunnels. The union continues to monitor safety across the industry.

DELEGATES tackle INDUSTRY ISSUES

ETU delegates and activists from across Sydney construction meet monthly to tackle industry issues of common concern.

Top of the list is ensuring industry standards are upheld when it comes to safety, pay and conditions, apprentice rights and a raft of other matters.

Delegates and the ETU construction team are also planning the next phase of the 'It's Time' campaign which seeks to extend the benefits of union EBAs across the sector.



ETU DELEGATES FROM PROGRAMMED, FREDON, DESA, JOHN HOLLAND AND STAR

IT'S TIME

UNION EBA THE ONLY WAY

Tunnel delegate JARRED PROUD OF ETU TEAM

Jarred Ritter stepped up as an ETU delegate on the NorthConnex project in 2019, working closely with the ETU team including organiser Lawrie Duff, fellow delegate Andrew Whyte, and leading HSRs David Letch and Roy Samuels.

ETU members employed by Fredon at NorthConnex won significant gains in the first union EBA achieved under the banner of the 'It's Time' campaign. Since then, members at 20 other electrical contractors have followed suit.



JARRED RITTER (CENTRE) WITH ANDREW WHYTE AND DAVID LETCH

'I have been involved with three different unions throughout my working life. I am an advocate for all of them but I rate the ETU highest. Times have changed a lot since I started my trade in 1996. These days you need to play smart and the ETU has been the best I've witnessed at that,' said Jarred.

'I am extremely proud to be a part of this union and honoured to be a delegate. I'm even more proud of the workers who stand together make change. We've got a great group who worked hard, stuck tight and created a strong culture.'

'The number of ETU-endorsed EBAs that have been signed in the last 12 months is an exceptional performance from everyone involved.'

IT'S TIME

UNION EBA THE ONLY WAY

21 Sydney construction union EBA companies

- | | | | | |
|------------|----------------|-------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 STAR | 6 UTECH SYDNEY | 11 GRID | 15 NXGEN | 19 F.I.P |
| 2 HEYDAY | 7 SDF | 12 NCI | 16 CITY ELECTRICAL | 20 CABLE INSTALL SOLUTIONS |
| 3 FREDON | 8 ABI SERVICES | 13 DYNAMITE | 17 KSE SERVICES | 21 DOWNER |
| 4 STOWE | 9 PERIGON | 14 RSGX | 18 JNI INFRASTRUCTURE | |
| 5 GOLDLINE | 10 NILSEN | | | |

THALES WORKERS WIN 9% pay rise + \$31 licence allowance



Electrical workers at defence contractor Thales have won a \$31 per week Electrical Licence Allowance on top of a 9% pay rise.

The gains come in a three-year agreement covering hundreds of workers from multiple unions at the Garden Island navy base. The company improved the offer after union members walked off for two hours and imposed an overtime ban.

'The agreement delivers a good pay rise that keeps our members' paypackets ahead of inflation,' said ETU organiser Anthony O'Sullivan.

'The ETU stood up for the rights of qualified electricians to receive the Electrical Licence Allowance that is standard across the industry.

'Congratulations to all at Garden Island for sticking together to achieve a decent agreement.'

METRO SPARKIES LOCK IN \$52.50 BASE RATE PLUS E.L.A.

Maintenance electricians on the Sydney Metro have locked in base rates of \$52.50 plus a \$2 per hour Electrical License Allowance.

These great wages come in a union EBA that includes several other allowances and a team leader rate of \$71.50 per hour. The agreement took over 12 months to negotiate but ETU members are very happy with the outcome.

'The long process was frustrating at times but the end result is sensational,' said ETU delegate Ash Piqueut.

Organiser Anthony O'Sullivan welcomed the outcome, which applies to the initial Chatswood-Epping section of the Metro.

'This sets the benchmark for those parts of the Metro that will come into operation in coming years,' he said.

The Metro will extend from Chatswood to Central and then to Bankstown via Sydenham. The ETU insisted EBA conditions match those paid to the same company's Victorian employees.

SYDNEY WATER MEMBERS seek to cut UNPAID TRAVEL

Electrical workers employed by Sydney Water want to be allocated home depots to reduce unpaid travel time.

The demand is included in a log of claims that also seeks fair wage increases, job security and no loss of conditions.

Sydney Water has contracted out most electrical work but around 15 directly-employed electricians will be covered by the EBA.

UNION DELEGATE ADAM COHEN SAID: 'It's good to see the ETU getting organised in Sydney Water. Hopefully we keep growing and move forward together.'

BUS MAINTENANCE WORKERS AIM TO DEFEND CONDITIONS

EBA negotiations at the State Transit Authority are overshadowed by the looming privatisation of Sydney bus operations.

Bus maintenance workers are covered by the NSW industrial system and, as public sector employees, are subject to a 2.5 per cent cap on annual wage increases.

If private operators take over in mid-2021, as scheduled, workers will have a two-year job guarantee. However working conditions are only guaranteed for three months.

ETU and AMWU maintenance workers are seeking to protect current conditions in the EBA.

ETU delegate Jacques Ninio believes electrical jobs are safe because 'there's nothing left to cut'.

He said any superannuation increase will be offset against the 2.5 per cent cap.



DESI PRIOSTE, ORGANISER, ANTHONY O'SULLIVAN, MARK KEEFE AND JACQUES NINIO

DOWNER CONSTRUCTION MEMBERS tick off UNION EBA

ETU members employed by Downer Construction have sealed a union EBA that delivers good pay rises and conditions in line with industry standards.

Among other projects, the EBA will cover electrical workers refurbishing the Opera House over the next three years.

'It's Time' to raise Canberra construction standards

The 'It's Time' campaign has expanded to Canberra with the aim of raising standards for electrical workers in the local construction sector.

Organiser James Darnton-Turner is working with members at major contractors to prepare for EBA negotiations. Talks are due in 2020 with Tier 1 companies Shepherd Electrical and Heyday5.

'I'm getting around sites, putting on the union BBQ, monitoring safety and building for the future,' said James.

The It's Time campaign has seen more than a thousand ETU members in Sydney construction achieve major improvements to pay and conditions through union EBAs.



JAMES DARTON-TURNER
ETU ORGANISER

ETU LIFT WORKERS plan to win

Why are ETU lift industry members among the best-paid electrical workers in the country? Because they are strongly-organised and ready to fight for their conditions.

In March, ETU lift delegates and officials from around Australia met in Sydney to plan industry strategy. National cooperation ensures ETU members are on the front foot when it comes to EBA negotiations, safety and training.

Union EBAs at two lift industry labour hire firms

The ETU is moving towards locking in union agreements at two labour hire companies that supply workers to the lift industry.

The Concept Engineering and Worthwhile Recruiting EBAs will meet industry standards achieved by ETU members at major lift firms. The Concept Engineering agreement will include a 25 per cent casual loading.

Organiser Steve Bankes said the union EBAs would help ensure that labour hire is not used to undercut hard-won existing conditions.

'Labour hire has a legitimate role supplying top-up workers to companies when there's a temporary surge in demand. These agreements allow that flexibility.'

Talks underway at United Lifts

Negotiations are underway with United Lifts for a union agreement covering around 12 workers.

The EBA will deliver industry standards in line with the main companies across the lift sector.

LIFT INDUSTRY NEWS





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ETU FIGHTS FOR POWER JOBS & SERVICES

Negotiations for new enterprise agreements across the transmission and distribution sectors are due over the next 12 months.

The current Transgrid EBA expires December 2020, but the company approached the ETU to open talks with the aim of locking in a new agreement by June 2020. As Livewire went to print, ETU members at Transgrid were discussing the company's request.

The 30 June date is significant because it marks the end of job guarantees at Transgrid and at distributors Ausgrid and Endeavour Energy. The guarantees were passed by State Parliament in 2016 when Transgrid was privatised and Ausgrid and Endeavour part-privatised.

Staffing and job security will be central issues in EBA negotiations.

Ausgrid implemented more than 300 voluntary redundancies in 2019. No jobs will go in 2020 but hundreds more are planned to be cut from 2021 to 2024. Endeavour has flagged reducing up to 300 positions by 2024.

Transgrid has indicated the company intends to maintain current staffing levels into the future.

An ETU campaign has so far prevented Essential Energy, which remains publicly-owned, from implementing large-scale redundancies.

In 2019 Essential announced without consultation a plan to cut hundreds of positions, with many to be targeted for forced redundancy. An ETU political and media campaign saw the NSW Government intervene and halt the first tranche of cuts, saving 165 jobs.

But Essential management continues to talk about wanting to cut 500 positions.

In the ACT, negotiations with local distributor Evoenergy (formerly Actew-AGL) are underway, with the company's current agreement expiring on 31 June.

ETU NSW & ACT Secretary Justin Page said the union would argue strongly against any job losses at any company.

'The distributors need to realise that the argument around staffing has changed. The summer of extreme

weather that tore through the networks in NSW and the ACT is the new reality that we have to respond to.

'Governments must guarantee the safe and reliable supply of power to homes and businesses. That means reviewing the structure of electricity regulation that has forced deep cuts to funding. The industry superannuation funds, as part-owners of Ausgrid and Endeavour, must also step up to the plate on these issues.'

Justin said EBA bargaining will also focus on maintaining all current conditions and delivering fair pay rises.

'I urge all ETU members to get actively involved in the bargaining process. Have your say, step up as a delegate and help achieve the best possible outcome for you and your workmates.'

'WHEREVER WE ARE NEEDED'

LIFETIME ACTIVISTS

JOHN & IRIS KNIGHT

John and Iris Knight met in 1957 as teenagers, at Mooney's Mudhole, a tidal pool on the Hunter's Hill peninsula.

So began a powerful partnership that endures today after 63 years of family, working and political life.

The couple's tireless contribution to the trade union movement was recognised when Unions NSW awarded them gold-embossed Scrolls of Honour.

John is an ETU delegate to Unions NSW and with Iris faithfully attends the peak body's Executive meetings. The duo are a true team: always first to volunteer wherever they can contribute across the labour movement. They are seen on the frontline of every campaign from Your Rights at Work to Stop the Sell Off.

Both are venerated Life Members of their unions, John with the ETU and Iris the Health Services Union.

John has been an ETU State Councillor since 1997 and Iris held many senior HSU positions. Born just 11 days apart in 1941, the couple grew up in the close-knit community at Hunters Hill. They never strayed from the union values inherited from their parents.

John left school aged 15 to work as a 'shop boy' just across the harbour on Cockatoo Island. Each Friday he would call Iris. John commenced an electrical apprenticeship on the island, Iris later took on a hospital clerical role. In 1960 they married and were blessed with two children.



By 1965 John had moved to Sydney County Council, the forerunner to electricity distributor Ausgrid. He rose to become a district operator before retiring in 2007.

Most retirees ease up or travel, but the Knights relish every opportunity to support union and social justice struggles.

'We do it because we like to help. We love the camaraderie of the union movement,' said John. 'We've got friends across the movement. We get involved wherever we are needed.'

The ETU thanks John and Iris Knight for their magnificent ongoing contribution.



VALE

Kerry Patterson

4.6.41-19.2.20



Kerry Patterson, a former ETU organiser and Electrogroupp field officer, has passed away.

Kerry was loved and admired by many during a long career as an electrician working on major Sydney construction sites from the 1970s to 1990s.

Colleagues remember 'a real joker and character' and 'keen golfer' who 'always stood up and fought for the blokes'.

Kerry had a special gift for mentoring apprentices throughout his career.

He was recruited to the ETU construction team in 1998 before joining Electrogroupp, retiring in 2003.

Kerry died from the asbestos-related disease mesothelioma.

'PIG DOG' CHAMPIONS AUSTRALIAN VALUES & WORKERS' RIGHTS

They call him 'Pig Dog' -- because once he latches onto an issue this delegate won't let go.

Darryl Gibson is the quietly-spoken but determined union rep for the Kyogle Essential Energy depot. He's a born and bred local and a 37-year Essential Energy dual-qualified veteran. Darryl stepped forward as an ETU delegate in 2011. For many years he chaired the company's Health and Safety Committee.

'I'm a delegate because I believe in Australian values and workers' rights. I've seen those values eroded by large companies and management culture. Today we see highly-paid managers come in to cut costs. They have no electrical knowledge and do not care about our industry or our people.'

'Pig Dog' has been active in ETU campaigns including the 2019 campaign to save hundreds of regional jobs at Essential.

He's a keen angler whose best catch was a red emperor off Swains Reef in Queensland.



ALEC LEADS BY EXAMPLE

Alec Beville says the ETU needs a new generation of young union delegates - and he's leading by example.

The Sydney Trains technical officer stepped up as a workplace leader at 22 years of age. He's made every post a winner since shifting to Sydney from the Southern Highlands hamlet of Colovale.

'I love my job and I love my union. I feel like I'm doing something worthwhile on both fronts,' said the keen skater. 'It's very satisfying helping to solve problems on a local level but I'm also focused on building activism.'

Alec believes younger ETU members need to get active and defend their trade.

'The ETU members who came before us fought and won great pay and conditions. Today we must stand together to defend and improve those entitlements.

'We also need to take up the political issues that affect us and our communities, such as privatisation'



PHILL REBUILDING SOLIDARITY AT AUSGRID

Phill Gilbert is a passionate, outspoken delegate helping steer Ausgrid workers through a period of massive change.

The company has shed more than 2,000 jobs and was part-privatised in 2016. Morale hit rock bottom but Phill and other seasoned delegates are rebuilding trust and solidarity among employees. The technician took on the delegate's role in 2007. He came to Ausgrid after working as an electrician on the wharves and in private contracting.

'I saw that I could be a voice for my workmates. We need to stand up to managers who push their own agendas and trample on our rights. The company needs to value and respect its hard-working employees. We are much more than numbers on a balance sheet.'

Phill volunteered on ETU campaigns including Your Rights at Work, Stop the Sell Off and at elections.

He's a proud family man who hankers for outdoor adventures like fishing, hunting and camping.



Country Labor backs regional jobs, services & communities

NSW Labor has vowed to keep Essential Energy in public hands with no further job cuts, if elected in 2023.

Labor's 2020 Country Conference passed several ETU policy motions backing regional members and communities.

ETU Secretary Justin Page successfully argued that Essential Energy should be restructured from its current status as a State-Owned Corporation, instead coming under direct Government and Ministerial control.

Labor will also reform the broken electricity regulation system which has driven unsustainable funding and job cuts.

These changes would enable a NSW Government to fully protect jobs and services at the distributor.

The Conference agreed that the safety and integrity of the renewable energy industry must be guaranteed by employing licensed electricians for all electrical work.

Labor will provide increased support for regional people facing redundancy or other employment issues. The Party committed to boosting funding for TAFE as the main provider of electrical training.

'We went to Country Conference to ensure Labor policy supports our regional members,' said Justin Page, who led an ETU delegation including rank-and-file members.

'This was a good result for our members at Essential and throughout regional NSW. We will continue to stand up for the interests of our members in all forums.'

Contractor withdraws sub-standard EBA after union action

A WestConnex M5 tunnel contractor withdrew a sub-standard non-union agreement after ETU action.

The Absolute Commissioning Group's proposed EBA was voted up by two casual employees but would have covered workers on construction sites across Australia.

The document's wages and conditions were substantially below industry standards.

When Absolute Commissioning refused to negotiate, the ETU opposed the company's application to register the agreement in the Fair Work Commission. The contractor withdrew the application after viewing ETU evidence and submissions.

Absolute Commissioning is a new operation seeking to entrench itself in the Sydney infrastructure

sector. Its core service is testing and fault-finding at the end of electrical fit-outs. The company employed 230 electrical workers on the WestConnex tunnel, all as casuals.

ETU organiser Nick Bligh welcomed the contractor's move to withdraw the proposed EBA.

'Our members at Absolute Commissioning want the right to bargain and vote on their employment conditions. They deserve the same pay and conditions as their colleagues doing the same work in the same sector.'

ETU NSW & ACT Secretary Justin Page called on the company to negotiate in good faith with workers and their union.

'Ramming through a sub-standard EBA voted up by just two workers is completely unacceptable. It's time to move forward to genuine negotiations.'

Justin said Absolute Commissioning should end its all-casual model and give employees job security and an industry standard EBA.

The ETU's 'It's Time' campaign has delivered big improvements for more than a thousand Sydney construction members at 21 electrical contractors.

ETU MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR MEMBERS

The ETU NSW & ACT branch supports mental health services **Mates in Energy** and **Foundation House**. Both provide services tailored for union members.

FOUNDATION HOUSE

Damien: 'Help is available'

Damien has put eight years of addiction and anxiety behind him, with support from rehabilitation facility Foundation House.

The 50-year-old was lost in a cycle of alcohol and codeine dependency which fuelled soaring anxiety and depression.

He tried to end it all twice in one day - only to be saved by two different passers-by. Today the communications technician and CEPU member has been clean and sober for more than a year.

The key was his decision to seek help, followed by two 28-day residential rehab stints at union-backed Foundation House.

'There's no shame in recognising you have a problem and need help. It's a brave move. The good news is that help is available.'

'I've made a lot of friends at Foundation House. I feel safe there.'

His advice to others struggling with drug, alcohol or gambling addiction: 'You can change your life by going to rehab at Foundation House.'

ABOUT FOUNDATION HOUSE

Foundation House is an alcohol, drug and gambling treatment centre offering residential services and ongoing support.

ETU organiser Steve Bankes sits on the board. ETU Sydney construction EBAs require employers to contribute to the centre.

CONTACT FOUNDATION HOUSE WWW.FOUNDATIONHOUSE.NET.AU • (02) 9555 4034

Mates in Energy set for NSW launch

The ETU NSW & ACT Branch is backing Mates in Energy, a suicide prevention charity for the electricity industry.

Mates in Energy follows the proven Mates in Construction model which has been saving lives since 2008.

Mates trains industry volunteers to recognise suicidal signs and intervene to support vulnerable workers. Ongoing support is provided through a network of professionals.

ETU Secretary Justin Page, who sits on the Mates board, says major NSW and ACT energy employers have agreed to back Mates in Energy.

'Ausgrid, Endeavour, Essential, Transgrid, EVO and AGL have all responded positively to the ETU's proposal to establish Mates in Energy.'

'We now need employers to lock in and commit the substantial funds required to build the Mates network in our industry.'

Simon: 'Mates look after mates'

Simon Jonas was aged 21 when he saw repeated suicides on the defence force ship where he worked.

'There were 110 on the boat. On average one per year suicided. I remember every funeral.'

The experience left Simon determined to make a difference. Now working for electrical contractor Fredon, he's been a top-level Mates volunteer for seven years.

'It's mates looking after mates. I've trained ETU members in suicide awareness and they get it.'

**CONTACT MATES IN ENERGY
NATIONAL HOTLINE 1300 642 111
WWW.MATESINCONSTRUCTION.ORG.AU**



*“ I’m a member of EISS Super,
the super fund for the electrical
industry in NSW. My super’s in
safe hands, is yours? ”*

Glen Potter

Electrician and ETU President



Join your industry super fund,
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